

**HOW TO WRITE AND SELL A
HOLLYWOOD SCREENPLAY**

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Introduction

This document is a quickstart guide to screenplay writing. It focuses on spec scripts for movies and does not cover radio plays, stage plays or teleplays. The script snippets in this guide were written on the fly or taken from my screenplays *Alien Attraction*, *Alien Attraction 2*, *Fata Morgana* and *Mad*.

A spec script is a *speculative* script, meaning it is an original work written unasked by a script writer who hopes to have it optioned and eventually purchased by a producer, production company or studio. Spec scripts are perfectly readable contrary to shooting scripts, which are cluttered with technical terms to prepare for production.

When referring to screenplays probably the first association that comes to mind is *Hollywood*, a district of Los Angeles, California, in the United States. There, in the early twentieth century a film industry emerged and later became dominant in the world. Industry standards evolved with respect to story building, formatting and exposure which will be described in the next sections.

Story topic

Before writing a story you need to know what it is about. This topic or subject forms the narrative foundation. Because you probably will work on the script for months or even years I recommend picking something you truly like or feel comfortable with. It will make life easier when you hit a motivational barrier or inspiration seems to have abandoned you.

Free association

A big help to get ideas for a topic is the associative approach. Browse thesauri or randomly click hyperlinks on the Internet. Or just contemplate some real object. Next to me stands a coffee mug imprinted with red hearts and a surrounding wide black ribbon. It makes me think of a woman who mourns for her beloved husband after he died unexpectedly. The hearts have a white circle around them. So this woman realizes she has to move on and meets a new man. The movie is about the emotional struggle between remaining loyal to her late husband and letting a new fire catch her heart. Film title could be *Red Hearts*, *Black Ribbon*.

When rinsing the coffee mug I noticed that the drain pipe of the sink might be clogged up a bit because the water flowed away slowly, flowed back up and then back down again. Imagine a guy tied to a pole on a tidal flat. As the tide rises the events that have led to his current situation are unveiled. Perhaps he met a girl online. She chats she loves him and wants to visit him. She calls that she checked her bag but missed her flight. Next flight will be in two days and if he would be so kind as to pick up her bag from the airport. He does. On his way home a shady character tries to steal the bag but he chases him and kills him by accident. Other shady characters kidnap him and take the bag, which contains cleverly concealed drugs. They tell him to never trust a woman and tie him to the pole to die. The story is back in the now. As the water is up to his chin he manages to cut the ropes using the sharp edge of a piece of floating trash. He tracks down the catfish woman and her sadistic henchmen and revenges himself upon them. As film title I suggest *Rising Tide*.

Real events

Another possibility is to base your movie on historical events or to anticipate on future events, like has been done for the Mayan prophecy of 2012 or the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Recent events are also good candidates because they are still fresh in people's minds. I'm writing this on the day of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games 2014 in Sochi, Russia. On the news they reported about the huge number of security troops guarding the city and a wide area around it. Also there was a short report about two lesbians leaving for Sochi to protest against the repression of homosexuals in Russia. Dressed up like harlequins they performed a hilarious act on the airport. Imagine a movie about two lesbians who travel to Sochi during the Olympic Winter Games 2014 to protest against the Russian repression of homosexuals by performing a street act. When they discover a bomb the responsible terrorists abduct them and threaten to kill them if the Olympic Games are not stopped immediately. Behind the scenes governments nervously negotiate with each other and the terrorists. The girls debate with their kidnapers about peaceful resistance versus terrorist attacks. Perhaps Navy SEALs are sent to free the women, they escape or one of them dies. Let's call this movie *The Sochi Statement*.

Last week I watched a documentary about huge pets, including a capybara that had been raised by a nice lady. The big friendly fellow accompanied her in the car and watched TV with her on the couch. Perfect ingredients for a funny animation film called *Capybara*.

Pick a title first

The best signboard for a movie is its title. Rather than first choosing a topic and finding a suitable title later, you could do the opposite. A title generator on the Internet presents several titles to me, one with the word *sword* and another containing the word *eye*. *Eye of the Sword*. This must be a fantastic story about a magic sword used to save an ancient people in times of peril.

Whether a topic or title will attract an audience or not is hard to predict. Preferences are subjective and whimsical. A good example is my script *Alien Attraction*. I chose this title because I felt it expressed power and to piggyback on the successful movies *Alien* and *Fatal Attraction*. But a reader rejected the script because of the title, which was analyzed as revealing too much of the story.

Follow trends

Like fashion designers, the film industry reacts on and sets trends. To play safe you may follow them. Recent years have shown the following:

- Shaky filming through the camera of a smart phone;
- Movie title is the name of a person;
- Adaptations of fairy tales.

Keep the budget low

Another way to increase your chances is to keep the budget low. Choose a scenario with few special effects, characters and locations, like somebody locked up in a cellar or going crazy in a cabin in the woods. The danger here is that dialogue could silt up your story. Although it will be hard to come up with something more original than changing the cellar for a freezer or the cabin for the trunk of a car, this kind of movie is still popular among producers.

Story structure

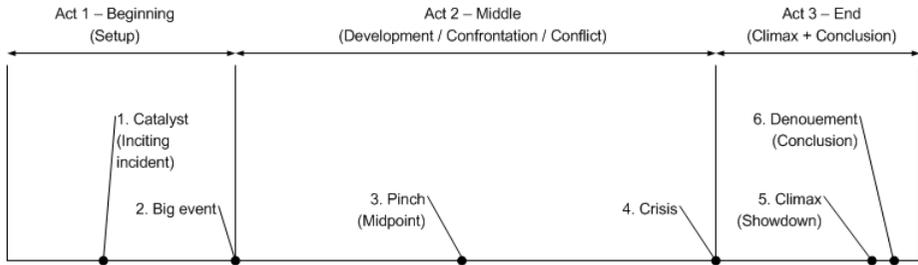
When you know the topic you need to determine the framework used to mold your story into a plot of coherent actions, events, conflicts, turning points and twists. Many films have a linear narrative, meaning that the events occur chronologically and have a clear pattern of cause and effect, which fits our movies *Red Hearts*, *Black Ribbon* and *Eye of the Sword*. Some films are non-linear. For example, they start in the middle of the story (in medias res) and tell the rest via extensive flashforwards or

flashbacks, like our movie *Rising Tide*. Other movies have both linear and non-linear characteristics, which would suit our movies *Capybara* and *The Sochi Statement*.

Framework

In Hollywood is commonly used the classical three-act (beginning, middle and end) structure, formalized by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The acts are set up with six key turning points as follows:

Three-act story structure



1. Catalyst (Inciting incident)	Usually within the first ten minutes of the setup something happens that changes the status quo and really triggers the story.
2. Big event	At about one quarter of the movie something big happens that puts the main character into a new position that will keep him busy for the rest of the movie.
3. Pinch (Midpoint)	After the big event the story develops with rising action, confrontations and conflicts. About halfway the movie there is a major turning point, after which new confrontations and conflicts occur.
4. Crisis	Some minutes after the third quarter a crisis occurs.
5. Climax (Showdown)	Mostly several minutes before the movie ends the protagonist is forced to take dramatic decisions which lead to a climax.
6. Denouement (Conclusion)	Action falls. Remaining conflicts are resolved, loose ends are tied up, tension is released and the audience may experience emotional fulfillment.

Plot

Let's invent a plot for our fantasy movie *Eye of the Sword* that fits the above framework.

In ancient times the weak KING TALEV rules the land of Lira flanked by his sweet wife QUEEN NIVA and his adviser, the evil magician ZAVIR. Zavir's arrogant son MOLOT has an eye on princess ASHIA, but she doesn't like him.

Ashia accompanies Molot and others on a hunting trip. A mean insect stings her horse which throws her. She gets lost in the dense forest where wild animals chase her. As one of them prepares to jump on her an ax slashes it open. Slashes it again, revealing NOVEK, the sturdy honest son of humble woodcutter SAMON. Before she faints Ashia watches Novek bravely fight the remaining beasts that attack her. She regains consciousness in the log cabin where live Novek and Samon.

Threads of dripping black mist ominously fill the valleys and villages of Lira. Hordes of rats infest the streets and houses. The skin of many people gets deformed by festering blisters and black buboes. Piles of disfigured corpses burn everywhere.

