

SCREENPLAY GURUS

SCRIPT NOTES

TITLE: X
LOCALE: Mogadishu, Switzerland, Toronto, Los Angeles
WRITER(S): X
PERIOD: 1975 to Present
FORM: Feature Screenplay
GENRE: Memoir, Cultural Drama, Woman's Issues
BUDGET: Low-Medium
PAGES: 118
DRAFT DATE: NA
COVERAGE DATE: 1/7/25
PREPARED BY: TA

COMMENTS

OVERALL

In this powerful and frank story, an independent Somali woman struggles to understand and empower herself after culturally normative genital mutilation surgery. Based on a memoir, the woman travels the world in search of healing and finds it through healing others and spreading the word about the brutal practice.

The talented writer has a flair for evocative, even poetic imagery and smart dialogue while boldly exposing themselves – flaws and all – in a compelling tale of contrasting societies. The characters are rich in this shocking tale.

However, the script's text is a tad weak and depends a bit too much on novelistic prose. There are typos, poor English usage and punctuation, formatting miscues. The episodic story meanders a tad too much in Act One before settling down.

Let's take a look at ways to improve the draft.

STORY

Terrific work, writer.

To those in the West, the mutilations are barbaric. This is Soraya's counter-culture view of a practice that leaves hundreds of millions of women mutilated. Her arc is one from the specific to the universal. We follow her journey with great interest and root for her. Clever work.

The titular 'Third Leg' refers to a clitoris that, unless cut, is believed will grow to the size of a penis. Too, this is a story of male dominance that controls the world. A world where female sexuality is curbed, and young women are forced into arranged sometimes incestuous marriages – even to a Heroin dealer. The script presents arguments with honesty and forcefulness.

Imagery and visual motifs are inspired: A RED SILK FABRIC flows in the desert winds as a giraffe walks up to a thorn tree. He sticks his long tongue out and moves it into the branches. It rapidly turns around selecting twigs then swivels his muzzle as he strips away the green leaves. With his tongue the giraffe sweeps a mass of thorns into his mouth and eats them. Through imagination we eschew 100% accuracy for the writer's inner thoughts. Truth can be stranger than fiction. It can also be confusing and structure-less. The writer does not fall into the trap of slavishly adhering to facts to make the story a documentary. The script veers from naked truths to favor a highly personal story.

The original form of a memoir is a wise choice. It's not a story of a person's entire life – an autobiography. It is about certain events, themes and memories. However, the script is not wholly successful in translating the memoir to a script for a film. Like fragments of memories, the script plays out in an episodic manner. This is due to formatting, structure and text that is prose rather than cinematic language. At times, it makes the story a bit confusing and difficult to follow. More in Structure.

The story centers on a theme as it reveals life events. Generally, this is not enough to sustain interest. The clever writer includes secondary themes like the family dynamic that ties it all together. The writer stands in good stead because the themes are relatable. There is a strong family drama within. A mother who believes she is doing her best for a feisty daughter but believes Soraya may not be her daughter. This child was switched at birth. In the script, the mother-daughter conflict underscores Soraya's inner journey. Part of her outer journey is reconciling with her mother. They dovetail to a final scene that is spot on beautiful.

If produced, a caution audience asses could wriggle in seats. That might also occur with readers of the script. It's a heavy subject described in detail. A dichotomy could rear up. Some might not glean the brutality present. This occurs between Hoyoo and disapproving Farole – a highly effective plot point.

No rule says stories should always make audiences feel comfortable. This is an uncomfortable story of an endemic problem. If some turn their face away, so be it.

As written, the story is solid. How could it not be? It's execution that requires work.

STRUCTURE

At 118 pages, the script is a good length. Markup flags trims.

At 17, too many characters are introduced in the first ten pages. This front loading does not allow the story to land before accompanying Soraya on her journey. The suicides and Ghost House are intriguing elements. We need to have a better sense of Soraya and her “normal” world before we go there on page nine.

Thus, story momentum lags until page 19 and the “gift.” This should arrive earlier as the Inciting Incident around pages ten to 12 – the latest. This means crucial elements in the first 19 pages are Flashbacks. Possibly bullying, as an example. As structured, the taunts have no context. Placing it after the surgery affords that context. Same too with the suicides and Ghost House.

The script turns to Act Two with Yusuf around page 35. This should occur around page 30. This translates to cuts in the dense First Act. Trims in the medical scenes and conversations accomplish this. It’s all there and important but needs cuts, trims and some reordering.

From 35 on, the structure is in good shape.

There is talk of wars, but they do not directly influence the story. The war talk feels a bit dropped in and could be cut. The way to discern whether to cut is to ask if the story suffers without the scenes. We do understand this is the environment in the country at the time, but it goes nowhere beside shining a light on male aggression. Farole, a General, has nothing to say about it. That’s telling.

