

The **February 2025 Sundance Collab Script Club** will discuss the screenplay for Boot Riley's award-winning dark absurdist comedy *Sorry to Bother You* (2018). The film, which stars LaKeith Stanfield and Tessa Thompson, premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival and went on to win the Sundance Film Festival Vanguard Award and Best First Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards.

In an alternate reality of present-day Oakland, California, telemarketer Cassius Green finds himself in a macabre universe after he discovers a magical key that leads to material glory.

As Green's career begins to take off, his friends and co-workers organize a protest against corporate oppression. Cassius soon faces Steve Lift, a cocaine-snorting CEO who offers him a salary beyond his wildest dreams.

Read the [screenplay](#) and watch the [film](#) on Hulu, Plex, or YouTube. Bonus: Watch this session from Sundance: [Boots Riley on the Creative Process Behind Sorry to Bother You](#).

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## Screenplay and Film Discussion:

### I. Act One: Character Introductions, Catalyst, World, Theme Stated

- We are introduced to the protagonist Cassius Green in a job interview at RegalView. What does this scene tell you about who our main character is?
- What do you think is key to a great character introduction? What are your impressions of each character in this film, how would you define them?
- How would you describe the world that these characters live in? How does their environment contribute to their actions?
- Writing dark comedy can be difficult. How does Riley establish the tone of this film?
- At this point in the story, how would you describe Cassius's relationships with his girlfriend Detroit, best friend Salvador, uncle, and those he meets at work? Does he foreshadow changes to come?
- How does the introduction of WorryFree contribute to the world-building of this film? How does the media portray this company versus our characters?
- On Cassius's first day, he is instructed to "stick to the script," and then we see him have three very different interactions. What do you think of the way the screenwriter visually conveyed these interactions?
- Which scene do you think is the inciting incident? What calls our characters to action?

- Many interpret *Sorry to Bother You* as an absurdist critique of capitalism. Do you think this is true, why or why not?
- Langston (played by Danny Glover) explains that sounding white is “about sounding like you don’t have a care. Like your bills are paid, you’re happy about your future, and you’re about to jump in your Ferrari when you get off this call.” Discuss this. How can the audience interpret this for this film, other stories, or society as a whole? What message do you think is being conveyed here?
- Are there other themes stated in the first act? What are they?
- How does Riley convey subtext - the unspoken meaning of characters’ words and actions - through each character?
- What are your thoughts about the writing and/or filmmaking featured in this film?

## II. Act Two: Conflict, B-Story Relationships, Midpoint, Raising Stakes

- Before the mid-point we just watched, what are the primary motivations guiding Cassius?
- What role do you think Squeeze (actor Steven Yeun) plays in this film? What questions does he ask the audience and how does he help to propel the story forward?
- What are your thoughts about the strikes? How does the commercialization of them (when Cassius gets hit with the soda can) change the audience’s interpretation of this event?
- B-stories typically feature the actions of the secondary characters and help to strengthen a film’s thematic message. What are the B-stories for each of the secondary characters?
- The ‘compliment fight’ is based on a real story from Riley’s brother. What does this scene between Salvador and Cassius tell you about these characters?
- Riley has called the ‘white voice’ persona an act of “code-switching” – the practice of changing how you express yourself in different contexts. How does using it change Cassius’s worldview and actions? How can exploring code-switching in your own characters provide more depth to their motivations and actions in different scenarios?
- How do you interpret Detroit’s actions in the second act? What do you think of her performance and why do you think she is attracted to Squeeze?
- Cassius seems to sacrifice his relationships and morality for monetary and professional success. How does Riley set up this conflict and foreshadow the potential consequences to come?
- Fancy Suit Guy is a character whose name is Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (bleeped out). Why do you think Riley chose to do this, what does this character symbolize or represent?
- How do lying and deception factor in as an action and theme in this film?
- What do you think about the mansion sequence, including when Cassius is asked to drop his white voice and rap?