Zavir swings a giant sword out of the frame of King Talev's throne. The sword has a guard that misses the central piece of an eye ornament. Zavir reads aloud the ornament's inscription "HE WHO WISELY HOLDS ME BETWEEN TWO NATIONS WILL DEFEAT THE PLAGUE AND BECOME KING" and tells King Talev that time has arrived for the prophecy to be fulfilled. To reunite the sword with the eye they must steal it from KING VOLOR in the forgotten land of Obris.

When Samon and Novek deliver wood at the castle, Zavir notices the strong Samon and orders him to come with him.

Princess Ashia and her chaperone run into Novek at the castle gate as he quarrels with guards to visit his father. Princess Ashia wears a veil that covers a side of her face. She takes Novek to Samon who is in the company of Molot and his retinue. Samon says they must travel to Obris and steal the eye of the sword to save Lira from the plague. Novek replies that the Gods should not be defied and paces away. As Ashia brings him back to the castle gate her veil falls off, revealing some nasty buboes on her cheek. She grabs the veil and rushes away. Her chaperone asks her how she met Novek, if Molot knows about this and that a princess should not fall in love with a woodcutter.

Guards escort Novek back to his father and Molot. Novek tells Molot he changed his mind and begs Molot to let him join the expedition stating that he is a better axfighter than his father.

Molot and his retinue travel to Obris, where they steal the eye, a big shiny gem, from an altar in a cave guarded by the mythical monster KUVAR. The altar has an empty spot that fits the magical sword. Obrisian soldiers chase them on the way back home. Samon and Novek fight the soldiers with axes whereas the other Lirans wield swords. The Obrisians kill several Lirans and Samon gets critically wounded. Before he dies he makes Novek promise to take back home the eye and save Lira.

Back in the castle Molot hands the eye to his father. Molot says that because he stole the eye he has the right to become king. His father answers that he himself is destined to become king. Molot pulls a dagger and they fight.

Let's put in a subplot. Molot actually is the son of Zavir and Queen Niva. Using magic Zavir brought Queen Niva in a state of trance after which he made her pregnant. The king doesn't know about this. They told him the baby was born dead.

As Zavir wipes blood off his hands he tells Novek that Molot asked for him. Novek goes to Molot's quarters where he finds Queen Niva crying next to the bloody corpse of Molot. As Novek inspects the corpse Zavir enters with two guards. He tells them that Novek stabbed Molot. While the guards throw Novek in the dungeon Zavir threatens Queen Niva not to tell anybody what really happened or he will reveal their secret.

Ashia begs her father to release Novek but he doesn't listen. Queen Niva secretly frees Novek. She says she has no other choice because she knows Novek is innocent and that Zavir is an evil man.

During the cremation of Molot Queen Niva cries big tears. Back in their quarters the king asks why. She confesses that Molot was her son. King Talev stammers that the baby died. She says it was a lie. Zavir is the father and she can only vaguely remember Zavir making love to her against her will. In a flashback Zavir prepares a magic powder and secretly puts it in the wine of Queen Niva. Like in a dream she visits him and they make love. King Talev shouts she is a filthy whore and in a burst of anger crushes her skull with a candlestick.

Ashia is inconsolable for the loss of her mother. As guards enter Zavir's quarters to arrest him, he grabs the magic sword and eye and vanishes in a cloud of magic smoke. He creeps out of a secret passage in the forest behind which rises the castle.

Liran soldiers search for Novek who escapes to Obris, where Obrisians capture him and take him to King Volor. Zavir has made a deal with King Volor, who has raised an army. Novek must fight to the death with Kuvar. If he wins they will bring him back to Lira. Using an ax he heavily mutilates one of Kuvar's legs but refuses to kill him. King Volor curses that Kuvar is a good-for-nothing and demands to bring him back to his cave where he will spend the rest of his days as a cripple.

Led by Zavir and King Volor the Obrisian army stands before the Liran castle. Novek is with them. He wears fetters. A delegation led by King Talev leaves the castle and stops before Zavir. Zavir says he wants to exchange Novek for Talev's kingdom. Novek tells King Talev that Zavir killed Molot and bewitched Queen Niva. Zavir roars with laughter and says her skin was soft like a peach and willing. King Talev shouts out his grief.

Standing before the Obrisian army Zavir puts the eye in the sword and raises it at the Liran castle. The sword gets a red glow of evil. Dark threads of mist rise from the valleys into the sky and combine to thick black clouds above the castle. As Zavir threatens to kill King Talev and points the sword at him, it breathes red flames that kill Zavir.

The sword rockets through the sky and falls to the ground right before Novek. Novek hesitates, then picks it up. It gets a blue glow of goodness. Blue flames engulf Novek. He cuts his fetters with a blue beam of lightning from the sword. As sunlight shines through the dissolving clouds he demands the Obrisians to retreat. He raises his sword filling the sky with blue lightning. They obey. Hordes of rats run out of the castle into the fleeing Obrisian army. Before pacing away King Volor tells Novek there can never be peace among Obris and Lira.

Princess Ashia fully recovers from the plague. She thanks Novek, tells him that the prophecy has been fulfilled and that the new king needs a wife, after which she kisses him.

In the cave Novek tells Kuvar he is bringing back the sword to where it belongs, after it had been stolen by King Talev's grandfather. When he wants to use the sword to cure Kuvar's mutilated leg, Kuvar warns Novek that after using the sword for healing it will cease to serve its carrier and will wait for the next one, which may take a thousand years. Novek looks Kuvar in the eye and answers that the choice is easy. He then uses the sword to heal Kuvar's leg with rays of blue light after which the sword stops glowing. Novek places the sword in its empty spot on the altar.

Novek marries Ashia. King Volor is guest of honor.

In his cave Kuvar cleans the altar. He hesitates, then takes the sword out of its spot. It starts to glow blue and red.

Summarized the major turning points are:

1. Catalyst (Inciting incident)	Novek gets to know princess Ashia when he rescues her from wild animals.
2. Big event	Driven by love to save Ashia from a plague, Novek decides to accompany Molot to the land of Obris to steal the eye of a magic sword.
3. Pinch (Midpoint)	This point is a literal turn. After stealing the eye in Obris from the monster Kuvar, Molot and his retinue return home.
4. Crisis	Zavir kills Molot when they quarrel about who of them will become king. He accuses Novek of the crime and throws him in the dungeon.
5. Climax (Showdown)	Standing before the Obrisian army at the Liran castle, Zavir is killed by the magic sword when he wants to kill King Talev with it. Using the magic sword Novek sends home the Obrisian army and ends the plague.
6. Denouement (Conclusion)	To restore peace between the land of Lira and Obris, Novek brings back the sword to Kuvar, cures his mutilated leg thereby giving up the sword's power and marries Ashia. When Kuvar picks up the sword we can imagine that he will be the next king.

My script *Mad* has a standard three-act structure as well:

1. Catalyst (Inciting incident)	The IT Department of "RIF CREDIT INSURANCE" where works software developer GILLES HUDD goes international.
2. Big event	Psychiatrist OSCAR LYNDECK diagnoses Gilles as suffering from psychosis and the Gilles de la Tourette syndrome.
3. Pinch (Midpoint)	Gilles and other patients of "MENTAL HOSPITAL HELIANTHUS" get zoo keeper therapy in zoo "THE ARK".
4. Crisis	Oscar Lyndeck convinces Gilles to join a reintegration project after which he turns mad again. Then he finds his girlfriend RACHEL

	murdered in her apartment. He met her in the zoo.
5. Climax (Showdown)	The police arrest patient PETER HOLMES for the murder of Rachel. Gilles murders him in the courtroom and flees. At night he pedals to RIF where he hoists his bike to the top of a flagpole and burns some other flags.
6. Denouement (Conclusion)	Oscar Lyndeck finds Gilles sleeping in the arms of MINDY, a female orangutan he takes care of. Gilles says he doesn't want to live among humans anymore. A cop and paramedic take Gilles away in a prisoner transport vehicle.

Many scripts do not strictly follow the three-act structure with six major turning points. They for example converge Catalyst and Big event, or add a major twist like my screenplay *Fata Morgana*.

