

# SCREENPLAY GURUS

## SCRIPT NOTES

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>LOCALE:</b>	A Fantasy Version of New York City
<b>WRITER(S):</b>	X
<b>PERIOD:</b>	Present
<b>FORM:</b>	Feature Screenplay
<b>GENRE:</b>	Fantasy Comedy-Drama
<b>BUDGET:</b>	Moderate
<b>PAGES:</b>	111
<b>DRAFT DATE:</b>	NA
<b>COVERAGE DATE:</b>	6/4/20
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	AJ

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## **COMMENTS**

### OVERALL

X is a complex, clever tale of gender politics, women's rights and issues. An accident merging a man and woman catapults the story into an alternate Universe where an ad agency secretary speaks with the mind of her sexist boss. The complications pile up as the secretary triumphs by raising her status at the agency.

The characters are well drawn, and the situations feel real. The social commentary is acrid. There are many laugh out loud situations and lines of dialogue. The story is a funhouse mirror with reflection upon reflection upon reflection...

However, the talky, over length script is a tad overwritten. While the commentary is valid and timely, the story becomes didactic and heavy-handed. The material is a bit too derived from other sources. The character permutations are a bit complex and difficult to follow because the rules of this world have not been set.

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

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## STORY

Very good work, writer. The story starts with good velocity. However, by midpoint the script goes a touch off the rails in lengthy scenes that could either be trimmed or cut to better serve a leaner, pointed and more entertaining story.

Much of this script would play better onscreen than it does on paper. The funny phone business on page 43 is an example. On paper, it requires a few re-reads. This is due to a lack of descriptive character labels. The vagaries of the industry demand a script be read and understood to be purchased in order to make a film.

Here, for purposes of clarity, "real" is used to describe the story pre-accident. Post-accident, we enter a netherworld with at least five Eves (original, "real" Eve; Eve with Adam inside her head; Reflection Eve – an image of the "real Eve," "One Mind") and three Adams (the "real" Adam, the river Adam and that fragment of him inside Eve).

ADAM IN EVE (IN MIRROR W/ MALE VOICE)  
(to "Real Eve")

It was you who said "Okay, sure"!

REAL EVE (IN MIRROR)

You're welcome. I'd do anything for my girl.

The suggestion for the character names is to write cleaner and with better description: EVE BODY – ADAM MIND, EVE BODY/ADAM MIND or EVE/ADAM. EVE REFLECTION. The accent should be in a parenthetical. The glasses help. What if one Eve only spoke German? An Eve always in specific clothes or hairstyle. Rethink using "Eve" in Actions.

One-offs should be avoided, i.e. one appearance of a character like ADAM IN EVE (IN MIRROR W/ MALE VOICE). Eve has already been established with Adam inside. Once a character naming convention is found, it should remain consistent.

This could be:

In the door reflection --

EVE/ADAM

(Adam's voice)

In other instances:

EVE/ADAM

(in glasses)

It turns confusing, particularly in scenes where several of the Adams and Eves are present. The recommendations are: Find a very easily understood character labeling or separation method; simplify the story with less Adams and Eves. It is understood the writer attempts to craft a labyrinthine story with many eddies and currents. For the most part it works. However, even a film could be confusing.

The significance of October 15, 2017 is Alyssa Milano's famed #metoo Tweet. It is a good reference but how many will know the significance? The suggestion is woman at the agency buzz and re-Tweet it.

How does this world work? If Eve has a part or all of Adam's consciousness or mind, then why does Adam appear normal? Eve gets a piece of Adam. What part of Adam is in the river? If the script stopped with three or four permutations (real Adam and Eve, Eve/Adam, river Adam), the story would be clearer while still affording the opportunity to explore the potent themes.

There is neither explanation nor foreshadow of how this happens. It just does. The basics of introducing a fantasy element is the audience will suspend disbelief in one move away from the real world (EVE (ADAM'S MIND)). The audience will have increasing difficulty accepting more than one step away because each additional stride requires them to work harder and harder to suspend disbelief. This offers less and less connection to reality.

When viewers work too hard to accept the story, they become frustrated and give up on the whole thing. This is the case in X. By midpoint, the read became increasingly difficult to follow when the already complicated story goes off on a few too many tributaries.

