



SCREENPLAY READERS

SCRIPT NOTES * SCRIPT COVERAGE * CONSULTATION

XXXXXXXXXXXXX

A. WRITER

87 pages

Drama/Period Piece (Civil War)

Analyst: RI

5/30/20XX

LOGLINE:

A rebellious young man runs away from home to join the Union army and in order to become the leader he feels destined to be, he must learn to let go of his troubled past or be destroyed by his inner demons.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS:

Ever since JOST O'HARE was a child he's had a rebellious, independent spirit. We first meet Jost as a three-year-old wandering through town on his own, ending up at a country store where he's given candy by adoring adults.

Jost's father JOE O'HARE shows up to fetch Jost, and after dragging him home, beats him with the flat side of a butcher's knife.

This physical abuse continues into Jost's teenage years. Jost's mother MICHELLE O'HARE stands by idly, doing nothing to stop it from happening, which confuses and disturbs young Jost. In fact, it seems sometimes as if Michelle encourages Joe to beat their son so Joe won't take his anger out on her instead.

Jost's literal call to action comes when the Civil War breaks out. Jost sees the war as an opportunity to get away from his family for good. Though he's only

sixteen, his cousin TEDDY MCDAVIS convinces him by telling him to lie about his age.

Before leaving for war, Joe O'Hare teaches Jost one and only one lesson: if somebody tries to bully you, grab a club and bash in his shins.

Jost's regiment, lead by COLONEL GLEASON and SERGEANT FORD, is a rag-tag group of men ages sixteen to forty who seem to enjoy drinking and telling stories more than obeying orders and training for the battles ahead.

A BULLY attempts to intimidate Jost one day on the camp grounds, but Jost takes his father's advice and whacks the bully in the shin with a piece of firewood, establishing himself as a loose cannon not to be messed with.

The company march into a town, lead by German-accented LIEUTENANT BOEHLE, and Jost accidentally defecates in his own pants after being startled by a cannon. Boehle takes pity on young Jost and tells him it can happen to anyone.

As Jost learns the ropes and mingles with his fellow soldiers, he is constantly plagued by daydreams and nightmares about his mother and father's bad parenting.

After taking charge and demonstrating great leadership in a battle against the Confederate army, Jost is commended by Boehle and is promoted to corporal. But Jost refuses the promotion and ends up leaving the army altogether.

After a brief interlude working as a carpenter at a general store with MARKO, a former slave, and flirting with PHYLLIS, a local girl he has a crush on, Jost still finds himself unsatisfied with his circumstances. He has vivid daydreams where he strangles his parents, and he hates himself for having those thoughts.

Jost leaves his abruptly to re-enlist in the Union army, where he is greeted with open arms by his old friend Lt. Boehle but not so warmly by the new LIEUTENANT TURNER, who seems to have it out for Jost from the start.

Jost acquaints himself with his new tent mates, REGGIE, FRANK, TOM, and JIM who all love to sit around the campfire and share stories, both from the Bible and from their own pasts. Jost holds his cards close to his chest and doesn't reveal too much about his home life prior to the war. He hears everyone's stories of

their wonderful and loving mothers and fathers and feels ashamed of his own parents.

Jost is beaten up by some fellow soldiers and learns that he's become a pawn in a petty feud between Lieutenants Boehle and Turner. Now, as the war continues, Jost's dreams also include graphic scenes of brutalizing Lt. Turner. Jost tells himself he's got to stop having such bad thoughts.

Jost is given the perfect opportunity to get back at Turner when the lieutenant is injured and alone after his horse is shot in battle. But Jost's conscience gets the better of him and he sends for help.

Jost's hatred of Turner is transferred to the abusive GENERAL GLEESON, as characterized by Jost's new daydreams of murdering the general. But O'Hare knows that his real hatred is for his father, who beat him senseless and didn't prepare him for the real world. Jost takes his anger out on a tree in the woods one night, chopping it down in a burst of rage that turns out to a therapeutic act.

