

SCREENPLAY GURUS

SCRIPT NOTES

TITLE: X
LOCALE: Philadelphia and environs
WRITER(S): X
PERIOD: Present
FORM: Feature Screenplay
GENRE: Zombie, Horror Comedy/Drama, Satire
BUDGET: Moderate
PAGES: 102
DRAFT DATE: NA
COVERAGE DATE: 3/3/22
PREPARED BY: TA

COMMENTS

OVERALL

X is a freewheeling, zany horror comedy, and drama, wherein Zombies run amuck in Philadelphia. A man beaten down not only by life but also by his wife develops an app meant to facilitate the transport of newly dead undead to funeral parlors. The man accepts a Faustian bargain, and the Devil amps up the code to instead deliver souls to his dark kingdom.

The plot approaches satire in unabashedly portraying the politics and lame police efforts in trying to reign in hungry Zombies chomping hapless Philadelphians. There is an effective ticking clock as a reporter races to save the life of a visiting president. The man's domestic life is acerbic and well done. There is plenty of funny as the man becomes rich by ridding streets of Zombie hordes but eventually loses his soul to spend his afterlife in Hell. This is a fresh take on the Zombie genre.

However, the script could be better written. It is a tad haphazard and sloppy with many typos and usage errors. The dialogue could use shoring up. The script is too long for a Pilot and is not properly formatted for the TV medium. There are a few plot holes to plug.

Let's take a look at script improvements.

STORY

There is room for all types of films, even broad, lowbrow comedies like DUMB AND DUMBER. The trick with such films is to build the fun on serious. X accomplishes this goal. Good work.

Philly is not only beset by Zombies but drug addicts who leave behind needles. The city is filthy, and people blithely accept it. It's as if the Zombies are the least of the city's problems. Further, the Zombies are eventually treated like immigrants or the victims of race hatred. Once Carter begins zapping them, and the hordes are rounded up for encampments, the protestors picket for their rights.

"Skin! Skin! Skin!" is the Zombies' sorrowful plea. In dialing down the app due to his guilt, Carter makes the Zombies sympathetic. There are a few ways to view this turn. A person's soul is deeper than skin, and they should not be judged for its color, or in this case, the lack of epidermis. There is madness in protestors seeking justice for Zombies who if freed would eat their faces. That makes single-minded and ultra-liberal protestors as mindless as the Zombies.

These skinless Zombies also infer immigrants who make demands on societies. They are needy, pitiful, and deadly. "NO ZOMBIES," "Go home, zombies!" read signs.

These are very effective notes of satire. The ingenious writer uses vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings and holds them up to ridicule. The intent is shaming or exposing the flaws of individuals, governments, and society itself, to improve.

The satire is fun, but the writer has the greater purpose of constructive social criticism. They use wit to draw attention to both particular and wider societal issues. A feature of satire is irony or sarcasm, but the writer uses exaggeration to greater effect. As killings spirals out of control, the Philly Cops' inability to stem the hordes underscores police powerlessness that is ripped from today's headlines. Also, there's an app for that: Uber For The Dead – very funny.

The Faustian bargain is a well-worn trope. Here, Old Harry uses Carter's wife as a bargaining chip to leverage him. There is a familiar wedding ring to Martha and Carter's relationship. However, there is nothing to salvage. She is a shrew who constantly harangues Carter and thinks little of him with "shit for brains." There is irony the security of a new home is lost to her when Carter strikes it rich. The writer uses their wedding photo to quickly tell their tale. It is a hoot.

A wedding photo of CARTER and MARTHA (21), both look miserable and depressed, 1970.

This takes a potshot at marriage. Theoretically, the wedding day should be a couple's happiest moment. The reasons these two married are not explored. They do not have to be. Sometimes the best approach is no explanation to let the viewer fill in the blanks. The picture alone is commentary. Was it settling? Was she pregnant? No kids so that doesn't fly. Is it a sadist/masochist thing? Great work.

Martha pitchforking Carter – it is assumed for eternity – is the perfect note to end their 50 plus year long relationship on Earth, and the story. He cannot escape her even in Hell. Very funny. Plus, he is zapped by his own app. Cosmic justice.

Carter dialing down the app has the opposite effect of helping. It makes matters worse. This is a good twist that takes the action to another level. Other good twists are Carter zapping the living Strippers, and Gretchen becoming a Zombie. They keep things lively by moving the story in new directions and adding complications. The presidential visit is well conceived. It turns a local problem into a national one.

