

SCREENPLAY GURUS

SCRIPT NOTES

TITLE: X
LOCALE: Argentina, Los Angeles, Texas
WRITER(S): X
PERIOD: 1980 to Present
FORM: Feature Screenplay
GENRE: Revenge / Political Drama
BUDGET: Moderate
PAGES: 124
DRAFT DATE: 3/11/22
COVERAGE DATE: 4/11/22
PREPARED BY: SD

COMMENTS

OVERALL

Revenge is a dish best served cold. X is a twisty, turny tale of payback borne of a dark and dirty, decades old war against the civilian population by the Argentinean military government. In present day, blood overflows the main player's cups to spill on innocent children and unborn grandchildren. This nasty business gets its due in an unflinching story, and graphic violence. No half measures on these red-soaked pages.

The characters are well drawn, their dialogue is sharp. The story builds to a tense bloodletting where all accounts are settled in full. Government accountability in granting amnesty to monsters and setting them free in a world they destroyed is potent commentary on an old story with many facets.

However, the script is a tad bloated and overwritten in extreme detail that dilutes the script's juice. There are only a few typos, and some formatting issues.

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

STORY

Very good work, writer. This story summons the spirit of DEATH AND THE MAIDEN, TONY MANERO, MISSING, Argentine-specific, Academy Award winning Foreign Film, THE OFFICIAL STORY, and the book IMAGINING ARGENTINA.

There are scores of other films like THE KILLING FIELDS depicting a decimated population. A friendly US Government offered cash, arms and backdoor support that spawned some of these government slaughters – including Argentina. These narratives, like X, are cautionary tales. A never-ending supply of innocent blood still flows worldwide. This does not weaken the dire need for such stories.

The writer sets aside past US foreign policy and concentrates on the here and now. An Argentinean activist from the Eighties lives a relatively placid life with his son and daughter-in-law in present day Los Angeles... until his past catches up. Like DEATH AND THE MAIDEN, this is personal. Mano a mano. Son for son.

The personal angle is what separates this story from those similar. The twists fly fast and furious: Andy's murder, the theft of Robin's baby, Genesis' identity. They are all effectively and creatively set up and paid off.

The multiple placements of Flashbacks and Flashforwards essentially make the script a non-linear structure. The time jumps feel organic, unforced, and do not disrupt the story's flow. The story reads like a standard Three Act structure.

As noted, Ramos wants his daughter's happiness and arranges to kill two birds with one stone by sadistically hurting Jorge. The subtext is should a person, a monster, have happiness when they have meted out so much misery? Does 'Karma is a bitch' apply to Ramos? The writer assures us it does. He loses a daughter, a (stolen) granddaughter and his life. It is fitting. We wave 'Buh-bye' as he boards a Hell bound train... with a second mouth to tell his tale to a disinterested Devil.

This is particularly resonant because Ramos goads Genesis. Ramos has a lot of cash to hire an army of lawyers to stall extradition and defend the rationale "I was just following orders." What is good for the goose is Genesis' reply. How many did you kill, torture and rape? The only real justice is the edge of Genesis' knife.

This is subtext of those who flout the law with impunity. The haves versus the have-nots. Some may argue “an eye for an eye” has no place in civilized society. The writer makes a convincing argument it is appropriate. The perpetrators were modern day Nazis indiscriminately slaughtering the powerless. There is no statute of limitations on genocide, or should not be as the writer suggests.

The well-written story is solid. As much as there is action, this is a script of ideas. Great work. There are no major issues or plot holes. The script’s issues stem from the craft. There is more in Structure and Craft.

STRUCTURE

As noted, the Non-Linear structure is effective. The story rises to an exciting and intense crescendo at the Hospital. Factions with differing agendas clash, and the bullets they do fly.

The writer carefully and precisely lays out the exposition. This gives the story a solid foundation from which to work. However, scenes go on a little long and the script is a bit overstuffed. The script requires an overall trim.

