



# SCREENPLAY READERS

SCRIPT NOTES \* SCRIPT COVERAGE \* CONSULTATION

## The Madcap Mob Diaries

Submitted Writer: J. Writerman

115 pages

Genre: Comedy | Circa: Modern

Script Reader: RI

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### LOGLINE

Two aging comedy writers try to revitalize their careers by writing a serious crime drama, forcing them to reunite with their old partner even as they are drawn into the underworld of crime.

### SYNOPSIS

In a Hollywood studio, the middle-aged writing team of Henry Jackson and Skip Mently watch the filming of an episode of their TV show, "The Babbette Bunsen Show". Though known for comedies - and for being quick with a quip - Henry confesses he wants to write something different. When he spies the director buying cocaine from Toby, a young "assistant", they decide to write a drama about the drug world. As research, they approach Toby, who eventually realizes what they're after and gives them each a sample packet of cocaine.

While Henry is a Hollywood playboy, Skip is happily married to Geri. The two have a college-age daughter, Anais, who hopes to take a year off college to pursue a career in film. At a fundraiser, Skip catches Geri kissing the pool boy and, in a fury, storms out. He finds Henry at a bar and his partner quickly agrees that Skip should stay with him. As Skip drives them home, they are pulled over by the cops after Skip is seen swerving in traffic. When the police discover the cocaine, the men are quickly arrested. Though they are bailed out, news of the arrest travels through Hollywood and they find themselves fired from "The Samantha Kennedy Show" and unable to find work.

As the men struggle to decide on their next step, they are visited by Toby who has heard of the incident and wants to express his gratitude because the men didn't turn him in. They tell him about their idea for a new movie and he agrees to be interviewed as part of their research. Skip returns home to pack his things where he has a fight with Geri over the state of their marriage. Geri has felt neglected for a long time but Skip can't forgive her for her betrayal.

Henry and Skip try to distract themselves with work and go to the Original Farmers' Market for inspiration. They meet Michelle, who years ago was their writing partner, and she tells them the truth about how the men got their first job: she was sexually assaulted by a producer who went on to hire Henry and Skip. Disgusted with Hollywood, Michelle left and has gone to become a successful author of teen fiction, which she writes under a pseudonym. The men are stunned by the revelation and suggest that Michelle help them with their film.

Knowing that Anais grew up reading Michelle's books, Skip invites her over. When Geri overhears the call, her reaction tells Anais that she wants to reconcile with Skip and Anais agrees to help. Meanwhile, Henry, Skip, and Michelle start writing their movie and there is a clear attraction between Henry and Michelle.

The next night, Skip goes to a restaurant to meet Anais and finds Geri waiting for him instead. After a rocky start, the two have a good time and agree to revitalize their romance. Henry and Michelle continue to grow closer. The writers go on to interview Toby who reveals himself to be a sensitive sort who is dealing drugs to pay for his education.

In the name of research, Michelle and Henry visit the warehouse where Toby told them his drug deals occur. While Skip and Geri have a successful date, Michelle and Henry stakeout the warehouse. They're discovered by Toby and his girlfriend Jenny. Toby reveals he set the writers up to see how committed they were to tell his story. The four of them go for drinks and Michelle and Henry continue to flirt. Later, Skip returns home to find that they have slept together.

The writers continue working on their film only to be interrupted by Toby, who is on the run. He reveals that Jenny is the daughter of a rival gang leader and that they are in danger now that the romance has been discovered. Toby asks the writers for help staging a murder-suicide so he and Jenny can start a new life. The writers concoct a complicated plan involving squibs and fake guns which they'll enact with the help of Scott Ryan, a stuntman friend of Michelle's.

A few nights later, the writers follow Toby and Jenny to their meeting with the gang leader Crisso and his henchmen. They are taken to an empty field where Toby is told to kill Jenny - but Crisso exchanges Toby's gun (which is a fake with blanks) with his own (which is real). Watching this from afar, the writers panic as they realize their ruse is about to go tragically

awry. Michelle comes to the rescue by racing into the field with her own gun. As Skip and Henry watch in horror, chaos ensues. Toby shoots Michelle and then Jenny.