Some bad decisions by General Gleeson put the troop in a bind and the only way out of the onslaught of Confederate soldiers in Chickamauga is to retreat to Chattanooga. To make matters worse, the Union soldiers give up their position atop Lookout Mountain, much to the dismay of Jost Ford, and Boehle.

Jost's troop essentially destroys Chattanooga in order to set up a mile-long protective barrier wall around the perimeter of the city. They're trapped with nowhere to turn and end up nearly starving to death after they run out of food. Reggie is convinced that "the man upstairs is calling him home," but Jost and the guys tell him to hang on just a little longer.

Jost follows orders and ends up shooting a CONFEDERATE MAJOR to protect his men when a secret deal goes sour, learning Boehle's rule number one of war: act on what you know the enemy can do, not on what you think he might do.

At the campsite, the starving men come clean about their home lives, confessing that they weren't all that great after all. This comes as a relief to Jost, who finally unloads about his own hatred of his parents.

General Grant takes control of their troop and orders them to help build a bridge and re-open the supply line. The mission is a success and the men finally get to

eat again. But they're still trapped. So Jost gets the idea to lead his troop to safety by climbing up and over Missionary Ridge.

Jost is finally able to get rid of his violent daydreams when he suddenly learns that his childhood obsessions with violence—instilled in him by his abusive father—are not doing him any good. So he lets them go and finds the strength to push on.

Invigorated by his newfound inner peace, Jost convinces his squadron to go against orders and he leads them in a series of attacks during the bloody battle that end up winning the Union control of Missionary Ridge. Unfortunately, there are many casualties, including Reggie and Boehle.

After Boehle's heartfelt death scene, Jost has one final flashback of his parents. But Jost openly forgives them, freeing himself from his hatred of them. They won the battle, and though the war isn't over, Jost feels he's done all he can, so he quits the army once and for all, a changed man ready to start his life.

WHAT WORKS / WHAT DOESN'T / SUGGESTIONS

XXXXXXXXXX is an action-packed coming-of-age drama set against the backdrop of the American Civil War in which we're told a very straightforward story of a young man on the verge of adulthood as he struggles with a serious case of PTSD thanks to his abusive parents. The usual difficulties of war seem to be no problem for our protagonist, Jost, as he's been hardened by a lifetime of beatings by the very man who should've been protecting him and preparing him for life's troubles.

Perhaps this script's greatest strength is in its depiction of a loner and an outcast who has the ambition to be a real leader of men. His personality is clear from the beginning and we immediately understand how he became the way he is.

Jost's inner struggle is clearly laid out and depicted in a clever way. The hyper-realistic daydreams that reveal Jost's psyche are woven quite well throughout the more traditional scenes. This isn't a device commonly seen put to work in a war drama, but it accomplished a lot by visually realizing what was going on in the character's brain; a tough thing to do in a film where the central conflict is inside the protagonist's own head.

The action description was efficient, visual, and easy to follow, making for a pleasantly straightforward read. This was refreshing for a genre full of scripts usually bogged down with blocks of text.

The story had a nice rhythm of “two steps forward, one step back” that made for a decent amount of drama moment-to-moment while we watch Jost progress through the plot of the film.

For all its strengths, this script still needs quite a bit of work before it can reach its full potential. First and foremost, the script lacks the structure it needs to feel like a satisfying narrative. This script is begging for a classic three-act structure, but instead feels too loose and episodic with stakes that are on a plateau until the final battle sequence.

Jost’s call to action feels right, especially after setting up his troublesome home life--his “ordinary world,” so to speak. But it feels too easy for Jost to leave home. He has no second thoughts about running away and joining the Union army.

The film would be more compelling if he had to leave something behind that he truly loved. Maybe this is a good friend or a love interest, maybe it’s a grandparent or a teacher he’s fond of. But whatever it is, it should give Jost pause before embarking on his journey. Something of this sort should also do well to deepen the complexity of his character, which at times can feel rather one-note.