Production market

The *Eye of the Sword* plot invites to become a typical Hollywood production, shamelessly over the top, sentimental and theatrical. Protagonist Novek actively participates in the story. Driven by love he decides to help stealing the eye to save princess Ashia from the plague. And the movie contains strong oppositions, like Novek personifying good (blue) versus Zavir personifying evil (red). I can imagine dramatic dialogues like "Take home the eye... save Lira" whispered by Samon to Novek before he exhales his last breath, "I trusted you... all those years... but you... you have blemished my kingdom... filthy whore" when King Talev discovers that Molot is the son of his wife and Zavir, whereas the poor woman has no real clue why she slept with Zavir, or "Take this ugly good-for-nothing back to his cave, where he will spend the rest of his days as a cripple" uttered by King Volor after Novek defeats the monster Kuvar with an ax.

Hollywood is still leading, but other markets are rising. For example, the last couple of years there has been a boom of Nordic thrillers. When you target a market other than Hollywood you have to know its features:

Market	Features
Europe	Thematic and realistic.
Scandinavia	Slow paced with extensive subplots about personal relationships.
Russia	Raw and relentless.
Asia	Capricious with deeply rooted vice and virtue.

Countries with censorship	Compliant but with a false bottom or strong hidden message.
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I strongly hope that movies from other regions like the Middle East and Africa will manage to reach a more international public. Hollywood needs more competition.

Formatting

After determining the framework and plot of your story you are ready to write it. Hollywood imposes strict formatting rules regarding page layout, contents of the title page and script elements.

Scenes

The building block for a script is the scene, to be understood as action occurring in a single location and continuous time. Scenes are identified by and include headings. They contain narrative description and dialogue and can be connected via transitions. Series of logically related scenes are called *sequences*. Sequences and transitions are instruments to give your script cohesion.

Page layout

The industry standard layout for script pages is the following:

- Font is 12-point Courier, which is a 10-pitch typeface meaning it has 10 characters per inch (horizontally);
- Document size is US Letter (8.5 in x 11 in = 215.9 mm x 279.4 mm);
- Margins must comply with strict rules. Left margin is wider than right margin, to provide for easy binding. Right margin is ragged. I recommend writing your script by using software like [Final Draft](#) (commercial) or [Trelby](#) (free). These applications provide industry standard script templates;
- Pages are numbered except for the title page and the first page after. Page numbers are followed by a period and positioned in the upper right corner of the page. Numbering starts with 2. on the second page after the title page.

In this age of fancy office applications the fixed-width typeface and other rigid layout requirements may seem outdated. But they actually mold the rule that one script page represents one minute of film. So the number of pages of your script represents the length of the produced film. The standard length for feature films is

90 to 120 minutes while short films have a length under 70 minutes. Feature horror movies commonly have a length around 90 minutes.

Please don't embed any pictures, flow charts or other graphics in the script. These would violate the rule that one script page equals one minute of film and could scare off industry professionals because of possible copyright issues. For my duology *Alien Attraction* I did a preliminary study that included pictures, logos, maps and flow charts. Because I wanted the aliens to speak their own language I designed a grammar and created a lexicon. When I told this on a screenwriting forum the first reaction was "If you think you can do better than the production designer why don't you produce the movie yourself !!!". As a screenwriter you have to know your position. Hollywood is a commercial machine not interested in cooperation. Stick to the rules or your script will immediately hit the bottom of the trash can.

Title page

Your script must start with a title page that contains:

- The title of the film in capitals (optionally underscored and/or surrounded by quotation marks), the word *by* or *written by* or *Written by*, and your name (middle centered);
- Your address, phone number and e-mail address (lower right);
- A copyright notice and registration notice (lower left), which are both optional.

For example:

EYE OF THE SWORD

by

Bas Oversteegen

Copyright © 2014 Bas Oversteegen
All rights reserved
Registered WGAw

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Multiple authors

If more than one writer is involved separate their names by & if the writers contributed equally:

"EYE OF THE SWORD"

by

Bas Oversteegen & Willy Weasel

or by *and* to indicate that the second writer rewrote the script:

"EYE OF THE SWORD"

Written by

Bas Oversteegen and Willy Weasel

Contact details

In case your script will be put on a website or online directory you may protect your privacy by omitting from the contact details your address and phone number. To reduce the risk of spambot harvesting some writers choose to obfuscate their e-mail address like for example 'b.oversteegen[at]lira[dot]com'.

Copyright notice

In Hollywood scripts age fast. It can take years before your script gets noticed, if noticed at all. Because a stale year of publication might scare off industry professionals and because generally spoken copyright is automatically protected, I don't put a copyright notice on my scripts. If you do include a copyright notice, put it on the title page in the lower left corner, constructing it with the following components:

- The word "Copyright," the symbol "©" (the letter C in a circle) or the combination "Copyright ©";
- The year of first publication of the work;
- The year(s) of next publication of the work (if relevant);
- The name of the owner of the work;
- The phrase "All rights reserved" (in order to gain copyright protection in Bolivia and Honduras).

Some examples:

Copyright, 2014 Bas Oversteegen

© 2014 Bas Oversteegen
Copyright © 2013,2014 Bas Oversteegen
Copyright © 2012-2014 Bas Oversteegen. All rights reserved.
Copyright © 2010,2012-2014 Bas Oversteegen All rights reserved

Registration notice

Many North American writers register their script with the Writers Guild of America, *WGAE* if they live east of the Mississippi river or *WGAW* if they live west of the Mississippi river. These writers may put on the title page the registration notice *Registered WGAE* or *Registered WGAW*, respectively. Don't include the registration number.

Headings

Headings are also known as *slug lines*. They are written in all caps. The types of heading that can be distinguished are master scene headings, secondary scene headings and special headings.

Master scene headings

These are headings that identify primary scenes. They have the format "<camera location> <scene location>[- <time indicator>]":

Component	Value	Meaning
Camera location	INT.	Interior, i.e. indoors.
	EXT.	Exterior, i.e. outdoors.
	I/E.	Interior/Exterior, i.e. alternately indoors and outdoors.
Scene location	<a specific location>	The specific location where takes place the scene.
Time indicator	DAY	During daytime. Not used if the Scene location is in outer space.
	NIGHT	During nighttime. Not used if the Scene location is in outer space.
	CONTINUOUS	Indicates that the scene is continuous in time relative to the previous scene. Use only if not clear from the context.
	LATER	Indicates that the scene occurs later in time than the previous scene.
	MOMENTS LATER	Indicates that the scene occurs some moments later in time than the previous scene.

	SAME	Indicates that the scene occurs at the same time as the previous scene, e.g. when intercutting between two scenes during a telephone conversation (for a script example see section Dialogue).
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If any of these components change you need a new master scene heading.

Examples:

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY
 INT. MOO FAMILY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT
 INT. MOO FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY
 EXT. MOO FAMILY HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY
 EXT. VOLCANIC VALLEY - WATERFALL - DAY
 I/E. MOO FAMILY DROPCAR - NIGHT
 I/E. METRO TRACK - DAY
 I/E. POLICE HOPPER - DAY
 INT. POLICE CHIEF'S HOUSE - HOBBY ROOM - CONTINUOUS
 EXT. VOLCANIC VALLEY - LAKE - LATER
 EXT. VOLCANIC VALLEY - CAVE - MOMENTS LATER
 INT. POLICE STATION - POLICE CHIEF'S OFFICE - SAME
 EXT. SPACE
 INT. SWALLOW SPACECRAFT
 EXT. AABAA SPACE STATION
 EXT. AABAA SPACE STATION - LATER

As the above examples illustrate, a consistent look can be established by separating scene sublocations with hyphens.

Secondary scene headings

If your master scene contains more than one sublocation or a time-shift indicator (CONTINUOUS, LATER, MOMENTS LATER), you may include these components as headings within the master scene:

INT. CHURCH - DAY
 Gilles listens to a rehearsal of a gospel choir in which sings Rachel.
 LATER
 Choir members and Gilles amble along a buffet table, like one happy family.

INT. CASTLE - NIGHT

TORTURE CHAMBER

A secret door opens in the painting behind Fatima's throne, revealing Brian Anderson, who steps into the torture chamber.