Suddenly, cops swarm the field. Crisso is killed and the other men are apprehended. It is revealed that the police had bugged Henry's house and knew about the planned meeting. Believing Michelle to be dead, Henry confesses his love - only to be stunned when Michelle wakes up unharmed. She had been fitted with a squib and had managed to switch guns with Toby when she ran onto the field. Jenny is also unharmed but the cops announce that Toby, Jenny, and Michelle will have to go into the witness protection program.

In the aftermath, the writers finish their script - now a Romeo and Juliet-esque tale based on Toby and Jenny's romance - and learn that it has been optioned. Anais is going to helm the project. Toby and Jenny are safe and Michelle, now living under her pseudonym, marries Henry. Skip and Geri have also reconciled. Henry and Skip both quit the writing game - Henry is going into witness protection with Michelle while Skip and Geri are moving to Europe for a fresh start.



## SCRIPT NOTES

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote that there are no second acts in AmTobyan lives, but the heroes of "The Madcap Mob Diaries" might disagree by the time they reach their finale in this bright and snappy romp. The movie's theme of second acts and second chances is echoed throughout its numerous plot threads - Michelle gets a second chance at screenwriting, Geri and Skip get their second chance at marriage, and even Toby gets a second chance to live an honest life. Of course, the men also get one final stab at Hollywood glory when they sell their script, giving the film its fairy-tale ending. Our wisecracking protagonists have a rapport which recalls other famed comic duos like the ones found in "The Odd Couple" and "The Sunshine Boys". The premise of Hollywood writers colliding with the high stakes of the criminal underground is a sharp one, as it provides for both tension and fish-out-of-water comedy. The film also has many strong scenes in which the comedy pauses long enough for these characters to become three dimensional. The scenes between Geri and Skip (pages 41 - 42), Anais and Skip (pages 21 - 22) and Michelle's revelation about her past all help to lift these characters and make them three-dimensional.

The third act has a clever conceit as the Hollywood folk find their special skills are just what's needed to dupe the crooks. It's also the strongest section of the film as the dramatic stakes are sky-high, which gives the script a finale taut with tension. By contrast, the earlier parts in the film pale in comparison. While the film's first two acts create great problems for the characters - the arrest, the loss of their jobs, Skip's failing marriage - their efforts to solve these problems lack sufficient dramatic stakes. After losing their jobs, Skip and Henry set out to write a new

film. While this may help them in the long run, the plot has not yet provided urgency to their efforts. No one is asking them to write the film and there's no indication that a completed script will even give them the opportunity to help them rehabilitate their careers. This means their quest to finish the script lacks sufficient dramatic tension. The lack of a compelling need means the first two acts lack of a compelling antagonist. The antagonists (the Hollywood people who have ended their career) are kept off-screen. And since the characters have no desperate need in the second act, there's no antagonist who stands in the way.

This could be addressed by the simple introduction of a dramatic opportunity to help them revitalize their careers. There could be a screenwriting competition or Henry might pitch their unwritten film to an important producer, who asks to see a screenplay by the end of the week. Whatever the urgency, the result should be that Henry and Skip are compelled to suddenly produce a script. The stakes could be further heightened if they are told that some A-list celebrity is interested in the project - but time is ticking. The celebrity would need to see a script soon. In all these scenarios, we have a scenario which introduces urgency to the film's second act. The men have a limited time to produce a screenplay which will save their careers. The antagonistic forces could be their conflicting desires to address the issues in their personal lives (i.e. Skip wants to write the movie but he also wants to repair his marriage).

Creating urgency will also force the men to become more active in their own fates. Right now, many of the things that happen to Skip and Henry occur largely by luck. Toby happens to show up at their apartment after the arrest and they happen to run into Michelle at the Farmers' Market. Anais sets Skip up on the blind date, making her and Geri the active ones in restoring the marriage. Consider altering these scenes so that these events happen as a result of the men's own actions. Let's continue with one of the scenarios suggested above. The men have a week to produce their screenplay. They track down Toby and convince him to tell them his story. Then one of them gets the idea to find Michelle (perhaps on the theory that three heads are better than one). Meanwhile, Skip convinces Anais to help him reconcile with Geri.

These are just suggestions, of course. The point is to create a scenario which A) creates urgency behind their need to write the script and B) makes the protagonists more active in their own fates.

