



THE CUT

Pitch / extended treatment

Logline: Two young men must find their passage through the canals of post-apocalyptic London, to peace and freedom, in the "promised land" beyond - Bristol.

Premise: Somewhat straightlaced, yet woefully misinformed, SPENCER (25) leads reckless young TOOVEY (18) on a dangerous trip through London; firmly in the belief that the grass must be greener on the other side of the post-apocalyptic city. On their travels they meet a new, non-traditional family, who they become close with, and form a genuine bond. But Spencer's dreams / goals / indoctrination drive them onwards, away from this refuge. The pair must keep each other alive as they outwit, outmanoeuvre, and outrun, other travellers, the city's vicious METRO cops, shuffling-HIPSTERS, and the lethal radicalised CHURCH.

Ostensibly a coming of age tale, in the guise of a zombie, road-trip, buddy-movie, canal tour - a genre under-represented in mainstream cinema, in my opinion. However, the idea also acts as the author's love-letter to London. An opportunity to show an audience some of the hidden beauty the city, and the The South, has to offer.

The irreverent and minimalist stylings of A BOY AND HIS DOG meets the stunning travelogue visuals of THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RINGS. The film also provides a vehicle to showcase breakthrough talent, both in-front of and behind the lens, geared towards a vibrant young cast and crew.

Treatment:

An opening VO briefly sets the scene; 2083, the outskirts of London, in the wake of some plague / outbreak a generation ago.

The audience are introduced to this world as dawn breaks. Three armed Metro cops wait patiently by a lock-cottage ready to waylay an approaching vessel - *Just Ducky*, our protagonists' boat!

One of the crew - young Toovey - outsmarts the potential ambushers, sneaking up on them by unicycle, and dispatching them swiftly with his bow-and-arrow.

As dawn breaks, *Just Ducky* passes safely out of the lock - familiarising the audience properly with Toovey, Spencer, and the workings of the canal infrastructure. Preparing them for later obstacles.





They continue towards London proper. Their individual characteristics, and Spencer's plan, being revealed as they pass through the stunning Lea Valley.

Spencer feels drawn to Bristol. His 'infirm' father TOBY, confined to his bunk - in reality, already dead and cremated back there - has informed him it's a veritable land of milk and honey. To get to Bristol they must first find their way onto The Thames. Toovey seems happy to follow this lead, unquestioningly. He's youthful, plucky.

Over dinner, aboard *Just Ducky*, Spencer tells a story (flashback) about Limehouse marina, their gateway to The Thames. The audience are treated to a scene c.2017: a party of day-trippers heading out on an ill-fated venture. The delayed arrival of one party-goer alludes to the impending outbreak.



As the tale draws to its conclusion, the guys pick up on the noise of another boat approaching. They dash to extinguish the lights, hoping they will remain unseen in the evening gloom.

The other boat passes by without incident - an unmarried, pregnant couple, unaware of *Just Ducky* moored under cover of the overgrown bushes.

The following day, Spencer and Toovey catch up with the unfortunate family. Their boat lies destroyed by a weir. They, themselves, gutted and crucified. Evidently victims of the predominant radical religious movement; murdered for the crime of "living in sin".

Toovey acquires a firearm, with mismatched ammo. He takes to fiddling with it as they cruise, a potential upgrade from his trusty bow.





London! "The Wick" (Hackney Wick)

The little posse make their way to Hackney. As per their plan, they continue south past the Olympic site, towards historic Three Mills - Limehouse and The Thames beyond.



Unfortunately, as they approach Three Mills, the way is blocked. One of the railway bridges is down - the canal impassible in that direction.

Spencer - determined in his venture - elects to double back to Hackney Wick... and take Duckett's Cut. This new route will see them having to travel Regent's Canal, through the whole of London, negotiate Camden locks, and finally rejoin The Thames at Brentford.



The pair / trio backtrack, painfully aware that this change of plan greatly increases their risk factor. They keep a watchful eye open for Metro cops, The Church, and - of course - any Infected!

They hit the first hurdle under the new plan immediately upon reaching Duckett's. Essentially a trial-run on the dreaded Camden locks itself, the pound is, as typical c.2017, bone dry!