Second acts are notoriously difficult to nail down and this is a classic example of that difficulty. Jost and his troop reach their lowest point when they’re hopelessly trapped in Chattanooga with no food, but that beat appears far too early in the script, making the third act nearly half the length of the script.

These all might be symptomatic of a script that is too short for the ground it’s attempting to cover. Generally, war dramas read very long, but this is actually shorter than most studio comedies. There’s plenty of room to beef up this story, largely in the first two acts.

Too much happens too fast for us to digest it. We meet new characters such as Marko and Phyllis and before we even get to appreciate how they’re functioning in the story, they’re gone forever.

Perhaps the most troublesome issue here is the lack of an overarching conflict. Jost's inner struggle is very vivid, but that points to his *need* as a character, something that should be far more subtle and secondary to what he *wants*.

Once Jost's external desire—what he wants, what he's trying to accomplish—is nailed down, the script will likely start to take shape.

The second act should be driven by a single question: is Jost going to get what he wants? That question needs to be answered by the end of the second act, changing the stakes and propelling him into the final battle sequence. Once we know the stakes for Jost, every scene in the entire film is going to become more compelling and interesting to watch.

An example of a successful sequence is when the soldiers secretly ride their pontoon boats down the river and past the enemy camps in order to restore the cracker line. We know what they're trying to accomplish, the obstacle is clear, and because of this clarity of conflict, we're biting our nails as we watch the Union troops sneak past the Confederates. When Jost coughs, there's a great moment when we think the jig is up. War films lend themselves to that kind of high-stakes drama and it would be great to see more of that in this script.

There are plenty of forces pushing back against Jost in the form of ill-meaning generals, fellow soldiers, etc., but it's never clear what Jost actually wants.

That said, the villains could do with some nuancing. For example, we meet Turner and are told immediately to hate him, without much reason, making it feel very arch.

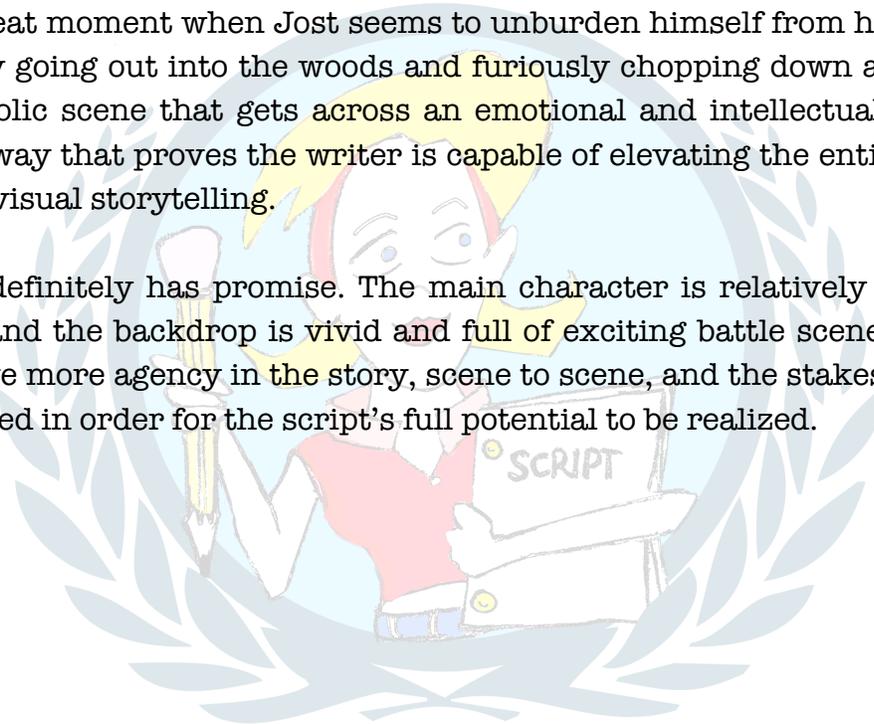
Also, the writer could take more advantage of plants and payoffs. The bit of advice from Jost's father to hit a bully in the shins has a nice, satisfying payoff that is both appropriate and complicated. This script could use a few more of those moments.