The opening scene under the Honeymoon bed has its charms. It sets up Soraya, and her place in the family. A suggestion to start with a brief half page scene of the sewing machine sounds and images of flowing red fabric. (The flesh can be added in later visions.) Then, Soraya under the bed in a reverie with eyes closed that suddenly pop open. What if she were alone? Without Fadwa?

We do not need to meet all the siblings at once – too many characters. They could come into frame one at a time as needed to move the story forward.

The recommendation is a restructure of the First Act: set up Soraya and the family; a quicker path to surgery; her troubled convalescence; arranged marriage to Yusuf.

PLOT LOGIC

When does Soraya’s family move from Somalia to Toronto? It should be specified.

What happened to Asra? She is not heard from after eloping with Hussan around page 32. This is a thread that should be tied up in some way.

CHARACTERS

There is particularly good character work. Wise Grandmother is a standout.

DIALOGUE

Markup flags cuts and trims but generally the lines ring true.

GRANDMOTHER

Obviously you are not learning anything except dragging trouble around your ankle.

GRANDMOTHER

In life you'll learn how to swallow your tears while firming up your spine.

GRANDMOTHER

When there is no rain even trees have passionate conversation with God.

SORAYA

I heard them ...a baboon was bouncing between trees and then one angry tree shouted, "You broke my legs!"

More clever work in Dialogue.

CRAFT

This is an area in greatest need of work. Markup flags typos and errors but it is not comprehensive proofing.

•

Cut small interstitial scenes that do not forward the story. Markup flags a few.

•

Parentheticals are not placed in the proper location, and some are too long.

SORAYA (CONFUSED)

SORAYA (INTO PHONE)

No... No!

(trying to compose herself)

SORAYA

(confused)

SORAYA

No... No!

She struggles to regain composure.

Parentheticals should be no more than three words and as used (confused).

•

Scene Headings are a touch off. They indicate largest to smallest, left to right. Headings should be locations not descriptors as in 'Wedding Couple'. That belongs in the following Action.

INT. WEDDING COUPLES BEDROOM, MOGADISHU - NIGHT (1975)

INT. MOGADISHU - COUPLE'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: "1975"

Newlyweds on their honeymoon night etc.

•

Avoid temporal qualifiers like begins, suddenly, starts.

Soraya sighs and begins to write in Arabic on the wooden board on her lap.

Soraya SIGHS, writes... (Comma Splices are acceptable.)

Soraya SIGHS and writes in Arabic on a wooden board.

Soraya SIGHS. She scribbles in Arabic on a wooden board.

•

Present Tense. Always.

Yusuf's hand squeezed her chin and pushed upward, as if to stop the chattering.

Yusuf squeezes her chin and pushes upward to shut her up.

•

Avoid adjectives and adverbs where possible.

We hear SLAMMING doors and dorm mates acting annoyingly.

Soraya bites her tongue, bleeds excessively.

Doors SLAM. Soraya's dormmates annoy her with their commotion.

Soraya bites her tongue. Blood spurts.

•

Write simply and with clarity.

She shuts the window as a momentary flash of light brightens the room only to disappear leaving her in darkness.

Standing alongside the empty bed, a FIFTH YOUNG WOMAN frail and sobbing releases a streaming gush of water from between her legs.

She shuts the window. A lightning flash brightens the room then leaves her in darkness.

She shuts the window. A flash of lightning then darkness returns.

Beside an empty bed, a frail, very pregnant FIFTH YOUNG WOMAN sobs as her water breaks.

•

Use Active Voice.

Soraya enters the room where GRANDMOTHER, ninety years old, is praying.

...turns to Soraya who is avoiding eye contact.

Soraya enters the room where GRANDMOTHER (90s) prays.

...turns to Soraya who avoids eye contact.

•

The writer reverses "Show. Don't tell." The question to ask is how will Actors lift the words off the page.

Soraya looks up at Hooyo, fights the emotions inside.

She's trying to figure it out, but doesn't know what to look for.

On the verge of tears, Saraya looks up at Hooyo.

A little lost, she looks at her body but finds no answers.

•

The writer sometimes equivocates. It weakens writing.

It appears too late to save them as Ayaan and the other three women's heads disappear into the water, the white sheets float to the surface. Is it too late to save them or not?

Soraya seems withdrawn as her siblings shower her with happy smiles. Is she withdrawn or not?

Too late to save them, Ayaan and...

Ayaan and the other Women's heads disappear...

Soraya withdraws when her siblings...

•

On a phone conversation, set up the call. There's no need for (ON PHONE) which if used would be a Parenthetical. It's (V.O.) when the other party is not in the scene.

Soraya's phone RINGS.

SORAYA

Hello.

CALLER (V.O.)

'Zup?