There are countless Zombie movies and TV shows. The number of Zombie comedies is not so great. This is a niche for the writer to exploit as a screenplay. The script is not for a Pilot because all loose threads are neatly tied up. There is nowhere for a series to go. The length is about 1 hour 43 minutes. A 90 minute Pilot should be 90 pages for non-broadcast streamer or premium cable and 60 pages for basic cable or TV broadcast where ads will be inserted.

The recommendation is to consider the Pilot as a feature screenplay. In that case, the act breaks are removed in a script that is between 90 and 95 pages max. The script markup flags cuts and trims that will excise about three pages.

The script has very good potential. All the plot elements are in place, and the core story is solid. Going forward, the recommendation is for the writer to tighten up the dialogue, clean up the errors and typos and amp up the Actions and Dialogue.

STRUCTURE

As noted, this is essentially a feature screenplay. Cut eight to 13 pages. The faster a comedy moves the better it lands. Get a laugh, move on to the next. Particularly in a bonkers story with crazy goings on. There is repetition to cut that loses pages.

Act One

Hook and Set Up

Very effective and economical. By page five we know where we are and the central conflict. We meet the happy couple Carter and Martha. Carter's goal and an obstacle – Martha – are introduced. We learn what Carter does for a living and go on a typical (?) run. This is page 17. The recommendation is a cut of two to three pages to the point of getting Chinese.

Carter can't close a sale to the funeral parlor. This sets up Old Harry on page 22. Martha's complaints about the app are a roller coaster she is on and off. We know what she says, but a hard look at Carter also works. This is a recommendation for the entire script. Use Actions instead of Dialogue. The script is a bit talky.

The meeting with OH around 25 takes the story into –

Act Two A

OH lays out his plans and uses Martha as leverage to get Carter to sign. Done deal. We learn what the app will do. On this, there are too many zappings on screen. These should be more precious and less arbitrary.

From a budgetary standpoint, the less the CGI the better. The suggestion is to set up what a zap looks like then use light and sound alone to indicate a zap. This was done with Gretchen and Cops who saw light in the alley when the zap happened O.S. We do not have to see every one. It loses power. Not entirely cut. Sparingly is the watchword.

Political complications abound; how to manage the problem. Gretchen exacerbates the issue by doing her job as a member of the liberal media. The discourse between her and the Cops is an effective way to debate issues and inform the story.

OH comes into the fray and advocates for the set upon Carter. This idea is inherently funny: Devil's Advocate.

There are too many zaps in the 30s and 40's.

Carter is rich and has all that he wished for. A high place for him to fall from. Good.

Midpoint

Zapping the strippers moves the story in a new direction. A recommendation to change their occupation. These portrayals are a bit tone deaf in the post #metoo era. The clever writer will find another way to accomplish the same goal with different woman – a few woman in a bar, for example. Bypass prostitutes as well.

Act Two B

Carter is a hero. The city normalizes after being cleaned by Carter. OH advises the government to prove a widely held belief politicians are in bed with the Devil. Fun.

Carter unsuccessfully puts the move on Gretchen and has a bad press conference. His spiral downward accelerates. OH tries to seduce him with a phony, sexy Martha. Fun move.

A new crisis evolves – one of skinless Zombies. The Prez wants to visit. A good add for stakes. OH desires POTUS' soul. This underscores politics where it seems candidates sell their souls to be elected. From page 81, the script gallops to the end. Good work.

Carter is busted for skinning Martha who isn't Martha.

Act Three

Carter is released to all Hell breaking loose. Fun. Gretchen is zombified by OH in Hell. OH puts moves on her and she escapes.

The intercuts between encampment and podium work well. Gretchen saves Prez. In the ultimate irony, a Zombie zaps Carter. OH is zapped, but not really. A fun, fitting and satisfying end with Carter poked and prodded by Martha.

Evil never dies. OH tempts a Mover who states he'll sell his soul...

Great work on the structure. Trim and cut to streamline.

CHARACTERS

The character work is good. Carter's physical ailments and complaints about his back works well.

PLOT LOGIC

There are a few lapses.

I'll remember this come election season. Police Commanders rise through the ranks and are appointed by the commissioner. They're not elected.

How does Gretchen come to accompany Carter to his penthouse? She's just there.

GRETCHEN

I knew you harmed all those poor defenseless people! How? All she knows at this point is Martha. I knew you harmed your poor defenseless wife!