This script could do with a pass just looking at formatting and grammar. For example, some of the battle scenes are not written in real-time, they seem to be mostly montage, which is fine as long as it's written correctly as such. There are also instances in which bits of action description have literally been copied and pasted several times. Perhaps this was done in error and isn't intended to be in the script.

Lastly, the dialogue needs some attention. It can be rather on-the-nose. There are too many instances when characters openly speak their minds and tell us exactly what they feel. The worst offense, though, comes in the form of Jost occasionally talking to himself and telling us, the audience, how he feels. That's unnecessary and the script doesn't need it. His character and inner conflict is written well enough to stand on its own two feet without any instances of our hero talking to himself; it just doesn't feel natural. Show us don't tell us.

There's a great moment when Jost seems to unburden himself from his hatred of his father by going out into the woods and furiously chopping down a tree. It's a nicely symbolic scene that gets across an emotional and intellectual point in a very visual way that proves the writer is capable of elevating the entire script to this level of visual storytelling.

This script definitely has promise. The main character is relatively strong and compelling and the backdrop is vivid and full of exciting battle scenes. But Jost needs to have more agency in the story, scene to scene, and the stakes need to be clearly defined in order for the script's full potential to be realized.



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SCREENPLAY READERS SCRIPT ANALYSIS GRID

STORY	SCORE
Concept is fresh and/or original	72
Concept is/contains a strong and/or buzzworthy hook	58
Theme is well executed/interweaved well	80
First 10 pages set up the story well	75
First 10 pages are compelling	70
Script is well structured	50
Every scene in the script feels essential	55
Scenes are the appropriate length	70
Stakes are clear/conflict is strong and/or compelling	50
Characters' choices drive the story forward	55
Pacing is strong and the story keeps moving	65
Story is not overly complicated or hard to follow	67
Story is not bogged down by exposition	75
Tension builds/escalates throughout	67
The climax/resolution is satisfying	67
CHARACTER / DIALOGUE	
Protagonist(s) is (are) likable and/or compelling	65
Supporting characters are likable and/or compelling	60
No characters were extraneous	65
Dialogue reads naturally/believable within this story	70
Dialogue reveals character	70
READABILITY	
Format and presentation adheres to industry standards	80
Spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage	75
Action text is concise, not overly descriptive/prose	70
Action text "shows" instead of "tells"	70
Overall readability	75
AVERAGE SCORE	67.04
RECOMMENDATION	Consider with Revisions

GLOSSARY OF ANALYSIS GRID TERMS

Concept is fresh or original

How original, fresh, or unique our analyst found your script's concept to be. A low score in this category isn't always bad, as many script buyers prefer tried and true concepts.

Concept is/contains a strong and/or "buzzworthy" hook

Does your concept have a strong hook? In short, this is a measure of how much our analyst estimates it would cause people who hear it say "I wish I'd thought of that."

Theme is well executed/interweaved well

Does your story have a strong theme or motif? Is it worked into your story well?

First 10 pages set up the story well

How our analyst feels your first 10 pages help get things in motion.

First 10 pages are compelling

Do your first 10 pages draw the reader and the audience into your story and engage them?

Script is well structured

Does your script have a structure, whether it's 3-act, 8-act or something completely different? If it sets up a new structural convention, does it serve the story well?

Every scene in the script feels essential

Does each and every scene serve a purpose in propelling the plot, or revealing character, or setting a tone, or engaging the reader?

Scenes are the appropriate length

Are your scenes too long, or too short, for what they're presenting?

Stakes are clear/conflict is strong and/or compelling

Are the stakes high enough? Is it clear what they are? Does your story have conflict?