The recommendation is for the writer to make a deep pass on the Actions first then circle back to look at cuts and trims in Dialogue and scenes. Some of the following suggested cuts and trims may include Actions. There is more in Craft, and the script markup includes gross cuts and trims.

In streamlining the script, the writer must find the balance.

Cuts and Trims:

Pgs 3 – 9, trim by half, tense but too long and detailed

Pgs 13 -15, trim to one page, no need to get into the aesthetics of bars

Pgs 15 -18, trim to one page

Pgs 20 – 28, as grossly marked up

Pgs 32 – 44, trims and cuts as grossly marked

Pgs 45 – 62, trims and cuts as grossly marked; no need to show entire cow process

Pgs 63 – 121, trim as marked, trim superhero fight on pages 86 – 88. It is great atmosphere but unless the audience or reader lives in NYC or LA, they will have no clue this is happening as a battle over tourist money. The exposition while walking LA is a good idea, just trim the atmosphere, the unimportant-to-the-story fight.

Pgs 101 – 105, trim to half; do not need to hear the entire lullaby.

Pgs 118 – 121, trim birth instructions
Pgs 122 – end, trim Actions a bit

Turn to Act IIA, Jorge learns of Andy's murder on Page 31. With trims, this should be about page 26. A good goal is about five to six pages of trims and cuts in Act I.

Midpoint: Jorge breaks in on page 62. Trimmed, this should be about page 53, a total of about nine to 10 pages cut.

Act IIB and Act III are in the best shape but still needs trims of around five pages.

The sweet spot for the script is 110 pages – 15 pages cut.

CHARACTERS

ROBIN

On page 20, Robin is 34 weeks pregnant, 8 ½ months of a 9-month term. This means the story takes place roughly over the course of two weeks.

It is learned Andy is killed on page 31. This is an indeterminate yet short time after the BBQ where we meet Robin – a few days? Then on page 44, Ramos and Athena “case” Robin’s womb. Robin acts normally. Her biggest concern is ribs. This occurs at another indeterminate time after Andy’s death – a week?

The note here is Robin acts a bit like her beloved Andy never existed. She would be in mourning, beside herself. Her lack of grief does not track. She and Andy were planning a new life in Texas with their child just 20 pages earlier. She’s about to pop out a child alone, without her hubby.

This requires a bit more finesse. It is an easy fix. Robin is despondent and does not know what she is going to do, or she is packing for Texas which is where the story ends anyway. Or something cleverer the writer discovers. The desire for ribs could be a reaction, a salve, to her deep sadness and mourning.

HECTOR

HECTOR (CONT'D)

They shot up my crib. My boy...took one in the head...

Hector SNIFFS, clears his throat.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Me and my old lady've been trying to have another, but it ain't been easy. There's treatments, but those are for rich white people.

A few issues arise with Hector. It reads like 18th specifically gunned for the baby, or was he killed by a stray bullet in a hail of gunfire meant to kill Hector? Specifically targeting his son is a truly heinous act that references the violence in Argentina. The specificity works but this should have more clarity.

If the baby were targeted, and even in the case of a stray, why would Hector's wife stay with him and try to have another child that would potentially be in jeopardy? It makes more sense for her to leave Hector. It is understood there is commentary here on haves and have-nots' ability to pay for fertility treatments. A small note: It is understood Hector is bitter but treatments are available to anyone with cash regardless skin color.

As Hector preps to kill Jorge:

JORGE (CONT'D)

Your boy...your boy! Think of your boy!

JORGE (CONT'D)

Your boss...He killed my son. Please!

Hector's turn is a bit too abrupt. He and Jorge pal up to assault the hospital where Hector will give his life. The motivation feels a bit thin. Hector keys on Jorge's dead son and imminent granddaughter in reverence to his own dead son. Hector owes a lot to Ramos but turns on a dime.