Brian glances around. Bear cage is empty. There is nobody in the pit. He enters the

SPIRAL STAIRCASE

He sneaks upstairs.

I/E. UNMARKED CAR - DAY

DENVER

Brian Anderson has a scab on his temple. Driving an unmarked car he follows the chick car through the city and the

MOUNTAINS

At a deserted

JUNCTION

the chick car takes a small road uphill in direction of "BIGHORN ADVENTURE PARK". Brian parks behind a bush.

He eats a sandwich. A moose trots across the road and drinks from a puddle. Brian raises his coffee cup in direction of the moose and sips from it.

JUNCTION - LATER

Chick car comes down the small road.

Special headings

Secondary headings are also used to embed self-contained narrative units into the master scene, like a MONTAGE, SERIES OF SHOTS, FLASHBACK or DREAM. These headings have the format "<narrative unit type> - <description>". Likewise secondary headings are used for story parts describing what is seen ON THE TV SCREEN, THROUGH THE WINDOW, THROUGH BINOCULARS or THROUGH SOOLAN'S EYES. When ending before the end of the master scene these units need to be explicitly ended by a footing which has the format "BACK TO SCENE" or "BACK TO <master scene identifier>". Footing for the FLASHBACK is "BACK TO PRESENT DAY".

Among screenwriting experts there is discussion about the need to differentiate between a MONTAGE and SERIES OF SHOTS. Both are sequences of shots each of which may be prefixed with "-- " (hyphen hyphen space). A MONTAGE typically is

accompanied with background music and its shots all center around the same theme (e.g. two people falling in love). A SERIES OF SHOTS may not have background music and is less thematic (e.g. someone dressing up for a party). In practice MONTAGE and SERIES OF SHOTS are used interchangeably.

Special heading examples:

MONTAGE - THERAPY BOMBARDMENT

- Gilles lies on his stomach. A JAPANESE MASSEUSE graciously dances across his bare back.
- Gilles lies on his back. An ACUPUNCTURIST sticks needles in Gilles's face, already full of needles.
- A MONK bows as Gilles steps into a meditation pyramid and sits down in lotus position on a yoga mat.
- Gilles lies on his stomach. A SPA MASSEUSE puts smooth stones on his spine, shoulder blades and arms.
- Gilles lies on his back. An ALTERNATIVE PHYSICIAN puts a wriggling medicinal leech on Gilles's face. On his chest wriggle some other leeches.
- Gilles jumps off a bench into shards of glass, which make his bare feet bleed. His face expresses pain as he glances at the MOTIVATION COACH, who grins sheepishly.

SERIES OF SHOTS - METRO CROSSES ECO ENERGY PARK

- Metro dives out of a tunnel onto the park and slows down.
- Metro passes a Hydro2 Power Unit. Threads of steam escape through the air grilles.
- Metro passes a maintenance crane with on top a worker standing on a retractable platform. He repairs a rotor blade. Bottom work platform of the crane is fully raised.
- Metro drives over banked curves around the semicircular shapes. The sun reflects on the solar panels. Inside the metro the walls tilt.
- Metro passes a maintenance crane that carries a solar panel array. Bottom work platform of the crane is in a lowered position.
- Metro accelerates downward into a tunnel.

I/E. POLICE CAR - EDGE OF MOUNTAIN FOREST - DAY

Starsky and Brian Anderson in his police car, parked at the edge of the mountain forest. He observes the medieval castle

THROUGH BINOCULARS

The Blond criminal guards the draw bridge.

The expensive sports car stands before the watchtower.

In the courtyard Nicu Tafaj pulls a crying Bess out of the dog cage and leads an aggressive fighting dog into it. She wears a shrew's fiddle.

BACK TO POLICE CAR

Brian takes his cell phone, presses it, holds it to his ear.

INT. CONTAINER CAMP - DAY

LAB CONTAINER

Ronnie works with the picoscope at the research desk.

ON THE PICOSCOPE CONTROL SCREEN

Magnified cells in green slime. The roaring of thrusters above the GOS-5 landing spot.

BACK TO LAB CONTAINER

Clarence Jackson enters the lab container. He wears his hook-on earphones and rhythmically sways his body. He puts a cup of coffee on the desk.

Narrative description

Every writer has his own style, so the sentences describing the story within the scenes may flow like prose, tickle like poetry or have a staccato rhythm. But this narrative description also must comply with some strict rules and conventions.

Present tense

Write in present tense, also when describing flashbacks or flashforwards. The *Simple Present Tense* expresses an action in the present taking place once, never or several times. The *Present Progressive Tense* (Present Continuous Tense) expresses an action taking place in the moment of speaking. In isolated sentences only use the Simple Present Tense but not the Present Progressive Tense:

"Gladys sits on the couch." but not "Gladys is sitting on the couch."

"Gladys watches TV." but not "Gladys is watching TV."

When you want to express that something occurs at the same time as something else, either Simple Present Tense or Present Progressive Tense can be used. The following three descriptions are all acceptable:

"Gladys sits on the couch watching TV."

"Gladys sits on the couch. She watches TV."

"Gladys **sits** on the couch and **watches** TV."

The Present Progressive Tense must not be confused with the *Present Participle*, which can be used freely. They both have the *-ing* form but the first functions as a true verb while the second functions as adjective:

"A speedboat with **running** outboard motor."

"**Agonizing** screams of Arab criminal in the house."

"The lazy Starsky suddenly transforms into a **snarling hunting** machine, which sprints to the Intruder."

The present tense rule doesn't apply to *Past Participle + Noun* and *Past Participle + Preposition* constructions, which are allowed:

"A quacking mother duck waggles stately across the street **followed** by her downy ducklings."

"Brian and Bess walk to his police car, **parked** along the street."

"Paramedics tie him to a **wheeled** stretcher."

"Police car stops next to a **charred** car wreckage on the roadside. A partly **burned** Audi emblem."

Past tense sentences are not per definition banned. They can be used to refer to previously described situations:

"Trembling she points at the corner where **disappeared** the car."

"Joe fishes a pair of binoculars out of his backpack and peers through it in direction of where the sound **came** from."

"He imitates the convulsions **made** by the Police officer with red hair while she **hung** under the police hopper, and laughs loudly."

Action

Only describe the *action*, i.e. what will be seen and heard on the movie screen. So don't write "Gladys joins them. She had a horrible childhood. Her mother let her wear embroidered dresses and her father was drunk all the time." but write something like "Gladys joins them. Her wan haggard face has eyes that express great sadness."

Use concise visually oriented descriptions that contain just enough information to push the story forward. To reach a compact look you may opt for single words instead of adjectival or adverbial constructions:

"a giant" instead of "a very big man".

"a Casanova" instead of "an Italian guy who knows how to seduce women".
"guffaw" instead of "laugh loudly".
"she glares at him" instead of "she looks at him angrily".

Avoid generic verbs like *see*, *walk* and *laugh* but use more specific variants:

Verb	Variants
see	glance, glare, look, lurk, observe, peek, peep, peer, pierce, squint, stare, view, watch.
walk	amble, creep, drag oneself, glide, gush, hobble, hop, hurry, hustle, jump, lumber, lurch, mince, mosey, pace, pad, prance, pussyfoot, run, rush, saunter, scurry, shuffle, slink, slouch, sneak, stagger, stride, stroll, strut, swerve, swirl, teeter, throw, tiptoe, toddle, trot, trudge, waddle, waggle, waltz.
laugh	bellow with laughter, burst, cachinnate, cackle, chortle, chuckle, crow, giggle, grin, guffaw, hee-haw, howl with laughter, roar with laughter, scream with laughter, shriek with laughter, smile, snicker, snort, tee-hee, titter, whoop with laughter.

Don't use more than four lines per paragraph. When the last line of a paragraph contains only a few words you could rephrase it to fit in the previous line. But don't do this all the time. Your pages should have enough white space. Pages cluttered with text will almost certainly scare off readers.

Dramatize:

"Bands of colored light magically swirl through a dark sky with bright stars." instead of "Colors fill the dark sky.".
"He sinks into rotting plants up to his ankles." instead of "His shoes sink into the peat.".
"He rips off pieces of kelp spaghetti twined round his legs." instead of "He removes the plants from his legs.".