•

The writing is a bit too detailed and clumped together. Break up Actions. Think 'Shots'.

Reflexively, Soraya throws the wooden slate at Imam, knocks off his turban and exposes the soft black curls on his head. Imam's eyes bulge in anger, he grabs at the unraveling cloth and begins winding the turban back onto his head. The cloth gets tangled, Soraya's curious eyes march with Imam's fingers. Abruptly, Imam gets up, storms out.

Out of reflex, Soraya fires the wooden slate at Iman and knocks off his turban.

Imam's eyes bulge with anger. Soraya watches him fumble in the struggle to wind the turban over his black curls.

He glares at Soraya then storms out.

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The recommendation is a page one rewrite of the text to amp up the Actions apropos to screenplays, correct typos, errors and formatting. For formatting guidance like how to lay out INTERCUTS, purchase of *The Screenwriter's Bible* is recommended. Find it on Amazon.

TITLE

Great title. Evocative and so much more.

MARKETABILITY and CONCLUSION

This is a script for a low-moderate film in the \$20M range. The cast is large, and the story spans the Globe. Location shoots are expensive. One budgetary plus is the tale is mostly contained. A wise producer might find structures or build sets that fit and shoot Second Unit footage to establish a city or location.

The story is an indictment of contemporary society. It is a bitter pill to swallow. This script evokes (the ironically titled) THE STONING OF SORAYA M. where a wife is sentenced to death. Her young son is given the honor of throwing the first rock. No punches are pulled in the graphic stoning. It's difficult to watch. So too this story. The brave writer does not flinch in depicting scenes in all their horror. It is amplified because it is a true story.

Even though the subject is important, due to the vagaries of the industry and audience tastes, there is limited interest in films of this nature. Never say never. This could be a film that wins awards. At the ceremony, the recipient admits, "It took ten years to get here."

However, the script is not ready for industry eyes. The structure is a tad wonky, and the writing must be polished. The writer should consider a professional rewrite.

The writer deserves kudos upon kudo for giving herself to the world. This is a terrific story that deserves an audience. The writer is encouraged to continue development.

Thanks for the opportunity to read the script.
- Ted

SCREENPLAY GURUS' 11 POINT SCORING MATRIX

Scores: 0 – 10 points for each element, 110 total possible points

Pass: 0 – 75
Weak Consider: ¹ 76 – 80
Consider: 81 – 90
Strong Consider: 91 – 100
Recommend: 101 – 110

Statistical Scores of Submitted Screenplays

Pass: 80%
Weak Consider: ¹ 10%
Consider: 5%
Strong Consider: 3%
Recommend: 2%

PRESENTATION	3
THEME	10
STORYTELLING	9
ORIGINALITY	8
STRUCTURE	4
PLOT	5
CHARACTERIZATION	9
DIALOGUE	7
STYLE	2
CONCEPT	7
MARKETABILITY/COMMERCIAL APPEAL	3
TOTAL POINTS	67

SCRIPT: PASS
WRITER: RECOMMEND

Presentation:

Is the script properly formatted, free of typos and misspellings? Does the writing use standard English conventions? Is the cover page attached with the author's name and contact information only? Is there white space? Are there lengthy blocks of dialogue and action?

Theme:

Is the theme stated and does the screenplay reinforce it throughout? Is the theme relevant or unique?

Storytelling:

How effectively has the author crafted the timeline of events? Is the story interesting or compelling? Is it relevant? Does the script serve the genre in which it's written? Does the story have a through line and respect it without unnecessary departures?

Originality:

Does the story twist well-worn conventions, or create a new one, without straining credibility? Where does the story fit into the four degrees: Totally Familiar; Familiar, Yet Different; Different, Yet Familiar; Totally Different (Familiar, Yet Different and Different, Yet Familiar are preferred).

Structure:

Does the script have and an Inciting Incident, proper Act Breaks, Rising Action, Complications and Obstacles, a well-identified Protagonist and Antagonist?

Plot:

How well has the author informed the audience why the story's events belong in the script, and what the story is meant to communicate?

Characterization:

Do the characters have dimension beyond cliché and trope? Are they real or relatable? Do they have flaws? Do the characters elicit empathy or sympathy?

Style:

Is the writing clear, economical, free of bloat and unnecessary description? Does the writer "Show, don't tell?" Are the descriptions visual and intriguing? Does the writer use Active Voice and Present Tense?

Concept:

Is it sound, interesting, or compelling? Do Plot, Storytelling and Structure reinforce the concept?

Marketability/Commercial Appeal:

Where does the script fit in the marketplace? How likely is it to be made? How does it compare to similar films? How will audiences react?

1. AKA Consider With Revisions.

Thanks for submitting your script to Screenplay Gurus! We hope the analysis gives you the info you need to make the script as good as it can be.

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