The suggestion here is to find something that really snaps Hector out of it. What if Ramos was the proximate cause of the death of Hector's son? Hector screwed something of Ramos up while in 18 then quit. Ramos gets his revenge then exploits Hector. Jorge could have discovered this plot. What if Hector is an Argentine, his parents suffered at Ramos' hand, and Jorge tells him? This requires a bit of set up. The clever writer may discover something more creative to shore up this loose end.

Further, Slaughterman killed Andy. Hector is Ramos' right hand. Wouldn't he know about the killing? It seems he does not. Jorge must suspect Hector knows, or finds him guilty by association. Why would Jorge trust Hector so quickly?

Pages 101 and 125, Ramos is called Reyes. Fausto, good name; deal with the devil.

The rest of the characters are highly effective. Jorge has the perfect business for his background. Good work.

TONE

It would be helpful to add a few more notes of humor to leaven the horrors.

CRAFT

This is the area in the greatest need of improvement. The script is very well written. The writer is talented and has Voice – something few writers possess. Jorge's hair is more salt than pepper, but otherwise he's well preserved. Jorge's world flies off its axis. Not a cell, but close. A *smirk of arrogance. Of impunity. Of fuck you.* A keen eye might discern the pea-green husk of Andy's car sandwiched among the other scrapped husks. However, there is too much of a good thing. Markup flags some issues.

The mini slugs are well used. They are formatted as scene headings. The suggestion is to make them Actions. It is better line spacing. After introduction, assure all characters' names receive an initial Cap, i.e. doula is Doula. Try to avoid Orphans, Actions where one word wraps to a second line.

Avoid using words or phrases that are not common usage: Hesperidina; Terrace Chant; Linytron. Use a generic label like 'Orange Liqueur' or 'the orange liqueur Hesperidina'; 'TV', and 'Fan Song' or 'Football Chant'. Avoid specifics like Nike Cortez – expensive footwear or pricey Nikes.

Use names on first introduction. For example, Butterball is first called Voice. There is no need to hide Genesis is the Boy (8). We recommend not keeping characters' names secret to trick readers. An audience can be surprised without confusing a reader. A script is a blueprint for a film, not a novel. Substituting the character's name for Voice or saying this is Genesis does not change meaning, it adds clarity.

The Flashbacks could be formatted a bit better. The first recommendation is to drop the *italics*. With that much text, it is more difficult to read and unnecessary. The overriding principal is clarity particularly in a Non-Linear structure.

For one scene Flashbacks like on page 25:

FLASHBACK – 1987, ARGENTINA, HOSPITAL

Jorge's wife, SARA (33), splayed out on a birthing table, belly cut open, the sum of her life sopped up in a raft of bloody towels.

JORGE (V.O.)

She never got the chance to swaddle you, hold you in her arms.

BACK

The end can be END FLASHBACK, BACK TO PRESENT, BACK. This is justified left.

For longer Flashbacks like on page 92:

FLASHBACK SEQUENCE – 1990, ARGENTINA

EXT. EMPORIUM OF FUN – NIGHT

Etc...

The cherub lowers the gun, salutes him.

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

Memory Flashes like on page 117 (this applies when it is not direct memory):

QUICK FLASHBACK

Andy's tortured body.

BACK

When it is a direct memory like on page 117:

MEMORY FLASH

Jorge shoots Francisco's son.

BACK

In Actions, there is no need to go into detail of slaughtering a cow, or exactly what kind of pants are in Ramos' closet. We do not care about these details. Trim and cut anything that does not move the story forward. For example, Slaughterman. What is important is not writing a Primer about prepping the cow. It is the Stunbolt

Gun. This is an opportunity to draw a parallel between Andy's wound and that of the cow. This is Andy's killer, and this is how Andy died.

A guideline is four lines per Action paragraph. By trimming the unnecessary detail, the script will read a lot faster, with more urgency and cut pages as well.

The gate JUDDERS open for a REEFER TRUCK exiting the facility. Jorge skirts along the hurricane fence toward the rolling gate.