Characters' choices drive the story forward

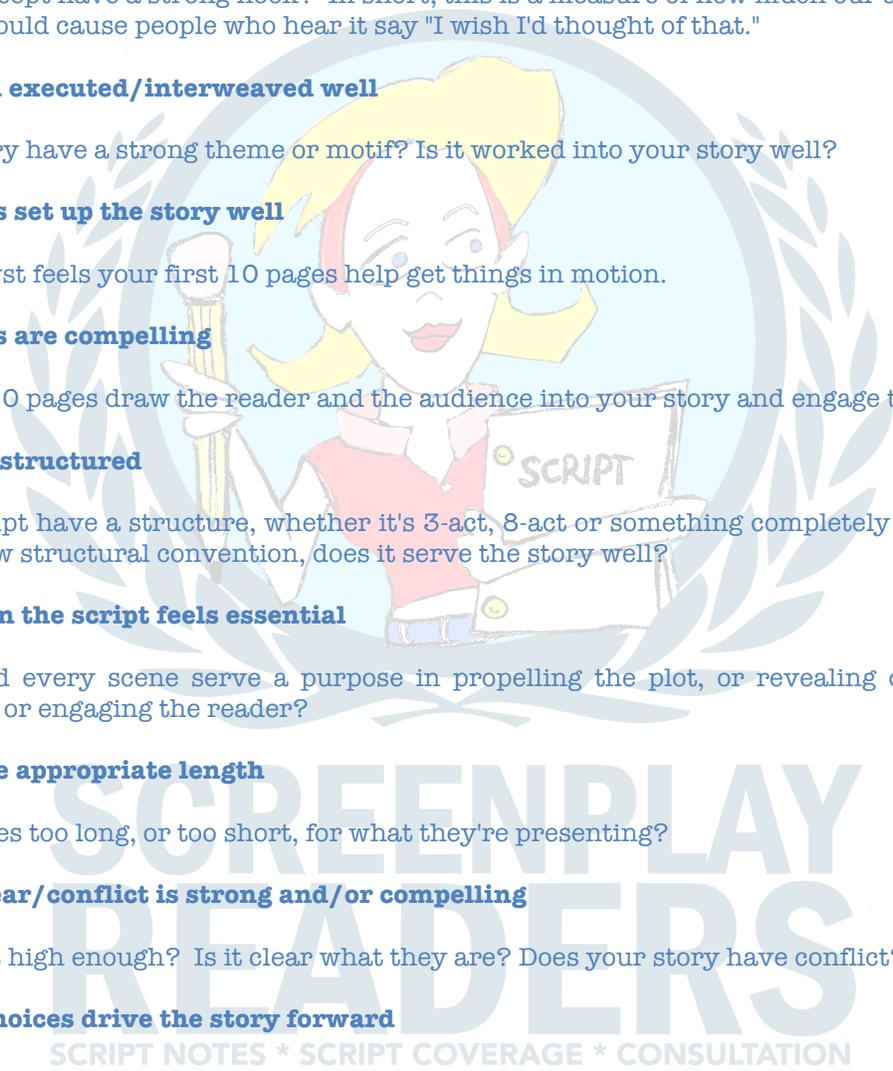
Do your characters' actions, choices, and reactions drive the story? Does causality drive your plot, or do your scenes unfold too arbitrarily, or too episodically?

Pacing is strong and the story keeps moving

Whether your story is intended to be fast-paced or a slow burn, does the pacing feel right?

Story is not overly complicated or hard to follow

Do you have too many scenes, characters, plot threads, reveals, or any other elements that are making things too hard for a reader or audience to follow?



Story is not bogged down by exposition

Is your story explaining things a bit too much? For example, over-explaining via too much backstory, too many flashbacks, too much voiceover, etc.?

Tension builds/escalates throughout

Does your story build tension? Does it do it well?

The climax/resolution is satisfying

Did everything in your story come to a resolution in a way that makes sense, and will be entertaining to an audience?

