



Test Sample

The Final Draft (Televison)

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Page Count: 1

Genre: Drama

Analyst: 47376

Rating: Consider

COMMENTS :

Overall this pilot is a strong writing sample in the crime-drama space. The writer provides just enough uniqueness and originality while staying true to the genre tropes. The pilot's success lies heavily on all the unexpected twists, but these also cause some minor structural problems that should be addressed per the suggestions below.

While the salability of this project may be tough (addressed below) the voice of this writer shines on the page. As such, this is an excellent writing sample and can definitely turn heads. The writer's sparse action lines and twisted plot are definitely enviable qualities in story telling. This may be the project that helps the writer get excellent representation even if it doesn't lead directly to a sale.

CHARACTER:

The writer does an excellent job creating complex, honest characters in this story. While occasionally their relationships don't feel as authentic as they could, individually the characters work really well.

DANIEL - The lead of the story is clearly a tormented man - he's been dragged into this life of crime by his father and has hated himself for it. While this isn't particularly unique, what works really well is Daniel's manic energy. This is a refreshing character trait in a genre known for brooding leads. It is also worth noting that the lead always remains likable despite his massive mistakes - including murder - because his decisions are always so impossible. We can almost see ourselves making the choices he makes. It will be very interesting to see how this character maintains his morality as the episodes continue.

While Daniel is extremely complex, what hurts this character is his connection to Maria. While we know he is obsessed with 'winning her back' we don't really get enough of their back-story to ever know why the two were together to begin with. What is it they saw in each other? As the story plays out in its current form, Daniel seems more just like an obsessed stalker than an ex-husband. While a level

of that is clearly intentional, more of their relationship would make the driving force on this character shine.

MARIA - Maria is a very likable character and we fear for her safety. This makes it that much more painful and shocking that she's brutally executed at the close of the pilot! This is just the right hook that keeps audiences watching after the pilot.

This character's biggest problem is tied closely into Daniel's - we don't follow that relationship. This is especially true from Maria's end: why did she ever love Daniel? Without exploring this, the one strong female character ends up feeling flat and only a tool for the plot to hang on.

LEN - The fact that the villain is the adopted brother of the lead is interesting, but doesn't play out to the level it could. How does this close relationship impact their choices? In this current draft, it doesn't really feel like it does. The brothers battle each other without hesitation. If they grew up as best friends we need to see that conflict now that they're enemies - even from Len. By giving Len reservations it provides a lot of humanity to an otherwise straightforward villain. With that said, Len is a truly terrifying villain. While not purely unique and a touch one-dimensional, he will still definitely be a presence through the series and it will be interesting to see how he continues to up the stakes.

JACK - Daniel's father works really well as a criminal who serves as Daniel's role model - for both what Daniel wants to be and for what he doesn't want to be. Jack also provides nice notes of comedic relief in an otherwise very bleak story.

This character could be enhanced by giving the audience a little more insight into how he feels about Daniel. It is very clear how Daniel feels about his father, but we don't get the reverse of that. The same is true for his adopted son and villain, Len. We know Len views Jack as weak, but how does Jack view Len? By giving us insight into how this character feels about his sons, not only will this character grow much more complex, but the main protag and

antag will be perceived in a whole new light that could really illuminate a lot.

HUGHES - The cop character is really interesting and quite flawed himself. His relationship with his new partner is a bit of a cliché, the guarded mentor, but it works for what ultimately unfolds. What is a little unbelievable is his ability to hide his alcoholism while on the force and his approval to be in active duty while clearly struggling with some deep emotional issues. Not only does this feel unrealistic at the start, but it manifests itself in the worse ways, which gives us a little bit of an "of course" feeling toward his involvement. While it's important to have flawed characters, their flaws need to be realistic within the context of the story. We shouldn't have a blind fighter pilot. It is suggested that Hughes struggles are toned down a little or made more internal so that we as the audience can believe that he could be serving as a police officer AND mentor in the first place.

MATTHEW - Characters who are children are really difficult to develop, but in this case, Matthew is really well done. He even has his own full arc as he comes to know his father better. There aren't really any changes necessary with this character.

While part of the appeal of this story is the small, condensed feel - characters are all related and from the same small town - there is also the sense that all the characters who are the focus tend to be uniform. It'd be nice to get more of the female perspective of the events (especially since moving forward Maria won't be involved) or to see this town through the angle of an outsider, or at least someone who considers themselves an outsider. This suggestion may mean just providing a bit of a different back story from someone like The Contract Killer or Hughes's partner. These smaller characters could really provide the unique perspective that feels like it may be missing from this story in the current draft.

PLOT:

What is really amazing about this plot is that it is always completely unpredictable. We never quite know where it will turn and yet (almost) every twist is always believable.

The biggest area that feels like it needs to be revisited is the cops' search for Daniel. The way Daniel escapes their grasp feels a bit stretched. It's interesting to see Daniel interacting directly with Hughes, but watching him convince Hughes of his innocence only hours after murdering his partner feels almost impossible. There needs to be a more setup build up for this payoff to work.

As can often be the case in these stories, the villain seems to have no fear of the police. Is this because he has bought them? If so, it may be worthy to touch on so that his unhindered reign of terror on everything he crosses feels a bit more realistic.