Use the technique *ellipsis*, i.e. don't describe a scene from A to Z but omit a part that the audience itself will be able to fill in. For example, start the scene with the police removing a gory corpse from a bedroom and leave out the murder. Or let a disoriented passenger stumble out of a plane wreckage and omit the plane crash. The heading component **LATER** explicitly marks ellipsis.

Setting

Settings should only be described if playing a clear role in the story and should be no longer than one or two lines or smoothly integrated into the rest of the action:

XCUBE 360

Floor, ceiling and walls have an embedded grid. In the middle of the gamecube Soolan sits in a comfortable chair placed on a ball bearing. Next to the chair stands the Young hopper pilot.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - APARTMENT OF RONNIE VERMEER - DAY
BEDROOM

Darkness. But then start to shine lights that progressively get intenser, revealing a small bedroom with bright white walls and a double bed. No windows.

EXT. ZIENOK - DAY

We smoothly continue through the atmosphere, enter the peach sky toward Kandai City, a spider web lying at a lake and surrounded by mountain ranges. And descend farther to a suburb full of house disks buildings in different patterns.

EXT. KANDAI CITY - SUBURB - DAY
ROAD

A dropcar bus drives over a force field road between the buildings, in decay.

Bus halts at a bus stop close to a house disks tower.

Characters

In the narrative description, names of individual characters are written in all caps when they first appear. In case of main and supporting characters this also is the moment to include a description of the character in one or two lines, preferably using only properties visible on the movie screen:

LORI ROBERTS, 30, chic business attire, strolls along the lake.

Lori smiles at a MOTHER WITH BABY BUGGY.

A MALE PARAMEDIC and FEMALE PARAMEDIC palpate Lori's lifeless body. The Mother with baby buggy stands apathetically near the traffic light.

Out of the car hops detective BRIAN ANDERSON, 40s, congenial and keen, but unruly.

He paces to the paramedics. Female paramedic shakes her head.

Brian Anderson sleeps next to his loving wife MABEL ANDERSON, 40s. In front of the bed sleeps Starsky, an old German shepherd dog.

Groups of people ("paramedics") are not written in all caps. The same is true for names of animals ("Starsky"), unless the animal is a main character.

The same character may appear under different names:

A KNIGHT wearing a medieval suit of armor with closed visor and holding a halberd, steps out of the elevator and clatters to the Chinese criminal, who works with lab devices.

The Knight opens his visor, revealing the face of Joe Fletcher.

or different ages:

Amiena rests in her shell bed. She puts SOOLAN IP VEMEE - BABY into Ronnie's arms.

SOOLAN IP VEMEE, three years old, full golden blond hair, blows out three candles on a birthday cake.

On a sitting cube wait Taylor Adams and her womanish daughter CARMEN ADAMS, 9, mixed white Latina, long black hair.

HAROLD ADAMS, white, 40s, watches holotelevision in the elevated part of a spacious living room. A basketball game. Next to him sits his daughter CARMEN ADAMS - 19, pretty, long black hair.

The pairs KNIGHT and Joe Fletcher, SOOLAN IP VEMEE - BABY and SOOLAN IP VEMEE, CARMEN ADAMS and CARMEN ADAMS - 19, refer to the same character.

Text to be read by the audience

Text to be read by the audience should be written in all caps and put between quotation marks:

A "DENVER POLICE" car shoots into view with wailing siren and flashing lights.

Brian Anderson stands before brothel "PINK BUTTERFLY" in a decayed neighborhood.

Cereal box has a funny print and the text "VEGGY FUN CEREALS".

If the text should appear superimposed use the script element SUPER::

SUPER: "INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS."

Vemee family boards a squider spacecraft. On the ship the word "SQUIDER" in Aabaa runes.

SUPER: "SQUIDER."

Sound

Sounds can be described by regular description or onomatopoeically (via sound imitation):

As he starts the car, Starsky violently jumps against the side window, scratches it, snarls and snaps.

Howls and barks, from various directions, which come closer.

WHOSH, a wormhole opens outside the haze of the atmosphere.

Daniel fires at Ronnie. FLASH. CRACKLE. Ronnie groans, stumbles against the wall and collapses to the floor.

CLICK, a photo of the stake leaving the body through the mouth.

SQUEAK, SQUEAK, of a handle turning above Brian's head.

Only give general hints regarding to music:

Out of shell speakers sounds plucking Aabaa music, like of a Victorian music box.

Don't mention song names because they might scare off producers due to possible legal issues.

Directions

Shooting scripts contain camera and sound directions like ANGLE ON, ESTABLISHING SHOT, POV (Point Of View) and MOS (without sound). Because the focus with spec scripts lies on readability, these directions are omitted or described in regular words like:

"Soolan stares at her hips swaying in front of him." instead of "Soolan's POV - Her hips sway in front of him."

"We can't hear the words." instead of "MOS".
--

Notes

If you want to include a special note this can be done by using script element NOTE::

NOTE: Climate on Vsr-6a is hot and humid. In the open air the squad always looks sweaty.

NOTE: Taylor Adams and Andrew Saunders have aged five years since Ronnie left Earth.

NOTE: Until further notice Bess wears the headscarf.

NOTE: See my screenplay "ALIEN ATTRACTION", of which this screenplay is the sequel taking place twenty years later.

Dialogue

Dialogues are indented. They consist of a character cue, a parenthetical and speech.

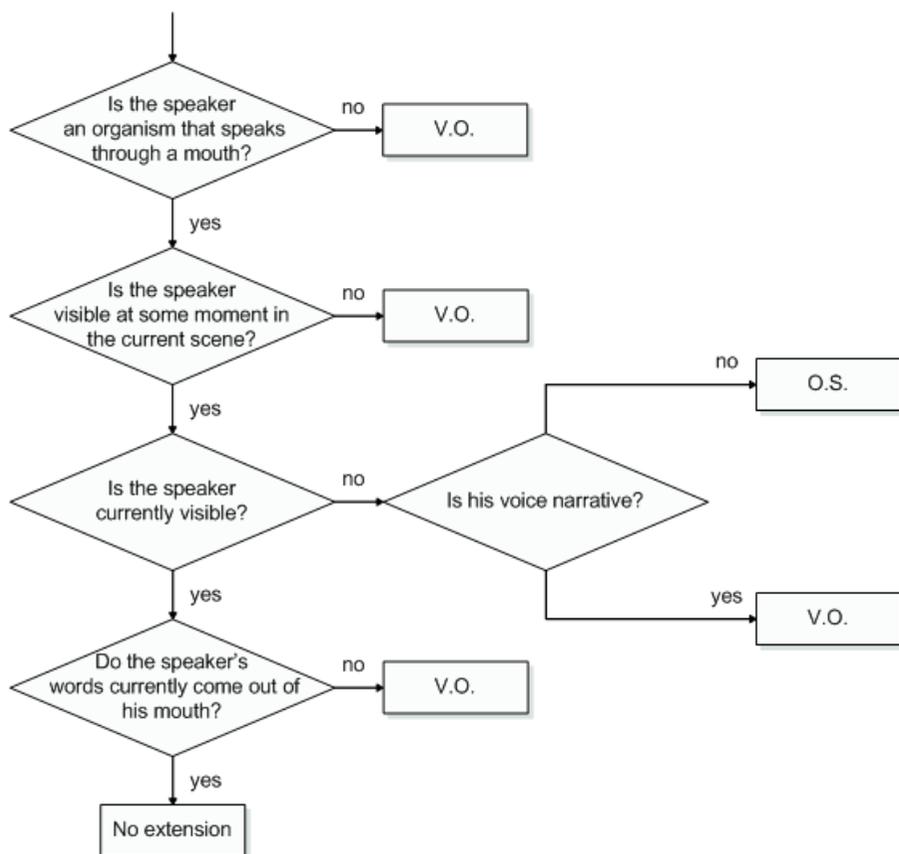
Character cue

Dialogues start with the character's name in all caps, sometimes followed by the extension (O.S.) or (V.O.) meaning *Off Screen* and *Voice Over*, respectively:

AGGRESSIVE COP
OSCAR LYNDECK
AMIENA'S MOTHER (O.S.)
CLARENCE JACKSON (O.S.)
FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
STATION SPEAKER (V.O.)