Spencer stays aboard, piloting *Just Ducky*, and keeping a general guard whilst Toovey hurriedly unicycles along the towpath; setting the system of three locks so as to fill the pound, and be ready in their favour to continue the journey. They are obviously extremely vulnerable in this configuration.

There's a rustle in the bushes. Toovey notices it. They're being observed. He pelts back towards the boat, full speed - both to warn Spencer and to have whatever safety there may be in numbers. Distracted, he cracks his head on the low bridge, comes a-cropper, and remembers no more.



When Toovey regains consciousness he finds himself in a comfortable, makeshift, bed - stitches holding together a gash in his forehead. Apparently in a renovated train carriage!



It transpires the watcher was one member of a little clan who have claimed the ruins of Hackney Wick station as their current home. Just as Spencer, Toovey, and Toby live a boat-based existence, these characters use the railways. They are friendly, and offer up their hospitality.



The 'mother', ALEX, knows of Toby by reputation. She invites them to stay as long as they like, and makes a daily trip back to the canal to 'visit' / sit with Toby - primarily as respite for Spencer. Spencer himself makes for something of an asset. He repairs various devices needing attention around the train, and enjoys the company. Toovey is initially confused by the group, and uncomfortable. Apart from his head injury, he has an instant distrust of the son, ALEX JNR. And no understanding of how the relationship of the married lesbian couple - ROSIE and JESSICA - works.



However, over a few days, he comes to bond with them - growing as an individual - and is adopted as the loveable-younger-brother.

Around the campfire one night, Alex tells a tale of when she was a toddler, c.2020. Some weekends, she'd visit the Camden Markets on a big wide-beam boat with her father. His laid-back parenting style obviously laid the groundwork for this warm, commune-like, family unit she finds herself matriarch of now in 2083. The tale allows for more hints of the apocalyptic event to be placed with the audience, as well as to prep them for the geography of the area prior to the climax there - the nearby rail network, Pirate Castle, the layout of the locks. Within the story, the tale is intended to encourage Spencer to abandon his quest, and stay with the railway family. But, as welcoming as Hackney Wick has been, Spencer's mind remains set on Bristol. Toovey, of course, would loyally follow his friend to the ends of the earth. He continues his firearm modifications on his downtime, despite sage advice from Alex and Co. not to meddle.



Before long, Spencer's itchy feet, Toovey's full recuperation, and growing signs of nearby Metro activity bring everything to a head - the family are going to relocate. The guys are invited to join them on the railways. They, politely, refuse. Alex and Co understand. Everyone has one last firepit party that evening, in celebration of their meeting, their lasting friendship, and their ultimate parting next morning.



That night Spencer has a Camden Lock nightmare; a Metro trap! He does not sleep well.

Setting off in the morning, they make their way through Broadway Market / Hoxton. Along the towpath gongoozling, infected, hipsters stand and stare; dead behind the eyes. Mostly harmless.



They stop before the Islington tunnel that night, and make final preparations for the challenge of Camden Lock at day-break in two days time.

Distracted momentarily in his plans, at his makeshift calendar, Spencer fails to realise that would be Sunday.



Camden!

Just Ducky arrives just after day-break. Spencer pilots her up to the first lock: it's chained and padlocked shut! The Church don't allow any traffic through on the sabbath. Spurred on by the recent nightmare, the Hipsters and Metro cops behind - hoping against hope that this surely is the final hurdle to get them on their way again - Spencer and Toovey make a snap-decision to cut their way through.



Toovey scoots along the towpath, as he had at Duckett's - prepping what he can. Spencer gets out the power-tools, hooks them up to the boat's engine, and starts to drill / saw / grind the padlocks away.

The noise reverberates and echoes - out the lock, around the pounds, between the buildings. They work frantically, fearful of detection.

Click. The first chains drop away.

Second lock; *Just Ducky* cruises in. Rinse and repeat. The sun has fully risen. The day is getting on; only increasing the chances of discovery.





Again, with relief, they make it through the second lock - on into the third, and final. The tension rises. Stuck, vulnerable, now in the clear light of day; committed - no way back, yet unable to progress forwards until the chains are cut.

The saw blade breaks! Spencer frantically searches for a replacement, all the while, water levels rising, bobbing the boat around. The sawing picks up again after what seems an eternity to the *Just Ducky* crew.