When presenting fantasy characters and worlds, there should be no assumption the audience understands a single thing about the characters or world unless it has been explained in some way. We are certain the clever and inventive writer will discover these ways.

Here, the writer describes a movie instead of telling a story. X is written visually, externalizes action and conflict, and applies form and function. However, the story is not fully executed on the page.

The narrative intention is not clear in the writing. The ideas associated with the story – beats, moments, subtext, emotional nuance, plot – have to be transparent to the reader. The script lacks a touch of clarity as a story.

Writing a film for a producer instead of writing a story for a reader is a mistake. It makes a script ambiguous. Parts of the story are on the page, but other parts are vague and still in the writer's head, attached to a finished film one has to actually see in order to fully comprehend its story. This is particularly true in the scenes with many Adams and Eves who are all trying to add something to the story. There is also a touch too much detail about ad campaigns. While it seems authentic, the script feels a bit like an ad agency primer. Cut these unnecessary details. For example, the effective "like a girl" material could be cut to a page with a montage or similar device. Right now, this plot element takes up too much real estate.

This leads to being taken out of the read. Instead of being engaged, there is confusion. If we were to sit down with the writer, they would be able to provide emotional explanation of the scene and narrative intent as related to the story as a whole. And therein lies the rub. When a script goes out into the world, it does not go with a person attached who can clarify or explain scene intentions.

Ambiguity is the enemy of a script. Curiosity is the hero. Truly engaging writing creates narrative curiosity. The reader wants to read more in order to know more. Ambiguous writing causes confusion. Curiosity is "good confusion."

The script tips its hat to WHAT WOMEN WANT, SWITCH, MAD MEN and a dash of TOOTSIE. In WHAT WOMEN WANT, Mel Gibson, an ad agency exec, slips and falls into a tub of water with an operating hair dryer. The accident allows him to hear woman's thoughts. He also tussles with women's products. In SWITCH, a cheating, male ad agency exec is shot by a lover, given a second chance by God and is reincarnated as a woman with his male personality inside. She struggles with makeup and teeters on high heels.

Eve bears a close resemblance to Elizabeth Moss in MAD MEN who starts as an ad agency secretary and fights up a sexist, male-dominated ladder. She starts with women's products. The series fictionalized the creation of ad campaigns for real products. TOOTSIE finds a desperate male actor transform into a woman to score a role. He experiences life as a female and learns how to embrace his feminine side.

There is an intriguing element of evolution offered at the script's beginning. The references to this element disappear along the way. It is understood to be a clarion

call for a new way of life. We must evolve or die. It bears a few more mentions or greater exploration along the way.

There are some very good elements. For example, the flipbook animation, "Warts and All" and many others. See the mark up.

Going forward, the writer faces a number of challenges. This is very good and inventive work. However, the fun trip attempts to handle too many issues, bogs down in a tad too much talk and becomes a bit preachy. Lack of easy to identify characters exacerbates the confusion. The overall recommendation is to simplify.

## STRUCTURE

The script is 15 pages too long. Some cuts are marked up; the CITY LIGHTS sequence and restaurant later. It is understood the Chaplin film is shown as a clever way to spark creativity. The film could be seen on TV and accomplish the same thing, or another method can be found. On a practical note, acquiring the rights to CITY LIGHTS could be expensive. Then there are lengthy blocks of Waitress dialogue. She also adds another character to the payroll. Then there is another movie and pizza.

Act One is in good shape. The turn to Act Two is spot on. It is Acts Two and Three that require cuts. Particularly the approximately 70 page Act Two.

Subplots To Trim Or Cut:

Accountants

Sam

Landlord

The repetitive banter between Adam and Secretary Eve in Act One

The "like a girl" scenes

IFC, restaurant, movie and pizza

Overall trim or cut of lengthy, talky scenes

Suggested Length: 100 pages

Act One 25 Pages

Act Two 50 Pages

Act Three 25 Pages

Overall, the tensions, complications and obstacles rise. Good work here.

## CHARACTERS

Why doesn't Eve have money to pay rent? She works full time. Why does she eventually torture the landlord with the dog whistle? It does not track for Eve's character. As noted, the landlord subplot adds little to the story, and can be trimmed to the bone or cut.