Whether to use O.S. or V.O. has led to discussion among screenwriting experts. In my scripts I use the following logic:

Character cue extension logic



Parenthetical

Parentheticals are optional actor directions, also called *wrylies*. Use them sparsely.

Examples:

HARRIET CONWAY
(overly friendly)

STRICT COP
(coughing and sneezing)

RONNIE VERMEER
(whispering to himself)

Speech

For the text to be spoken we can distinguish several formatting rules.

Write out all numbers except years:

JESSICA MEADOCK
Good morning. This is Comm News of
Monday May eighteenth 2144. I am
Jessica Meadock.

ARTHUR WILEY
Sleep well and see you in about
five years.

Use "... " (three periods and a space) to pause within a sentence:

SONJA LANE
Well... all right... but hands off
the trigger and the barrel always
pointed away from us.

Use "...." (four periods) to pause at the end of a sentence:

CYNTHIA MEAD
I will have informed the families
of the deceased.... Can you send me
the Vsar Two report?

Use "... " (three periods) to pause at the end of a character's speech and "... " (three periods and a space) at the beginning of the continued character's speech, if the

character's speech, if the second character interrupts the last sentence of the first character:

TAYLOR ADAMS
But... we can't just --
HAROLD ADAMS
-- Try your granddaughter.

Put quotation marks around quoted text:

MATTHEW ROSS
The coffee machine broke down. It says "Bean hopper missing". But the beans have been filled up.

Underscore words to emphasize but only if not clear from the context:

AMIENA IP MOO
My man has huge potential.

Put a hyphen between individual letters or syllables when spelling a word:

RONNIE VERMEER
Yes, he-li-cop-ter. We had them on planet Earth long ago.

Depending on the pronunciation per letter or word, acronyms must appear with or without periods, respectively:

POLICE OFFICER
I heard the D.E.A. has formed a special team.

BALD POLICE OFFICER
ELI has him.

MICHELLE ADAMS
What's ELI?

BALD POLICE OFFICER
Extraterrestrial Life Investigation.

Simultaneous dialogue can be indicated through parallel columns:

RONNIE VERMEER
I'm going to sleep.
AMIENA'S FATHER WAKIEL IP MOO
Good night. Night.

Mimic dialects and accents phonetically:

JESSICA WANG
Hello, I'm Jessica Wang, the new
Head Of Development. I heald you
wolked hele befole and now stalt
again by doing choles like blinging
coffee. Fol me black with sugal,
please.

Ronnie points at himself.

RONNIE VERMEER
Ronnie.

AMIENA IP MOO
Onnie.

Ronnie draws three person symbols in the sand with a
stick.

RONNIE VERMEER
Human.

AMIENA IP MOO
Ooman.

Speech in a foreign language (i.e. a language different from the language the script is written in), is normally not written in that language but indicated in the parenthetical including eventual subtitling. You may put in some phonetic flavor:

MINGO GARCIA
(in Mexican Spanish;
subtitled)
I swear this dude Alejandro did
it.... Leave me alone.

AMIENA IP MOO
(in Aabaa; subtitled)
Mean bastard.

Soolan steps out of the chairbed, soaking wet, revealing
Michelle, loose long black hair.

SOOLAN IP VEMEE
(in Aabaa; subtitled)
Hi mom. This is Mieselle.

Telephone conversation

When the audience does not hear or see the other character (Lennox), handle like regular speech:

Michelle switches on her holophone. A holoscreen pops out.

MICHELLE ADAMS
Hi Lennox.... Yeah, fine.... I need
an anonymous wridlet. But prepaid
wridlets are invalid outside Earth.

When the audience hears the other character (BIG JIM) but does not see him, use
Voice Over:

BIG JIM (V.O.)
Where are you?
LITTLE JIM
On the playground.

When the audience both hears and sees the other character (Police chief), use script
element INTERCUT combined with SAME:

I/E. POLICE CAR - EDGE OF MOUNTAIN FOREST - DAY
Starsky and Brian Anderson in his police car, parked at
the edge of the mountain forest.
Brian takes his cell phone, presses it, holds it to his
ear.

INT. POLICE STATION - POLICE CHIEF'S OFFICE - SAME
Police chief works behind his desk. Cell phone rings. He
picks it up, holds it to his ear.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

BRIAN ANDERSON
I was right. Bess is at the castle
and Joe probably also is.

POLICE CHIEF
What? Anderson, are you at the
castle? Wait for backup.

BRIAN ANDERSON
But sir, they are in immediate
danger.

POLICE CHIEF
Anderson, listen. I command you to
wait for backup.

CLICK, Brian hangs up the phone. Police chief sighs.

POLICE CHIEF (CONT'D)
Dammit, Anderson.

Dialogue breaks

If a dialogue is split by narrative description or a page break, this is indicated with
the script elements CONT'D and MORE + CONT'D, respectively. Most screenwriting
software will automatically insert these script elements:

CLARISSA BABRIDGE

I will discuss this with Paul. I don't accept such abuse.

Telephone rings three times at Gilles's workplace.

CLARISSA BABRIDGE (CONT'D)
Think of motto Customer First,
Gilles.

Telephone rings two times more.

CLARISSA BABRIDGE (CONT'D)
Gilles, can you pick up the phone?

Telephone rings one more time.

CLARISSA BABRIDGE (CONT'D)
Gilles.

Gilles picks up the phone.

GILLES HUDD
That's what I wanted to talk about.
I need more time because the
analysis document is so bad that I
must do the analysis myself. We
should have official guidelines the
analysis documents must meet.
(MORE)

----- page break -----

18.

GILLES HUDD (CONT'D)
It's obvious that each project
phase needs some sort of quality
assessment and validation.

Transitions

A transition is the passage from one scene to the next. Shooting scripts contain transition directions like CUT TO: and DISSOLVE TO:. Because the focus with spec scripts lies on readability, these directions are omitted or described in regular words like:

The world turns black.

INT. POLICE HOPPER - DAY

THROUGH SOOLAN'S EYES

Blackness and silence change to the interior of a police hopper respectively humming of thrusters.

Hiker girl blushes, lowers her eyes and gazes at her plate. Camera zooms into the food on the plate.

INT. RESEARCH STATION - DAY

INTERROGATION ROOM - PRISONER CELL

Image morphs into sandwiches on a plate and zooms out, revealing Soolan eating on the edge of his bed.

Normally the only transition indicating script elements used in spec screenplays are FADE IN: and FADE OUT., which are mandatory. FADE IN: starts the script left aligned on the first line of the first page after the title page:

FADE IN:

EXT. VSR-6A - SPACE

Blackness with tiny twinkling stars. In the foreground planet Vsr-6a. Smaller than Earth with a planetary ring. Instead of oceans blue lake spots scattered all over the surface.

FADE OUT. ends the script right aligned on the last line of the last page:

Blackness with tiny twinkling stars.

FADE OUT.

Script improvement

This section gives some hints how to improve your script.

Error checking

After writing the script:

- Verify if the story has the characteristics summarized in the checklist at the end of each chapter in *Making a Good Script Great* by Linda Seger (see section [Further reading](#));
- Check if the script complies with the formatting rules summarized in this primer and explained more extensively in *The Screenwriter's Bible* by David Trottier (see section [Further reading](#));
- Double-check for grammatical and typographical errors. Hollywood is picky about them. Most screenwriting software has a spell checker but it may be a good idea to load the script into a word processor to get a second digital opinion. It may save you one or two typos;

- Check word usage in an online corpus like the [Corpus of Contemporary American English](#) (COCA) or [British National Corpus](#) (BNC).

Family and friends

Ask your family and friends to proofread your script.

Writers community

Join a writers club or community where writers give feedback on each other's scripts.

Screenplay analysis services

You can have your script proofread or analyzed by an industry professional. Professional proofreading may be especially useful when you write in a language that is not your native language. Google for "screenplay analysis services" and you will find a bunch of script consultants.