Protagonist(s) is (are) likable and/or compelling

The protagonist doesn't necessarily have to be likable, but they should at least be fun to watch.

Supporting characters are likable and/or compelling

Are your supporting characters interesting to watch?

No characters were extraneous

Does every character in your script serve a purpose? Or do we spend time with characters that don't do much for the story?

Dialogue reads as natural and/or believable within this story

Does your dialogue sound authentic within the parameters you've set up for your story? If it's a modern, gritty cop movie, do the cops sound real? If it's an alien space adventure, do the alien overlords speak in way that lets us suspend our disbelief?

Dialogue reveals character

When your characters talk, does what they say or how they say it tell us more about them as characters?

Format and presentation adheres to industry standards

Does your script look and feel like what the film industry at large would consider to be a pro screenplay?

Spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage

How well did you manually spellcheck? Did you use "their" when you meant "there?"

Action text is concise, not overly descriptive/prose

Are your action lines crisp, brief, and easy to visualize quickly? Or do they have a lot of extraneous description?



Action text "shows" instead of "tells"

Does your script's action text and description tell us how a character is feeling? Or, preferably, does it show us by having that character do something?

Overall readability

How easy to read our analyst feels your script would be for an agent, agent's assistant, contest reader, producer, or other film industry reader.

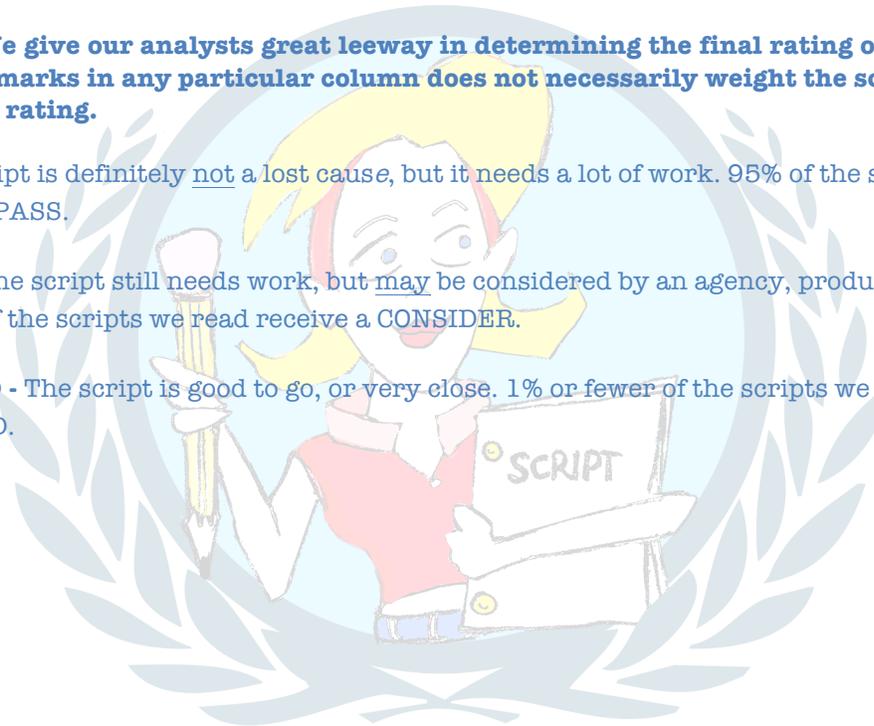
Overall Rating

Please note: We give our analysts great leeway in determining the final rating of your script. The total of X marks in any particular column does not necessarily weight the script towards any particular rating.

PASS - The script is definitely not a lost cause, but it needs a lot of work. 95% of the scripts we read receive a PASS.

CONSIDER - The script still needs work, but may be considered by an agency, producer, contest, et cetera. 4% of the scripts we read receive a CONSIDER.

RECOMMEND - The script is good to go, or very close. 1% or fewer of the scripts we read receive a RECOMMEND.



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