



Short Film Script Writers Room Analysis

Analyst: R. Lynch

Screenplay Writer: [REDACTED]

Genre: Thriller

Category: Short script

The following scores and comments are objectively presented and intended to be illustrative, instructive, and helpful in guiding the writer along a professional path. Scores and comments are in accordance with current professional film and television industry standards.

Scores/Comments:

Concept/Originality: 3

[REDACTED] has little the movie-going public hasn't seen many times before in the longer screen formats of feature films and television. Someone digs into dirty deeds that the doers of those deeds don't want dug into and gets offed because of it; a lover/ally of theirs is complicit in the deal and gets whacked themselves; and a mysterious shadow group is behind it all. In this case, the killer turns out to be a bit of fresh air, as he works both on contract and for his own personal reasons and cares a great deal about making sure he isn't pinned for a murder he didn't commit, but he would benefit from a fresher story staging. That can be hard to do in such a short script, but it can be done.

Structure: 7

There is a distinct three-part structure to this story, a considerable feat for its short length. First is Leila with Lowell as she unwinds in her apartment alone. Then things get jacked higher when Reese takes her hostage and reveals his storyline. Things get even crazier when Lowell returns and we find out that he isn't there to rescue her but to make sure Reese kills her. There is even a denouement with the TV newscast.

Plot/Story: 4

As stated earlier, the plot is a common one. When Lowell gets there, it's quickly clear he's not there to help Leila. He shows complete resistance to her charm, so while her death is gruesome it's not really unexpected. And Lowell's death is seen a mile away. The TV newscast, while it does sum up the story, is the standard ending of the powerful literally getting away with murder.

The general setup could work, especially given the ambience/atmosphere the writer painstakingly establishes with the upscale apartment and the DA shrine, but a whole new unexpected direction is needed, or at least an unseen twist or two.

What if it turns out that Lowell is the Estes killer? Reese highlights the differences between his MO and Lisa's death, revealing things that maybe the audience sees earlier in the story being discussed between Lowell and Leila. This gives the audience the opportunity to piece together that Lowell is the Estes killer. Then Leila can appeal to Reese to kill Lowell and that she'll drop the cases if Reese will let her go. It doesn't matter who dies in the end as long as the route that gets there is unexpected.

Give people what they've never seen before and don't see coming.

Pacing: 5

The action that occurs is unspooled at a decent pace. The atmosphere is well-established. The description does get little overly detailed at times, more so with numerous camera angles and scene transitions. Maybe dial back the description a little.

Characters: 4

Leila is a stock character. She's ambitious, but that's not enough to portray someone realistically. If she's as manipulating as the two men in the story claim she is, who is the audience supposed to root for? Certainly not the vapid Lowell. Reese has an interesting duality or two. He's a killer with a conscience. He kills for pleasure but also for hire. It would be nice to see more of him going back and forth as to which mode or context his killing of Leila is to be, and she can play off this with some nice banter that shows her manipulation instead of just telling it. Make us hate her and side with Reese that she should get what's coming to her. Instead of shock at a gorgeous woman getting killed, have us relish the thought.

Dialogue: 4

The dialogue here tells everything and shows little. Granted, with a one-location short film it's a challenge to be visual, but dialogue can be just as revelatory as action and frequently is in contained stories. Having Reese and Leila debate different sides of issues would flesh both of them out. Reese's language is far cruder than his character demands; he is highly intelligent and principled, so have him sound smart. Also, especially in the first scene but also throughout the rest of the piece, exposition is pretty blatant. If information isn't needed, get rid of it. If it is, find a subtler way of getting it across.

There is also awkward wording throughout. A recommendation is for the writer to go through and speak the lines as the various characters as though the writer is the audience

and doesn't know what's going to come out of their mouths. Much should be seen/heard that is missed (like the word *nightcap* being used four times in the first scene).

Tone: 8

No problems with the tone. The setting is one of classic upscale elegance and for the most part the description reflects this.

Conflict: 6

Conflict abounds in [REDACTED]. The only major issue is that we've seen much of it before. More of a cat-and-mouse game would provide layers and emotional interactions that keep things interesting and unexpected. Have us wonder not only who *will* die but also have shifting opinions as to who *should* die. Imagine if the conflict in the story leads to a conflict in readers' minds, as well. That's real impact.

Emotional Response/Investment: 4

The fact that the material is familiar and that two of the three characters are not well-defined (with the third given contradicting aspects) makes it hard to get into the story. There is no one to root for and no clear side to pick.

Marketplace Potential: 6

Short films can be a hard sell, especially for those seeking investors to get them made. Much of the profitability of shorts comes from the fact that they herald the talents of the writer, director, and others who make them.

This short is roughly the length of a half-hour television episode, so could this serve as a series pilot? Maybe Leila and Reese partner up to fight crime on both sides of the law (once Lowell is killed, of course).

Strengths:

- An atmospheric setting
- A layered killer
- Distinct acts

Weaknesses:

- Familiar plot
- Flat characters
- Expected outcome

Final Comments:

This story could really be something if original aspects are found. The setup has potential but it needs fresher execution. Flesh out the characters; make them real and make us feel who they are. Figure out who we're supposed to root for and why, but make us see all sides of the issues. Give the sides new spins so we see something old in new ways.