The analysis criteria used by professional screenplay readers/analysts are:

Criterion	Description
Premise/Concept	The story idea or enticement.
Presentation	Industry standard layout and formatting, spelling and grammar.
Structure	Story framework (three-act structure) and progression (linear or non-linear).
Plot	The actions, events, conflicts and turning points that propel the story forward. Progression of the story in an original or unpredictable way.
Pacing	Action timing, the speed by which evolve the plot elements and the tempo of character development.
Characters	Personalities that are distinctive, compelling, multi-layered and unpredictable. A protagonist and antagonist with clear and active goals.
Dialogue	Voices that are natural, succinct and unique to each character. Use of language that effectively reveals character and moves the story forward.
Theme	The underlying message of the story as revealed through plot, narrative description and dialogue.
Style/Tone	Overall quality of writing. A cinematic and distinct narrative that effectively conveys the feel of the movie.
Commercial potential	Audience appeal and box-office potential.

Based on these criteria the reader/analyst will mark the script as *recommend*, *consider* or *pass* (reject).

Examples:

Script analysis basic - Alien Attraction
Script analysis basic - Fata Morgana
Script analysis basic - Mad
Script analysis official - Alien Attraction

Rewriting

A much-heard Hollywood slogan is *writing is rewriting*, which can refer to just a polishing job or to a drastic rebuild. You must be willing to change your own creation and decide how far you will go.

A reader might say he likes your script but that the main character should not be a shy boy but a femme fatale. Then another reader suggests that your femme fatale should be a crack addict. Be prepared that the third reader will recommend substituting this sexy crack hooker for a shy boy. If you are dealing with a producer, never do a major rewrite without making a contract first.

Document preparation

After writing and improving your script, you must prepare it for sale.

Script

Nowadays most film companies are green, meaning that preferably they receive digital scripts instead of printed scripts. In case you need to send a printed copy by snail mail the paper requirements are as follows:

- Industry standard page layout is US Letter (8.5 in x 11 in = 215.9 mm x 279.4 mm) and this is the preferred paper size for printed scripts, although lately A4 (8.267 in x 11.692 in = 210 mm x 297 mm) prints are tolerated;
- Blank cover sheet (card stock = cover stock) 3-hole punched, white, 80 lb (= 216 GSM);
- Other pages 3-hole punched, white, 92 brightness, 20 lb (= 75 GSM);
- Brass brads with washers, preferably ACCO Solid round-head Brass Fasteners #5 1-1/4 in (= 3.1 cm) length, with ACCO Brass Washers No.2

matching ACCO Brass Fasteners #5-9. Only put brads in the two outer holes and leave the middle hole empty.

Your cover letter may look as follows:

[Script cover letter - Template Alien Attraction](#)

Logline

Apart from the script itself you will need a logline, which is the TV guide teaser describing the story in one or two sentences. The logline should be written in present tense and no longer than 60 words.

Examples:

Alien Attraction

A young laboratory assistant travels to a remote planet, where he frees an alien girl from a research camp. Her people take him to their home planet. As she helps him to build up a new life, the intimate spark between them becomes an unstoppable fire. Her fiancé loses control...

Alien Attraction 2

A young alien travels to Earth to explore his human roots. After he meets a girl the CIA gets wind of him and takes him to a research station on a barren moon. His new friend has to use all her talents to help him escape, but the CIA doesn't give up that easily...

Fata Morgana

A traffic accident and drugs overdose lead an unruly detective to a group of sadistic criminals operating from a medieval castle.

Mad

A software developer turns mad when the IT department globalizes.

Query letter

When a film company has read your logline or otherwise heard from your script, they may ask you to send them a query letter. The query letter should be written in present tense.

Examples:

Query letter - Template Alien Attraction
--

Query letter - Template Alien Attraction 2
--

Synopsis

You also need a summary of the script. Depending on your personal preferences you may opt for a chronological description of main events or for highlighting certain aspects of the story. The synopsis should be written in present tense and no longer than one page (475 words).

Examples:

Synopsis - Alien Attraction

Synopsis - Alien Attraction 2

Synopsis - Fata Morgana

Synopsis - Mad

Treatment

A treatment is an extended summary. The treatment should be written in present tense and its length may vary from 3 to 12 pages.

Contrary to the logline, query letter and synopsis, I have never needed a treatment.

Examples:

Treatment - Alien Attraction
--

Treatment - Alien Attraction 2
--

Copyright registration

Protect your script or entire document set through copyright registration. This is providing for proof by registration that you were in possession of certain material at a certain date and time.

A basic form of copyright registration is what is called the *poor man's copyright*, because it costs nothing more than a stamp on the envelope that contains the script sent by the author to himself via snail mail.

Another way of copyright registration is via a copyright office, which may be part of an intellectual property office. Copyright offices store a paper or electronic version of your script with a date and time stamp. When needed, for example when you

have a legal dispute about your script, you can obtain a copyright certificate which includes the script as an attachment and on which the copyright office formally declares that your script was in their depot on the stamped date and time. Most copyright offices are commercial. You have to pay a fee for their filing and certification services which in most cases have to be renewed after a certain period of time.

See the [Directory of Intellectual Property Offices](#) for a list of intellectual property and copyright offices recognized by the [WIPO](#), the World Intellectual Property Organization.

Copyright laws may vary per jurisdiction. For example, if you wish to bring a lawsuit before a U.S. court for infringement of a U.S. work you will have to register at the [U.S. Copyright Office](#).

Finding exposure

After registration of your script you are ready to seek exposure.

Directories of film companies

A common suggestion to gain exposure is to acquire address lists of film companies and contact them by phone, e-mail or snail mail. I strongly advise not to do this based on my own experience, which is the following.

On several screenplay related websites I read that getting exposure is as easy as calling or snail mailing query letters to film companies. Because I live in the Netherlands, calling Hollywood would be quite expensive and so I chose the snail mail option. I subscribed to [IMDbPro](#) and filtered out 300 addresses of film companies, including some Indies (film companies independent from Hollywood), individual producers, agents, directors and talent (actors).

I also read that I should be prepared to snail mail my script in case these industry professionals liked my query letter. And that the preferred paper size is US Letter, three-hole punched. Nowhere to find in my region. So I bought three-hole punched US Letter paper, envelopes, ACCO brass brads and washers in the U.S. for about twenty scripts. Quite expensive because of the taxes.

Then I snail mailed the 300 query letters. One third was returned to sender because the mail could not be delivered, another third was returned unread by the

companies with a cover letter explaining that they don't read unsolicited material due to legal and insurance restrictions, and for the remaining third I got no reaction, except for three leads. Two of these leads dried up quickly. The third stopped unexpectedly and without any explanation. I also got a letter which thanked me for my interest in a certain actor and finished with an announcement of the next fan club meeting.

On the aforementioned websites they apparently didn't know that most film companies do not communicate directly with screenplay writers but only with the agents or managers representing them, and that they are green nowadays.

Contests

An accepted method to make yourself known is by participating in screenwriting contests. Google for "screenwriting contest" and you will find plenty. Most contests offer analysis services as well and the option to submit rewritten scripts against a reduced fee. But don't expect too much. Also if you make it to the finals this is no guarantee that your script will attract a producer.

Pitch fests

Pitch fests are meetings organized by film organizations where writers are given some minutes to promote their script before a jury of industry professionals. The meeting location can be physical or online. Google for "pitch fest" to find some.

Writer meetings

Attend screenwriter meetings to enlarge your network.

Script promotion services

These are websites to which writers can submit their spec scripts. The contents of the scripts are indexed such that industry professionals can search them. Some of these services include logline publication as well as pitching to and chatting with industry professionals.

Examples:

InkTip (commercial)
Spec Scout (commercial)
Talentville (commercial)
SimplyScripts (free)

Create your own website

Create your own website to put your scripts on.

Further reading

To improve your screenwriting skills you may read the following books:

Title	Author	First edition	Description
The Screenwriter's Bible	David Trottier	1994	A guide to writing, formatting and selling your script. The recommended book for beginning screenplay writers.
Making a Good Script Great	Linda Seger	2010	A structured approach to screenwriting. Contains a handy checklist at the end of each chapter.
Story - Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting	Robert McKee	1998	A bold description of the essence of screenwriting.
Screenplay - The Foundations of Screenwriting	Syd Field	1979	One of the first books about screenwriting.

Read other spec scripts to learn how to bring theory into practice.

Conclusion

I hope aspiring writers now have a basic understanding about spec screenplay writing.