Consider finding more opportunities to create conflict between the characters. Part of the great comedy in "The Sunshine Boys" and "The Odd Couple" comes from the fact that the men are forced to interact with each other even though they don't get along. This is not to suggest "The Madcap Mob Diaries" needs to mimic this dynamic with Skip and Henry (though that's certainly a possibility). However, finding ways to introduce conflict into their relationship will raise the dramatic stakes. Let's return to the above scenario one last time. Suppose the producer the men needed to impress is none other than Howard Leachman. This creates a

conflict since Michelle obviously doesn't want to interact with him again. She tells them the reason why. What do the men do with this information? They need Howard Leachman to revitalize their career but how can they accept his help after what he did to Michelle? This would create a moral dilemma which will add tension. It may lead to conflict between the men as they are forced to examine the price they are willing to pay for success.

Creating opportunities for the men to confront their own morals is just one possible way to use the plot to take the protagonists on a compelling emotional journey. This is another area of the script which needs close examination. All films have two plots - the exterior one (the action of the film) and the interior one (the emotional arc of the characters). The exterior journey should provoke the interior one, such as how the exterior plot in "The Sunshine Boys" forces the two elderly comedians to confront their issues and restore their friendship.

In "The Madcap Mob Diaries", there exists a disconnection between Henry and Skip's interior journey and the exterior plot. The exterior plot concerns their efforts to write a new film and save their careers, which gets them embroiled with Toby, Jenny, and the criminal underworld. The interior journey, though, involves Skip saving his marriage and Henry embarking on a romance with Michelle. This disconnection is emphasized in the third act when Henry and Skip remain uninvolved in the film's climactic confrontation. They are witnesses to the climax of their own adventure as opposed to being active participants.

Consider connecting these two stories. The efforts to write the screenplay should be the thing that provokes some interior change in the men. This could be as simple as forcing the two men to confront issues in their own relationship or giving them the tools they need to save their romantic lives. For instance, suppose that it's Toby who ends up coaching Skip on how to save his marriage? Whatever is decided, it's crucial that the third act climax involves the men. Perhaps it's all three of the writers who have to jump into the fray and improvise - or write - their way to freedom.

"The Madcap Mob Diaries" has an engaging premise and plenty of comedy. In the next draft, focus on raising the dramatic stakes, adding dramatic urgency, and using the plot to give the two protagonists a more compelling emotional journey.

Page 1. This is a fun opening that delivers a nice twist when we realize we're watching a TV show being filmed. It also introduces the world of the story and our characters in a way that's fast and funny.

Page 10 - 15. There is a natural energy to this scene with Toby. This sequence is strong because Skip and Henry are active and taking charge of their own fates. They want something and they're trying to get it. Use this technique throughout the film. In every scene with the



men, examine how to make the men more active in fighting for what they need.

Page 20. "Looks like you need a new writer...." One of the clever things about the film's dialogue is that it reflects the characters: they are writers and would naturally use writing metaphors when they talk. Good job.

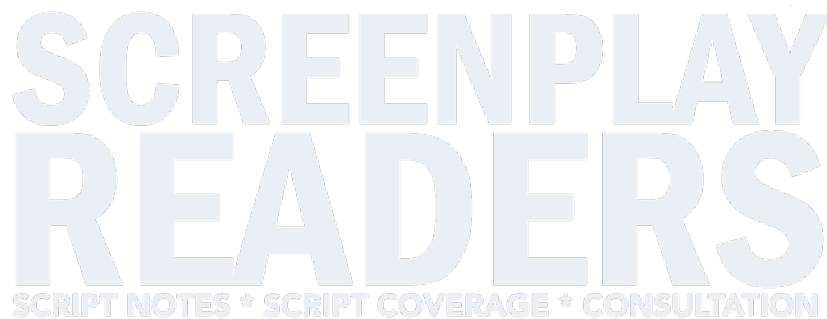
Page 38. "I do my homework." This should be Toby's line but it's been assigned to Henry.

Page 43. Skip is referred to as "Paul" in the narration.

Page 77. Typo. "bit" should be "bite"

Page 96. Consider finding a way to give us this information about Toby and Jenny's relationship earlier. Including this much exposition now slows down the momentum. Suppose that Toby and Jenny told Henry and Michelle the truth when the four of them were out earlier. Then Toby could show up now and there would be no need to pause for an explanation.