- What are your thoughts about CEO Steve Lift? How does the screenwriter set him up as the villain? Do you think he is the antagonist or is it something or someone else?
- Cassius discovers the Equisapiens and then CEO Steve Lift presents him with a \$100,000,000 offer to lead them. Why does this sequence work so well? How does it raise the stakes?
- What do you think is essential for a strong midpoint?
- The screenplay's "Break-in-Three" is usually when a character realizes what they must do to fix their internal/external problems. There is a lot of action here. What do you think is the Break-into-Three for this screenplay?
- What are the main conflicts - internal and external - for our characters in the second act? What are their stated goals and how do their actions support or go against what they say they want?

### III. Act Three: Climax, Descending Action, Finale

- Which moment in the script or film would you define as the "all is lost" moment of Act Three?
- How does this film address the theme of identity? What identities does each character express?
- When selling human slaves isn't enough, WorkFree creates Equisapiens. What do they symbolize? How do they serve the story and the themes of the film?
- Cassius tells the world about what Steve Lift and WorkFree are doing, and then what happens? What do you think is the point of the scenes following his TV interviews?
- Cassius quickly reconciles with his friends and girlfriend. What do you think about this?
- Squeeze states: "...They feel powerless. If you get shown a problem, but don't see a way you can have control over it- you just decide to get used to the problem." What are your thoughts about this exchange and why was it included in the film?
- How does each character resolve their internal and external conflicts and goals? Are there any characters that don't have an arc, if so, who?
- What are your thoughts about the uprising in the third act?
- Graphic scenes add shock and heightened obstacles, but also humor. What do you think is key to balancing violence or lude scenes with comedy? How does the screenwriter succeed or not succeed at this?
- How does each character evolve? How do their transformations serve the story and convey its themes? Do any stay the same?
- At the end, Detroit earrings say "Bella Ciao" (an internationally known hymn of freedom used at many historic and revolutionary events). How can wardrobe and scene descriptions contribute to a story? What do you think about these details in Riley's script?

- Riley makes creative use of media inserts (TV news clips, promotional videos, commercials, etc) to tell the story, why does this work? Which ones are the most memorable to you and why?
- What do you think about the false victory at the end?
- Now that Cassius is an Equisapien, what do you think will happen next? How does leaving an open-ended question like this contribute to the audience's experience with the film?
- If you could rewrite the final scenes, what alternate ending would you give this film?

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Please see the [#scriptclub](#) channel on the [Sundance Collab Discord](#) for continued discussion. This community forum is a great place to connect with fellow filmmakers.

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### Recommended References for *Sorry to Bother You*:

- Sundance: [Boots Riley on the Creative Process Behind Sorry to Bother You](#)
  - Script Lab: [Unpacking the Surreal Genius of the 'Sorry to Bother You' Screenplay](#)
  - Final Draft: [All the Write Moves: Sorry to Bother You](#)
  - Oscars: [Academy Conversations: Sorry to Bother You](#)
  - Filmmaker Magazine: [Boots Riley on Writing and Directing the Out-There Sundance Hit, Sorry to Bother You](#)
  - Hollywood Reporter: [Boots Riley on 'Sorry to Bother You,' 'BlackKkklansman' & Working With Guillermo del Toro](#)
  - Vice Media: [Boots Riley And The 'White Voice' In "Sorry to Bother You"](#)
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### Related Sundance Collab Resources and Courses:

- [Screenwriting Course: Core Elements](#)
- [Screenwriting Course: From Outline to First Draft of Your Screenplay](#)
- [Rewriting Your Screenplay and Crafting Your Pitch](#)
- [Crafting Your Short Screenplay](#)
- [Directing: Core Elements](#)
- [Mastering Pre-Production: Setting Your Film Up for Success](#)
- [Master Class: Building and Sustaining Your Career as a Writer and Director with Kasi Lemmons](#)
- [Master Class: Finding Your Screenplay's Story with David Schwab, Mira Nair, Tamara Jenkins and Destin Daniel Cretton](#)