Another refrigerated TRUCK approaches. The driver's arm reaches out, hits a button on a gooseneck stand. The gate RATTLES open.

Jorge waits for the truck to pull out and the gate to start to close before he slips inside.

The gate JUDDERS open for a REEFER TRUCK exiting the facility. Jorge skirts along the hurricane fence toward the rolling gate.

Another refrigerated TRUCK approaches. When it pulls out, Jorge slips inside.

We generally know what happens in a meat processing plant – less detail:

Jorge moves among a row of refrigerated trucks, glimpsing the hive of activity as he darts about.

~~On one side of the facility, a loading area — heavy set workers lug meat to refrigerated trucks parked in the loading bays.~~

~~On the other side, a group of cattle is unloaded into a pen and shunted through a gauntlet of rails.~~

A GOLF CART zips into a space next to a short staircase leading up to a side entrance. The MAN ~~in the cart gets out. He dons a protective helmet, grabs a clipboard.~~

~~Jorge cuts across the lot in the direction of the man, who bounds the stairs. The man swipes a card, opens the door, enters the building.~~

Jorge sprints up the stairs, grabs the door before it closes.

Break up Actions like on page 113:

Hector closes in -- Jorge latches onto the table, tries to haul himself up, but Hector grabs him from behind. He twists Jorge's arms behind his back, puts a forearm to his neck, SLAMS him face down on a SAW TABLE. Jorge's eyes bug at the jagged BANDSAW BLADE six inches away from his face.

Hector closes in.

Jorge latches onto the table, tries to haul himself up.

Hector grabs him from behind.

He twists Jorge's arms behind his back, puts a forearm to his neck

Hector SLAMS Jorge's face down on a MEAT SAW TABLE.

Jorge's eyes bug at the jagged BANDSAW BLADE six inches from his face.

As noted, the recommendation is a deep pass to cut and trim Actions before trimming Dialogue and scenes. A severe pass will cut many pages.

DIALOGUE

The Dialogue is a script strength. There is subtext and meaning. Great work.

The sole suggestion is less writing character lines in pidgin English and instead let the actor under direction put the spin on the words. For example, Lev. In his intro he could be said to, "speaks in fractured English – dropping Articles and taking ungrammatical shortcuts." The text will read better without the spin.

TITLE

It's good. Evocative.

MARKETABILITY and CONCLUSION

This is a script for a moderate budget film in the \$25M to \$35M range. The upside is the story is fairly contained. The Flashbacks do not introduce crowds, military or specific exteriors that need to be dressed for the Eighties and Nineties. The Argentinean interiors can easily be faked in the US. The cast is manageable.

Another upside is the story is ready for industry eyes and use as a Spec. It is the execution that still needs work.

This is not a 'just another knock of the US' story of rancid foreign policy. As noted, the focus is on people – what audiences watch movies to see. Still, the market for a film with 40-year-old roots might have limited appeal even though it is a universal

story of subjugation and unregulated wielding of power. The audience might skew to those who have lived under such a yoke. Others might find the story a bit cruel. However, historical films enjoy resurgence, and the state of the planet finds many corners of the world attempting to enslave their populations.

Hollywood considers stories in one of four ways: Totally Familiar; Familiar, Yet Different; Different, Yet Familiar; Totally Different. X lands in Familiar, Yet Different – a good position.

This is a well-written and complex story. The writer is talented and knows how to weave a tale. The writer is encouraged to continue development.

Thank you for the opportunity to read the script.
Sam

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	5
THEME	8
STORYTELLING	9
ORIGINALITY	7
STRUCTURE	8
PLOT	8
CHARACTERIZATION	9
DIALOGUE	9
STYLE	5
CONCEPT	8
MARKETABILITY/COMMERCIAL APPEAL	6
TOTAL POINTS	82

SCRIPT: CONSIDER
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 screenplay 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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