Page 99. For them to agree to help Toby and risk themselves, there should be some very compelling reasons. For instance, suppose Toby helped them write their movie and they sell it to some producer. As they're celebrating, Toby arrives with his problem and they agree to help him to pay him back for helping them get their careers back on track.



## SCRIPT READER'S SCORESHEET

The concept is strong and/or script has a buzzworthy hook	80
Script's first 10 pages are compelling	80
Script's theme is well-executed/interweaved well	90
Story/plot/story logic is clear and easy to follow	90
Every story element feels essential	75
Setting/world is easy to understand/follow	90
The script is not bogged down by exposition	70
Scenes and moments cause/impact later scenes and moments	75
Stakes are clear/conflict is strong and/or compelling	60
Tension builds/escalates throughout	60
Characters are interesting/entertaining/fun to watch	75
Characters' choices and actions drive the story forward	60
Characters' motivations/wants/obstacles are clearly defined	60
It's easy to tell who's who – Characters are different from one another	75
Antagonistic forces are difficult for protagonist/s to overcome	60
Dialogue is strong/colorful/entertaining/impactful	85
Action/description text is visual/concise/vivid	100
Climax/resolution is entertaining/satisfying	60
The script feels as if it's as strong/funny/dramatic/entertaining as it can be	65
The script's target audience/demographic is clear	90
Content/subject matter is likely to be strategically appealing to buyers	90
The script's format/spelling/presentation isn't distracting	100

Average Score **76.8**

Recommendation **Pass**

Please note: There is no formal mathematical correlation between scores and Recommendation.

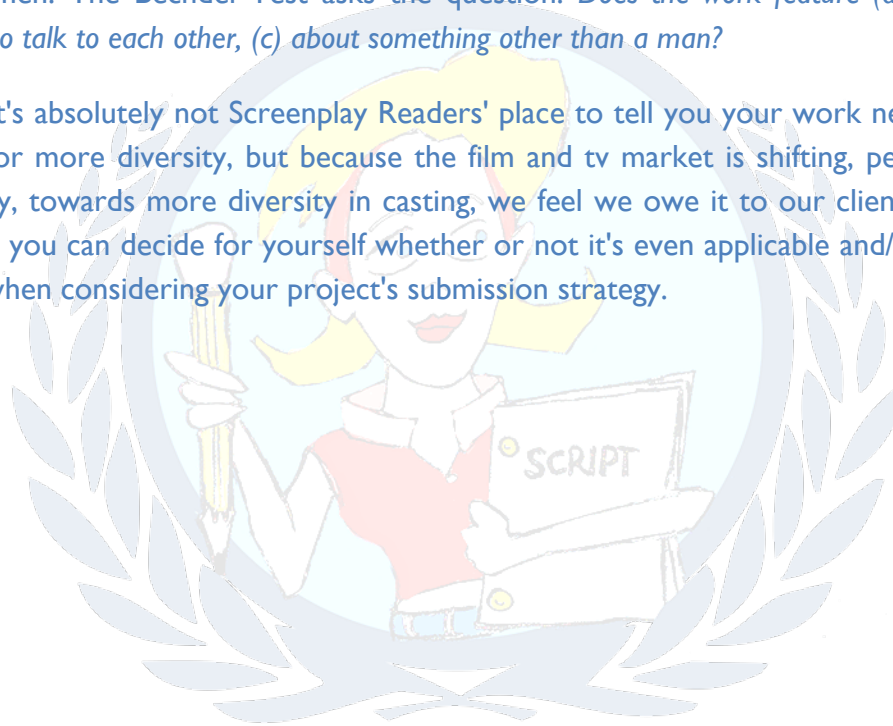
## BECHDEL TEST

YOUR SCRIPT'S RESULT: No

### Bechdel Test Explained

The Bechdel Test is a non-scientific, shorthand "litmus test" that many readers, agents, producers, and executives apply to a potential project when looking for material with strong roles for women. The Bechdel Test asks the question: *Does the work feature (a) at least two women, (b) who talk to each other, (c) about something other than a man?*

Please note: It's absolutely not Screenplay Readers' place to tell you your work needs stronger female roles or more diversity, but because the film and tv market is shifting, perhaps slowly, but undeniably, towards more diversity in casting, we feel we owe it to our clients to provide this metric so you can decide for yourself whether or not it's even applicable and/or something you can use when considering your project's submission strategy.



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