There are some delicious characterizations:

They don't know where I live, so this is the only place where they can find me. How did they get my new number?!

The sexism is potent. The little digs and abuse. Adam is a woman's nightmare.

Good work with the characters.

## TONE

The script is a bit tonally confused. The start is lighter than an end that becomes quite serious. The method for fixing this is to make less light in the beginning or add more from midpoint on.

## CRAFT

Script mark up flags errors.

The writing is generally good but could be broken up and pop a bit more:

Adam and Max chuckle. Eve's smile disappears as she turns around, exits the building and gets back in through the revolving door - but just as she re-enters the building she drops one of the pastries, and in an attempt to catch it she also drops the folder, and SEVERAL CAMPAIGN SKETCHES scatter across the floor.

Adam and Max chuckle.

Eve's smile disappears as she turns, exits and returns through the revolving door.

She drops a pastry then the folder. Campaign sketches scatter across the floor.

testosteronic A funny made up word.

soon -- That's what my dad--I firing - Or Double Em dashes should be consistent. Some attach to words, some do not. Some are single, some are double. This is the preferred usage: Something positive -- Similarly, inconsistent period placement. The correct THIN AND RICH." With incorrect Valkyries".

The suggestion is to use CAPS sparingly and delete the underlines. An actor under direction will know where to place emphasis in dialogue. Caps and underlines slow the read.

MONTAGE - To the music of "Yesterday" by the Beatles:

There is varying wisdom regarding the use of specific music cues. In some cases, it is seen as Voice. Others view it as forbidden in a Spec. The issue here is the cues are integrated into the script. This could be an issue for a producer considering the story. What will it cost (The Beatles = \$\$\$)? Is it available? Will copyright owners release it to this story? Plugging in emotion or message through a song is also a touch lazy. Keeping them in is the writer's judgment call.

The recommendation is a clean up pass for typos and formatting issues, deleting the underlines and scaling back on the Caps. The Actions could also use a little more polish and pop.

#### DIALOGUE

Good work here. The script is chock full of wonderful sentiments, philosophical notes and observations. As noted, there is a bit too much.

#### TITLE

Intriguing. The sole note is the possibility of mistaking the script for a biblical tale.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

There is a possibility some will discount a script about women's issues written by a man. This does not frequently happen but it does happen.

#### MARKETABILITY and CONCLUSION

A film from this script is in the mid-budget level of \$20-\$25M. The bulk of this cost is in special effects. The rest of the story is contained.

This is good, funny script. As noted, it is full of wonderful insights and has a compelling message. However, it is not ready for industry eyes or for use as a Spec. In order to be ready for the market, the writer should concentrate on wrangling the story to the essence. It is too long and, as noted, becomes didactic. Audiences go to movies to escape and be entertained. Even when there is an important issue to impart, it must be seamlessly integrated. The story should simmer, not boil.

In the last few years, the fight for women's place in society has exploded through #metoo and other movements. The writer does a great job highlighting the obstacles in the path of a woman with something to contribute and a desire to grow. She works in a sexist environment and is not taken seriously. It is a sad state of affairs and she eventually triumphs.

However, though there are many insights, no new ground is broken on the core issue. The allegorical swap between Adam and Eve is a very good slant that is very well done. But it is not a wholly original one. We have essentially seen this story in other forms.

The writer's greater challenge is to take the ideas and existing material then pen it in surprising and accessible ways. The writer has Voice. The recommendation is to make certain it is heard clearly.

Thank you for the opportunity to read the script.

# SCREENPLAY GURUS' 11 POINT SCORING MATRIX

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

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

Statistical Scores of submitted screenplays

Pass: 80%  
 Weak Consider: <sup>1</sup> 10%  
 Consider: 5%  
 Strong Consider: 3%  
 Recommend: 2%

PRESENTATION	8
THEME	8
STORYTELLING	5
ORIGINALITY	5
STRUCTURE	7
PLOT	3
CHARACTERIZATION	8
DIALOGUE	8
STYLE	7
CONCEPT	6
MARKETABILITY/COMMERCIAL APPEAL	5
TOTAL POINTS	70

**SCRIPT: PASS**  
**WRITER: WEAK 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.

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**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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