



Entry Type: Classic Notes (WeScreenplay)

Synopsis Included: No

Notes Date: March 7th, 2023

Analyst: JMLTW

Ranking: 68th Percentile

# RASCAL

Thriller

Feature

109 Pages

by Esmarelda VillaLobos

**TOP 5%**  
DIALOGUE

**TOP 24%**  
OVERALL IMPRESSION

**RATING**  
**PASS**  
PLACED IN THE TOP 32%

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## OPENING THOUGHTS

Rascal is an energetic and immersive thriller that benefits from some excellent characterization and dialogue. There's a lot here that lands and the potential is evident for a compelling low-budget feature. However, there remains some opportunity for development of the plot and elements of the characterization in order to craft a more resonant read. The following analysis will assess both where the script is at now and where its areas of potential growth are for future drafts. Any suggestions given are purely designed to explore possibilities that may spark the writer into new creative choices. It is for the writer to determine the best course of action. Hopefully the following analysis will facilitate this.

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## CHARACTERS

From a characterization standpoint, there are both clear strengths as well as a few potential growth areas in the current draft. In terms of personality, the characters are all well-defined and authentic. There's a vibrancy to the cast - particularly the supporting characters - that helps give the project a distinct feel. Maxine's Love Ranch feels like it has a personality of its own, with its patrons and décor blending into each other in a way that echoes the likes of the 'Titty Twister' bar from *From Dusk til Dawn* (1996). Roger, Hector, McCready, Danny, and Marley all have distinct voices and clear personality traits. And even minor cameo parts like the obnoxious Shaved Head patron are made memorable and unique.

Rascal is also a strong persona, with a grit and tenacity about her that's easy to root for. We sense someone who hasn't found an easy path in life and carries both physical and mental wounds with her. In another movie she might just be the sassy prostitute who lingers in the background adjusting her boobs. But here she is given centre stage and this makes for an original and refreshing choice. However, when moving away from personality and toward character function, Rascal's effectiveness as a protagonist has scope for refinement. The main issue in her current guise is that she lacks an investable motivation and goal. This limits the depth of connection that a reader/audience is likely to have with her.

Strong protagonists tends to have a clearly defined story goal that has stakes for them, both internally and externally. This is what is currently lacking with Rascal. She has a vague idea of going to Nashville, but the reasons for this seem unclear and even arbitrary. She appears to happen upon the destination by chance when bouncing the ball. When questioned about what it represents, she responds simply "Recording studios. Barbecue. It's my second favorite Altman movie". Whilst this is a

cute line, her lack of definitiveness over it will translate to an audience. She is our touchpoint in the story and the reader/audience respond to her level of enthusiasm or compulsion to achieve her goal. Just to underscore this point, imagine any number of classic movies if the protagonist was only mildly invested in their goal. What if the shark in Jaws (1975) hadn't actually eaten anybody and Chief Brody only wanted to deter it, rather than kill it? It would greatly impact the level of investment that the audience has in the story.

The lack of clarity in Rascal's goal is mirrored in her rather vague motivation. When queried on how she ended up at Maxine's, Rascal tells Danny that it was mostly driven by economic needs and that she isn't bothered by the sex as "Penises are way more funny than scary and I've kind of always been slutty". Once again, this lack of a more definitive motivation limits the resonance of her as a protagonist. If she's not desperate to escape the life she's in, the audience won't feel this on her behalf. And so ultimately she risks becoming no more investable than any of the other girls at Maxine's.

The challenge for the writer, therefore, is to make Rascal easier to invest in by strengthening her motivation and goal. In terms of Rascal's story goal, this is as much of a plot issue as a character one and so will be analysed in the following section. But in regard to her motivation, the recommended approach would be twofold: lean into both what she wants in life, and what she doesn't want. So any passions she has (e.g. music) could be underscored and played up, and this could create a beacon of hope for her and the audience. And by contrast, leaning in to how much she wants out of her current situation will also help with this aspect. So one option could be to show a little more of Rascal's daily grind, no pun intended. Might we see a montage of clients that she services that day, for example? Or could Roger intervene in her argument with the Shaved Head man and explain in no uncertain terms that she is not in charge and that if doesn't go through with the sex, he will dock her an entire month's wages? This could potentially create an impactful beat if we saw Rascal forcing herself to be intimate with an entitled pig. Whatever the writer decides, the point here is simply to give the audience a clear motivation for why Rascal wants out and then this will form an anchor for her actions thereafter.

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## PLOT

The script has a simple, linear plot that the writer mines for several strong moments. Marley being found dead, Stanley returning Rascal to Maxine's, her exploration of the attic, the fire, and the scenes around the outhouse are all strong beats that deliver on the promise of the premise. The script is at its best when immersing us in Rascal's attempts to navigate her way out of her bleak situation. She experiences tons of conflict and physical pain across the story, and this helps in making her someone the audience will root for. However, as referenced with regard to character, Rascal lacks a clear goal in the story, both before Marley is killed, and after. Nashville is little more than a half-idea for her, somewhere she just might meet her true love. It could be preferable to make this goal much more defined and solid. Just by way of illustrative example, what if Rascal had been planning a new start for some time. Might she have been saving up and amassed a specific amount of cash, like \$5k? If she planned to use this cash to, say, open a small café then it would give the reader/audience a clearly trackable goal. Every move she takes thereafter will signal to the audience if she is closer to her goal or further away from it. So if her \$5k in cash suddenly went missing, she'd be further away. If she seems to have escaped from Maxine's, she'd be closer. Again, the specifics aren't important, it just matters that Rascal has a more tangible goal in mind. By extension, it feels that Nashville should have some significance. So again, purely as an example, might Rascal have a vinyl in her collection for a Nashville singer, like Dolly Parton? And could that album cover represent her idea of a free, happy woman? If it encapsulated her dream in a single image, then it could perhaps make her goal easy to comprehend and visceral for the audience.