Beezlebub, and Belphor How do they travel openly as demons without causing panic? That they can freely travel adds to the wackiness. Like people are in a stupor or demons are commonplace. A suggestion however to consider them looking normal in suits in public until they're in Hell where they show their true form. Judgement call.

INT. ZOMBIE ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Zombie Gretchen looks and sees Carter with the president. She becomes irate. Where is the encampment located in reference to the president and Carter? Why put the Zombies on trucks if it's that close? Walk them over. Also, why have the encampment in town? A good solution is a TV at the encampment where Gretchen sees the president and Carter.

Zombie Gretchen pushes down the fence. Make this Gretchen leads the Zombies in pushing down the fence.

CRAFT

This is the area in greatest need of work. Mark up flags typos and other issues.

Drop the logline from the title page. It screams "amateur!"

There are 66 lumbers, lumber or lumbering. Find other verbs: wordhippo.com.

Fix verb-subject disagreement.

The skinless zombie collapse dead. (skinless zombie collapses, skinless zombies collapse)

The skinless zombie terrorize (skinless zombie terrorizes, skinless zombies terrorize)

While the following works to a degree, there are a number of lines with missing words that when added back will make text clearer:

Just an old concoction to loosen up.

Just an old concoction to loosen **you** up.

EXT. WEST END NEIGHBORHOOD - OVERCAST

Overcast is not a daypart. Scene Headings use DAY, NIGHT. Note the weather in the Action that follows.

A number of Actions and Dialogue combine to say the same, obvious thing.

Skinless zombies ATTACK residents for their skin.

ZOMBIES
Skin! Skin!

MAYOR
I could kill Carter the Cleaner!

His SECRETARY runs into his office.

MAYOR (CONT'D)
Skinless zombies are attacking residents for their skin!

Carter is in his penthouse, **not his old apartment.** (not needed)

There is a lack of Direct Address commas:

I own your soul boy, that was the agreement. Unless...

I own your soul, boy, that was the agreement. Unless...

When do we eat grandma?

When do we eat, grandma?

There is unnecessary repetition.

The zombie points the cellphone at Carter as Carter's flesh **is slowly sucked off into the vortex.** He SCREAMS. Carter SCREAMS as **his flesh is torn off into the vortex.**

The following dialogue is repeated twice:

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
Your app is brilliant.

CARTER
Aw, shucks. Thanks.

The writing could be a tad sleeker and more compelling rather than sing-songy:

Old Harry grabs zombie Gretchen from behind but zombie Gretchen clocks Old Harry as Old Harry falls to the ground.

Gretchen grapples with Old Harry. She clocks him on his demonic noggin. Dazed, he loosens the grip and drops like a felled tree.

The recommendation is a deep pass on the text to fix issues and pump them up.

DIALOGUE

In general, dialogue is in good shape. Some very funny lines. However, there is a tendency for the lines to go on for a bit too long.

As I said before young lady,

Characters sometimes inform the writer. OH has already inferred this. Avoid repetition. Keep the story moving.

In jokey dialogue, there are a few cringeworthy yet clever lines. The following dialogue is so far out it tracks in this story:

OLD HARRY
Top secret, too? Well, let's remove that top and discover the secret.

This is a story untethered. Therefore, the story craziness should be mirrored by spoken text, and as noted non-verbal character Actions. The recommendation is a pass to assure lengthy blocks of dialogue are trimmed and worked for great clarity.

TITLE

It works but a derivation would also work: APP OF THE DAMNED.

MARKETABILITY and CONCLUSION

As written, the script is for a medium budget film in the \$35 million range. The budget goes to locations, Zombie makeup and CGI. The cast tends largish. There are a number of pricey set pieces like the encampment scene that requires the set and a slew of Zombies. As suggested, the CGI can be cut down.

The script is not ready for industry scrutiny. To be ready, the script needs to be cleaned up and streamlined to go for the jugular.

The imaginative and clever writer has a good facility with comedy. This is a kooky story with good potential and a chance to take the Zombie genre in a new direction. There is meaning and potent commentary of contemporary society. Good work.

Thank you for the opportunity to read the draft.

- 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	6
THEME	7
STORYTELLING	7
ORIGINALITY	9
STRUCTURE	7
PLOT	8
CHARACTERIZATION	6
DIALOGUE	6
STYLE	4
CONCEPT	8
MARKETABILITY/COMMERCIAL APPEAL	7
TOTAL POINTS	75

SCRIPT: PASS
WRITER: CONSIDER

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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