One smaller issue is the story acts as if Daniel has been bothering Maria for years maybe. And yet, their interactions early on are as if this is new. Maria doesn't feel like she's had enough and Daniel is still explaining things to her. The result is an unrealistic feeling for the plot that is pretty transparently trying to deliver exposition early on in the pilot.

However, save for the few issues mentioned, this plot is really solid.

STRUCTURE:

The pilot throws a lot of obstacles at our heroes, but almost so many that we find ourselves wondering if the story will be able to maintain the pace for even one whole season, let alone 5,6,7 seasons.

The pilot has a feel of a mini-series like FARGO. The scope is small enough that we suspect by the end of one series the plot lines will all be tied up. Any producers you're pitching to will have the privilege of knowing if that's the case and with the growing market for that kind of material, this script could be right at home somewhere.

There are some problems with the pilot at times feeling like a crime drama and then occasionally slipping into action territory. While TV is certainly expanding in scope, for the long run generally dramas are going to be more effective and efficient than action stories. As such, it is recommended that the author keep the story grounded as a drama. This will serve to both keep the tone and expectations consistent AND it will keep the budget TV reasonable.

The pacing is strong and the story starts quickly. There are hooks before act breaks and a big hook at the pilot's finale so this pilot is certainly a page turner.

DIALOGUE:

When you have a bunch of low-life criminals interacting in a small, specific part of town you inevitably end up with a lot of characters sounding similar. The best thing the author did to prevent this from being too problematic is focus heavily on giving Daniel a unique voice. However, after the lead, everyone else sounds effectively the same. Some have some quirks, but they aren't truly defined as unique individuals through their voice.

The first thing to address some of the overlapping dialogue is to find what drives Maria. Her basic drive is from her son, but there has to be more complexity than that. You've created pretty dynamic male characters and so you must not forget to fully develop the female lead. She is in a very fragile situation and determining exactly how she envisions escaping will define her voice in a big way. Her current, wait and see what happens outlook, doesn't feel realistic and makes her voice feel bland.

Matthew also suffers from speaking a bit younger than he actually is. This is a common problem with child characters in scripts. While his actions feel age appropriate, his language feels a bit immature - especially for someone who has been exposed to so many adult situations. Just touching up his dialogue to make him a bit older will help.

Finally, Daniel's speeches early on (especially with him on Maria's porch) carry a lot of exposition. Much of this is

necessary, but often it feels very on the nose. It is suggested that the scene on page 3-7 be reworked to give the audience a sense of what is going on without directly stating "I want to see my son" "You can't". Those obvious back and forths lead to a bit of a boring start to an otherwise riveting pilot.

CONCEPT

The crime-drama arena is crowded, but the nice infusion of higher paced action and a manic lead into a noir style story really works to set this script and concept apart. While this isn't something I would call "high-concept", it is certainly a very realistic platform for a fantastic pilot script.

Because the twists shift the story so much, it is hard to envision exactly how this pitch would play out and at times hard to see exactly where this story will go. While that will be included in the pitch material, you need to remember that the audience won't have the benefit of a series bible when they're watching your pilot, so you need to make sure to give us enough hints in the script of the overall concept of the show. The pilot starts out seemingly like a general crime story, but by the end it feels like it has developed into a tale of revenge. Certainly, those changes are intriguing, but keep us on one path if at all possible. It seems that eliminating some of the action sequences will help keep this feeling more consistent and may give the reader/audience a better sense of what to expect moving forward.

SALABILITY: LOW / MEDIUM / HIGH

While the pilot's execution is very solid, for a crime drama to really succeed the execution needs to be nearly flawless. Anytime a project is execution dependent, it always makes it a little bit of a tougher sell. The pitch may grab the producers, but for this to get ordered to pilot you're going to need to perfect this execution because it's a risky space.

The mature content is expected in this genre and changing that would likely only hurt the appeal of the show by turning off fans of the genre and not capturing a younger

audience anyway. The content right now reserves this story only for Premium Cable, but if shows like SONS OF ANARCHY can play on FX, this can be trimmed up just a touch without losing any of the core story and play on a cable channel.

The budget for this project is likely higher than the average crime-drama pilot because of some of the more effects driven action sequences in the second half of the script. As such, you're fighting a bit of an uphill battle. With that said, shows like Game of Thrones and House of Cards have set the new standard for TV budgets.

One of the biggest strengths for this script is Daniel. He's the kind of character that attracts A-list actors looking for a project. Not only is he on almost every page, but he's unpredictable, severely flawed, and yet lovable. As such, attaching a piece of valuable talent to this project may be a bit easier which greatly increases the chance of a project like this selling.

The best this for a project like this is to get the execution as high as possible and see if it can do well in some high profile contests. It's an excellent sample, but it needs to be read because it is a hard pitch.

OVERALL: PASS / **CONSIDER** / RECOMMEND

The pilot's unique characters and twisted plot set this crime-drama apart from the pack. The writer is clearly talented in this area and infuses just enough of their own voice into the genre for this to be a project that should get them some attention.

Make sure to inject the story with broad range of characters that have different backgrounds. Also, make sure that believability is never sacrificed for yet another plot twist. However, the writer has a very solid foundation and only minor revisions need to be made from this current draft.

Excellent work and I look forward to seeing your writing on the TV one day soon.

tslnotes

Scores

plot: 8.0

character: 7.0

concept: 7.0

format: 9.0

voice: 7.0

structure: 6.0

dialogue: 6.0