Of course, once Marley has been found dead, Rascal's goal shifts somewhat to getting justice for her. However, where the logline teases a revenge story, this isn't exactly how the screenplay pans out. Instead, Rascal's initial instinct is to flee. This slightly clouds what the audience are supposed to be tracking at this point in the story. Should we want to see Rascal escape and get out, or should we want to see her get revenge for Marley's death? If the latter, then more could be done to align us with her suspicions that this was foul play and not an accident. In the current draft Marley is shown to be an addict and so her death by fentanyl doesn't appear unusual, based upon what we have been shown. Rascal is certain her friend didn't use the drug, but we as spectators are not. This fractures the connection between us, where ideally we would feel aligned with her. So it may be possible to establish Marley's boundaries on drugs before this development, to seed her aversion to opioids. Another way of strengthening this would be to have her excited about leaving with Rascal, and perhaps going a little further than her. For example, might Marley raise the prospect of robbing the office safe in order to give them more capital for their new adventure? Even if Rascal shot down this idea, it might seed in her mind that Marley might have gotten caught stealing and given Roger or Hector a reason to get rid of her.

What matters here is simply that Rascal's intention is clear and driving the story forward. If she wants out, then reinforce this at every opportunity and give her an emotional attachment to her destination. If she wants revenge, then help the audience to understand why she cannot believe Marley died at her own hands. This will ensure that the narrative is focussed and increase Rascal's resonance as a protagonist.

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## STRUCTURE

The script has a solid three-act structure and an appropriate overall length. There's a very strong flow to scenes, with none lingering too long or feeling too abrupt. The condensed time period helps to increase the tension levels and the moments that keep us in Rascal's headspace are some of the strongest in the script. The opportunity for future revisions probably lies in the script's second act. Once Rascal is returned to the ranch, she becomes somewhat static due to being literally confined. This limits the feeling of forward progression and this is amplified by the lack of a clear goal for her. If her desire in this moment is simply to escape, then this is easily investable for an audience and we will want her to find a way out. But in the current draft it's not clear if she's entirely focussed on leaving or on getting revenge for her friend. So clarifying her intentions will assist in this aspect.

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## DIALOGUE

This is a clear area where the script excels. The dialogue is true to character voice, has a good level of concision about it, and is frequently witty and humorous. The likes of Roger really comes alive through his evocative words. He's grotesque, but feels authentic to someone who has been raised into the pimp lifestyle. For example, his comment that "Girls like Rascal, man, they'll turn your brown eyes blue in the brothel but take 'em home? Man, bitches like that just ain't suitable for long term growth" reveals a man who considers himself above both the whores and the johns. So here the dialogue really does a lot of the heavy-lifting in terms of conveying character.

The one aspect that could be tweaked when making revisions is some of the interplay between Rascal and Danny. The scene in his truck has some slightly clunky exposition and backstory in it that, as referenced, lacks some definitive intention. Ideally this scene would be more of a playful exchange

between the pair that reveals what each sees in the other and buries some of the exposition a little more subtly. For example, there could be the potential to imbue some subtext in Danny's penchant for Lego. So rather than think it's weird, might Rascal actually see some link to her own life; she too has been trying to build something, but life keeps breaking her back down to just one block. And might she even take one of his blocks as a reminder to keeping building? Again, this is just a quick example, but it could be impactful to use a detail like the Lego to reveal some additional character.

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## CONCEPT

The script has a unique location and a strong, original character at its centre. However, the script doesn't yet clearly seem focussed on whether this is a revenge story or an escape story. Rascal can have both goals in mind to a degree, but the key is aligning the audience clearly with where her focus is at any one time.

In terms of commercial appeal that script would translate into a R-rated movie and this naturally limits the scale of the audience. Furthermore, this is more of a character-based thriller than one with an easily marketable concept. However, it does have the potential to be shot for a micro-to-low budget, and the strength of the characters and dialogue suggest a talented director could create a really impactful film from these pages that could well find a cult audience. Indeed, it is not hard to foresee collaborators showing interest in the project, once a little further developed.

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

Rascal is an enjoyable read and the potential of the project is clear. The titular character is unique and memorable and the dialogue is snappy and evocative. However, Rascal isn't yet as resonant a protagonist as she could be due to her slightly vague motivation and goals. Addressing the areas of potential improvement mentioned should help to elevate subsequent drafts to the next level and hopefully give Rascal its best chance of attracting further interest.

# RASCAL

**VIRTUALLY PERFECT**  
98th - 100th Percentile

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**EXCELLENT**  
85th - 97th Percentile

Dialogue  
95th Percentile

**GOOD**  
50th - 84th Percentile

Overall  
Impression  
76th Percentile

Concept  
51st Percentile

Structure  
74th Percentile

Characters  
68th Percentile

**IMPROVE**  
0th - 49th Percentile

Plot  
40th Percentile

## RATING

**PASS**

PLACED IN THE TOP 32%

### ABOUT STORY ANALYST JMLTW

Script analyst with multiple development roles at leading production companies, funding organizations and broadcasters, including the BBC. Experienced in the development of both live action and animated content.

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