Then, almost without warning, it's over. The chains fall away. The gates swing open: deceptive in their smooth, quiet, motion - as if they were feather-light.

Spencer revs the engine, and drops her into gear. The boat pootles forwards, clears the lock. He and Toovey can barely believe it. They've made it! They high-five awkwardly. A shot RINGS out! Spencer falls to the deck, injured.

Up in the Pirate Castle battlements a Church sniper fires again. Alarm bells begin to peeling throughout the entirety of Camden. Toovey bundles the injured Spencer down the stairs to the relative safety inside. He looks back to the deck, where their gas canister lies unprotected; very likely the next casualty! Then it truly would *all* be over!



Another shot. Indeed, the canister is hit. And nothing much happens. It ejects its contents forcefully, but nothing more. The plume of gas offers temporary concealment from the shooter. Because that's what happens when you shoot a gas canister! Nevertheless, unable to control the boat from inside, and with Spencer shot, the guys are in trouble.



Toovey grabs his firearm, steels himself. Diving out onto the deck, he takes a blind shot towards their assailant... and blows a few of his fingers off. Because amateurly re-chambering 9mm rounds to fit a 38 cal revolver is pants-on-head-dumb.

They're screwed.



As the gas clears, Toovey lies on the deck, clutching his bleeding hand. He looks up towards the rifleman's nest, determined to defiantly stare his executioner in the eyes. The rifleman takes aim casually... and slumps forwards. Dead.



Rosie steps out from behind him. A reprieve! Bells still ring out across the town. Toovey thanks Rosie silently across the distance. She salutes in understanding, and vanishes. He now takes the controls and powers away at top speed, hollering reassurances into the boat: everything will be OK Spencer. They'll get out of here and fix him up.

They turn at Cumberland Corner, full pelt. Pass the Feng Shang Princess. Easing off only as they approach the zoo. But all is not well. Spencer's wound is too severe. He makes Toovey promise: promise he'll get them - get Toby's remains - to Bristol. They pass the Before I Die wall just before entering Maida Vale tunnel.



Spencer quietly expires.



Bull's Bridge.

The challenge of London now lies behind. Mutely, alone, Toovey continues the journey - adamant to fulfill his promise. The landscape starts to change again, open fields, greenery. It perfectly mirrors the serenity of the River Lea opening.



In montage, the next few days pass without any incident of note.

Toovey nurses his wounded hand, returning to bow-and-arrow for defence. Now the master of *Just Ducky*, he starts to take on traits earlier exhibited exclusively by Spencer. Some in tribute, some subconsciously.



About a week out, Toovey stops. He stands atop a hill, windlass in hand, surveying the land ahead.

Caen Hill flight is revealed to the audience. "Balls", he mutters.

Toovey wanders down to begin setting the sequence of 16 locks in order to pass.



Bristol!

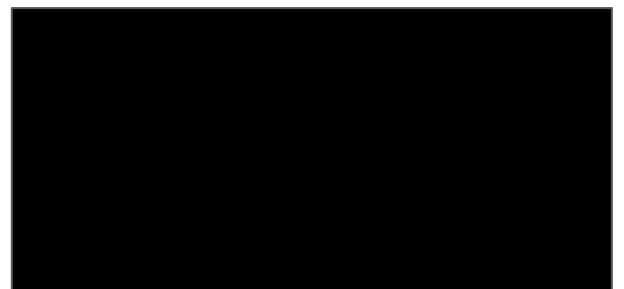
The Clifton bridge is sighted. Finally, *Just Ducky* has arrived. Toovey regards the time of day as he moors up in town. It's approaching sunset.

He makes arrangements, starting to manhandle equipment - and Spencer's bundled corpse - onto his kayak before they lose the light. He addresses Toby as he hurries, as Spencer often used to.

At Portishead beach, Toovey sits. He chats to Toby's box of ashes as he watches the kayak peacefully float out to sea: carrying Spencer's body with it. The sun sets. Toovey is now, perhaps, a man. Perhaps he's found a peace of sorts, albeit in solitude. He reflects on this. The credits roll. Black.

This tranquility is shattered by the blinding of a helicopter spotlight. Sand whips at Toovey's face and body. His blanket blows away. The noise! The wind!

Perhaps not.



THE END

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Additional reference / tone shots:



