



SCREENPLAY READERS

SCRIPT NOTES * SCRIPT COVERAGE * CONSULTATION

PACO AND JAMES

J. TAYLOR

107 page

Comedy / Triller

Analyst: RT2

LOGLINE

It's a dream come true when Mexican thug Paco takes an interest in producing James' screenplay, but the method of production soon turns deadly.

SYNOPSIS

JAMES, a gay screenwriter, and JOHN, an award-winning actor, flee for their lives in the Mexican desert, chased by Mexican thug PACO and his armed men. Flashback to the beginning: we learn that down-on-his-luck screenwriter James has messed up his big chance, and he feels so low he tries to kill himself.

Friend AL turns up at the opportune moment to announce that he's found someone who wants to make James' movie. After reminding James that he wants to succeed at all costs, James reluctantly gets in the vehicle with the Mexicans.

At Paco's luxurious home, James crosses paths with the beautiful BELLA. His bliss soon turns to horror when he discovers Paco is a psychopath who is going to kidnap his leading roles.

Terrified actors arrive, but John ends up enjoying the experience after falling in love with James' script. The filming begins, and the actors all do as they're told, especially after witnessing Paco ruthlessly killing five men.

James is torn between his love for the filmmaking process and Bella, and the voice of reason, which ends up coming from a terrified Al. Desperate to leave, Al makes an attempt at escape only to be killed.

James only really realizes just how trapped he is after Bella makes him aware. The filming ends, and all that is left is the wrap party, after which Paco will have no need for any of them.

John comes up with a plan to run away disguised as women, and they succeed after having managed to fool the fat and stupid guard GORDO. They run and hide in the desert.

Paco soon realizes what's happened and after killing the remaining actors goes after James and John. James hides in a hole he has dug but John is caught and tortured.

Bella searches for James, and is relieved to find John dead and not him. Brother Paco is furious with her for loving James and this makes him more determined to go into the mountains after him.

In the mountains, James goes under a transformation, becoming one with the land and attracting the support of wolves. He concocts some explosives from materials he finds.

It's one on one as James and Paco battle. Bella arrives and keeps Paco from dealing a fatal blow to James. Then the wolves descend on Paco to finish him off. Bella and James ride off.

At an awards ceremony, various cast members receive awards; the film, as well as the film within the film, was all just a film.

SCRIPT NOTES * SCRIPT COVERAGE * CONSULTATION

COMMENTS

With a concept revolving around a filmmaker's attempt to make a movie for a dangerous Mexican cartel leader, ARIZONA DREAMIN' promises to be a unique and entertaining story, quite different from other "behind-the-scene" movies. However, with a jumbled narrative and uneven tone, the script still needs a lot of work.

The plot, when boiled down to its basics, is quite promising: James, a struggling filmmaker in Hollywood, is given a chance to turn one of his scripts into a movie with the "help" of Mexican cartel boss Paco Blanco, but it soon turns into a hostage situation where James scrambles to finish the movie to save his life.

The main problem with the script is that, despite this fairly straightforward plot, the narrative isn't well-defined enough to move the story forward. The script has too many scenes with very little tension in them, or do not contribute to the overall conflict (all the scenes of John Conrad Nelson III performing Hamlet, for example), which slows down the entire script.

In a nutshell, the tone of the script keeps changing, the protagonist is unsympathetic, there are parts of the piece that are overdramatic, and the ending is unfulfilling.

But another reason the script reads as a bit all over the place is the fact that it never makes it explicit what Paco's threat toward James and the cast is (is he going to kill them? Keep them prisoners forever?) so the stakes aren't clear enough. This also means that James doesn't have a clear plan of action: how is he planning to escape? Does he want to escape at all? Is he trying to make the movie just to mollify Paco, or is he doing the best that he can for his art? This leads to a lack of direction in the plot development, making it rather clunky.

While there are comedic moments to this piece, Paco is too violent and dangerous. The kidnappings are harsh, but still darkly funny. Paco killing a bunch of his crew isn't humorous in any way. This takes away from the tone of the piece.

The sequence that follows, with Jonathan unable to act, could be amusing, if the massacre hadn't just happened. Paco killing the dog is way over the top. This gives the script a very ambiguous tone.

It's a bit coincidental that James finds all the ingredients he finds and that he knows how to put them together to make gun powder. This and his sudden transformation into a warrior who can make wolves walk away with their tails between their legs are extremely hard to buy. If they're intended to be over the top for the sake of humor, they don't come across that way.

The surprise ending that this was all a movie is a bit campy and predictable. It's not an original concept and it defeats the whole purpose of the story, since it was all just a movie anyway.

Also contributing to the script's muddled feel is that at times, it is not clear what genre it's meant to be. The opening scenes certainly have a comedic tone, but as the story progresses, it becomes more of a thriller, only to become slightly surreal toward the ending. It could certainly work as a comedy thriller or a spoof (especially with all the surrealist elements in the third act such as James' battle with the wolves), but both the humor and the suspense need to be amped up a lot more and be consistent throughout the script.

In terms of characterization, the script could use more focus as well. James is a sympathetic and identifiable protagonist, but as mentioned above, his character suffers from the script's lack of direction. He doesn't have a clear-cut, tangible goal, which may make it difficult for the audience to follow him on his journey. His character arc could also be clearer as well: does he start out as a man willing to sell his soul to the Devil just to get his movie made, and end up learning his lesson?

To wit, James seems intended to be the protagonist, but what he should be striving for: getting himself and his cast free from Paco, he doesn't have any interest in.

Instead, all he cares about is getting his film made. This makes his goal one that the audience isn't going to be able to get behind. What's at stake for him if he doesn't make his film is he won't have a career. Considering what else is happening in this story, that's extremely trivial.

While this should be a story about James trying to heroically free his friend and his kidnapped cast against extreme odds, that's not the story that's being told here.

This gives much of the script very little conflict, despite the extreme circumstances and violence. Until the end, James simply wants to make his movie and he's making his movie.

In the early parts of the script when he tries to kill himself, there's something marginally comical about this, but ultimately, it just makes James appear weak and selfish.

The dialogue is a bit flat and over the top, but it works for a zany comedy. However, since much of this script gets too serious to be a zany comedy, the dialogue sometimes feels out of place.

Paco's dialogue is especially unclear. At times he seems intended to be comical because he's so over the top, but at other times, he seems intended to be menacing.

For example, on p. 102, Paco says: "Who are you?! Fucking Geronimo!? You think I can't see the fucking tracks?! Huh?! Conjo! Move your fucking ass!" This could be intended to be humorous, but given what Paco has done and is doing, a comedic moment feels out of place.

The rest of the cast is serviceable to the plot, but they could be more well-rounded. Their relationships with each other and with James would go a long way in making the characters more memorable and believable, but right now it's either all on the surface (such as the relationships between James and John Conrad, or between James and Al, while a lot of interesting parallels and contrasts could be drawn from them) or nearly non-existent. Paco himself could also be more effective as an antagonist, as he comes off as a one-dimensional psychopath, without any depth to his character.

In conclusion, there is a good idea behind the concept this screenplay, but it currently suffers most from an unfocused execution. The script needs to decide if it wants to tell a dramatic story (think *Sunset Boulevard*) or a comedic one (think *Bowfinger*), in order to appeal to the audience.

SCREENPLAY READERS SCRIPT ANALYSIS GRID

STORY	SCORE
Concept is fresh and/or original	77
Concept is/contains a strong and/or buzzworthy hook	78
Theme is well executed/interweaved well	79
First 10 pages set up the story well	82
First 10 pages are compelling	80
Script is well structured	76
Every scene in the script feels essential	72
Scenes are the appropriate length	71
Stakes are clear/conflict is strong and/or compelling	75
Characters' choices drive the story forward	80
Pacing is strong and the story keeps moving	84
Story is not overly complicated or hard to follow	69
Story is not bogged down by exposition	71
Tension builds/escalates throughout	72
The climax/resolution is satisfying	75
CHARACTER / DIALOGUE	
Protagonist(s) is (are) likable and/or compelling	78
Supporting characters are likable and/or compelling	72
No characters were extraneous	78
Dialogue reads naturally/believable within this story	79
Dialogue reveals character	74
READABILITY	
Format/presentation adheres to industry standards	96
Spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage	80
Action text is concise, not overly descriptive/prose	77
Action text "shows" instead of "tells"	76
Overall readability	76
AVERAGE SCORE	77.08
RECOMMENDATION	PASS