In Hollywood it is difficult to get your script read or get representation (by an agent or manager). Thousands of scripts are written every year but only a few hundred are actually produced. And many of their directors write the screenplay themselves, which further reduces the chances of other writers.

Knowing the above, if you still want to write screenplays then go for it, regardless of what other people say.

Attachments

Script analysis basic - Alien Attraction

Archive #4001, ALIEN ATTRACTION, Reader #X

What did you like about this script?

ALIEN ATTRACTION is a goofily conventional sci-fi adventure fantasy, with plenty of colorful set pieces. The narrative takes place in a vividly realized future. The writer does some thorough world building, both in terms of future life on Planet Earth and on the alien worlds of VSR-6A and Zienok, and the screenplay is layered throughout with extensive visual details. Every aspect of life within the diegetic world has been carefully thought through. There's an element of fantasy fulfillment at work in the arc of the protagonist: Ronnie begins as an ordinary lab worker, unwilling to get out of bed to go to work, and, through a series of extremely lucky opportunities, ends as the founder of a new race, part human, part aabaa, lord of a fertile green planet. The message of the screenplay seems to be that anything is possible, and it doesn't take itself too seriously. En route to his happy ending, Ronnie demonstrates several heroic qualities that a present-day audience can relate to. He can outshoot a professional sniper, despite the fact that he has no experience of handling a real gun, thanks to the hours of training he has put in on the 'Xcube Three Sixty'. This comes in very useful when he feels the need to rescue a damsel in distress, the captured aabaa Amiena, partly because she reminds him of the lab animals he used to be called on to mistreat. It's not just combat skills that are latent within Ronnie. When he gets a last minute opportunity to enter a triathlon on Zienok, he proves to be a champion athlete with the capacity to defeat all the aabaa who have been training for the event. There's never any doubt that Ronnie will triumph over any and all obstacles thrown in his way, and that he will get the girl, Amiena.

What do you think needs work?

Although it's always good to see depth to an imaginary world, a screenwriter is not a production designer, or a novelist, and must take care not to get bogged down in ultimately trivial details of mise en scène. You need to focus more on developing character, dialogue and action, rather than describing sets and props. The pace of this screenplay is too pedestrian in the first half because large chunks of each page are taken up with unnecessary description, especially of locations or activities that we will only see in one short scene. It takes 22 pages for Ronnie to leave the surface

of the earth, and most of those are taken up with mundane activities that don't have much bearing on his main adventures. Could you get him on his way to VSR-6A by p.10? Even once he's en route, Ronnie is too passive a protagonist, partly because of the over-emphasis on the scenery. He doesn't seem to have any specific ambitions, plans or goals, and just drifts along, saying "Yes" to possibilities on a whim. Could you establish from p.1 that his ambition is to explore the biology of new planets, and that he is passionate about protecting the integrity of new life where it might be found? He should be delighted about the job offer on p.11, rather than saying he needs time to think about it. Once he's made it to Zienok, he doesn't seem particularly excited about the discovery of such an exotic and marvelous creature as Amiena, or even the caterpillars. Could you show him butting heads with Dreshner over the cruel treatment of Amiena prior to the rescue beginning on p.49? As it stands, Ronnie's empathy for the captured alien and his willingness to risk everything for her seem to come out of nowhere.

Archive #4001, ALIEN ATTRACTION, Reader #Y

What did you like about this script?

The story is completely original – judging by the title I imagined I was in for a silly sci-fi comedy. The universe in which the story exists is very well fleshed out and imagined, it treads ground other sci-fi works have previously: I believe avoiding those shortcomings and really developing (often taking a pause from the action sequences) these characters, this could make for a very interesting feature script.

What do you think needs work?

First and foremost I think the title, while apt gives away a little too much. The "alien attraction" doesn't happen via a meet cute on page 5, but until much later in the second act. Ronnie Vermeer has the potential to be a truly engaging character, however I feel like we need to see more of him – after all this is his journey – the arc throughout all three instances requires a little polish. Ronnie is somewhat robbed of that awkward period in one's life – the mid 20s: there is plenty of room to develop and build on that. While his home-life in act one is clearly established

Some of the language, particularly on the first page is a little awkwardly written, this sadly is an immediate turn-off to a reader who might be interested in producing the script and should be resolved. In general the exposition and the sense of the universe is well drawn, however at times the action prose become a little too technically detailed: I think we can move on.

There are minor formatting details that at times get a little confusing – including, for example (page 71-72) – EXT. SHNNING VALLEY – DAY – which contains several sub-scenes including the Main Road and the exterior of the Moon Family House. These should be broke up into individual scenes with designated headings for the ease of the reader, marked by “Continuous” if they are continuing the action from the previous scene. The alien landscapes seem quite well developed (as does New York City in the first act).

Initially New York City (and this time period) is established via the TV screen. This moment goes on a little too long – perhaps if we had bits and snippets of programs and commercials, what this sequences sets out to accomplish can be done in half the time. Once away from Earth the back-stories including those of the supporting characters in the Marines aren’t as interesting as they could be: I’m curious to know a bit more of their back-story. Right now they seem like cartoon characters and where’s the fun in that! The story is often moving too quickly in passages – while not really confusing it’s frustrating when we want just a little more time, especially as Ronnie saves and develops feelings for Amiena. The pace could indeed be slowed down a bit.

The danger of these sense, particularly the Moo family house could appear to be somewhat silly – often the dialogue is a little too on the nose (although much of the medical lingo works well – as its both easy to follow and intelligently researched). We see moments of Ronnie’s infatuation with Amiena, but I’m still not quite sure why he saves her and essentially abandons his mission (although five years is an awful lot of time to “grow up”).

I like that the story includes some elements of day-to-day life however these elements while developing the settings don’t effectively develop characters (although I admire Amiena’s rebellion and her spirit). Developing rich characters will only serve to enhance the pay off that occurs on page 99 when Ronnie admits he likes Amiena – which is the most important scene in the script.

Script analysis basic - Fata Morgana

Archive #6554, FATA MORGANA, Reader #X

What did you like about this script?

You've shown some creativity in the creation of your ring of villains who feature in this story. Adalbert Kammin, with his strange obsession with medieval castles and instruments of torture, is particularly memorable here, as are his extremely multicultural band of thugs. There's also no shortage of action sequences, with the chase that progresses from cars, to 4-wheelers, to a zip line, to pedalos, to jet skis showing off the most Bond-like extravagance. Your final action sequence at the castle, featuring Joe, Brian, and Starsky dishing out a blood bath of epic proportions to the Fata Morgana ring was an inspired use of your established quirky set pieces (having Joe run around in a full suit of armor). I only wish it had actually been the final action beat in your film, as it so clearly deserved to be.

What do you think needs work?

The pacing of your script was incredibly erratic, cutting back and forth from Brian's pursuit of the Fata Morgana gang to Bess and Joe's bizarre courtship. Every time we leave an action sequence in favor of watching Bess and Joe joke around with one another about Dr. Phil, or swim with manatees in Florida, it's as though the forward momentum of your story grinds to a crushing halt, from which it has to recover once the criminals reappear. These two storylines are so diametrically opposed (moving from over the top action to underwhelming banality) and so completely unconnected, until the criminals invade Joe's father's home in Florida, that it felt like two movies in two very different genres folded into one, and just didn't work. You need to find a way to bring these two stories together much earlier on than you do. My suggestion is to done down the romance between Bess and Joe (which plays as very awkward anyway seeing as how their introduction was made when she broke into his bedroom at night because her apartment was being broken into by shady drug dealers) and focus instead on Lori and Bess' connection to the Fata Morgana dealers and how that is currently affecting Bess and, by association, Joe.

I also think your third act is in need of some shuffling, again in the name of keeping up the momentum through to the end of the script. You have this massive action sequence that takes place in the castle where Joe and Brian wipe out 99% of the Fata Morgana ring and rescue Bess. This sequence is so epic, and takes out so many of the bad guys (with the remaining put in jail) that it feels like it ought to be the final

dramatic action beat in your film, and therefore should happen at the end of the script. However, you go on from here for another 20 pages introducing an entirely new plot point about Edward Wilmot having impersonated Florance through use of facial prosthetics and a voice changer. If you're going to make this your final reveal, then this needs to happen in conjunction with that final bloodbath at the castle. You need to plant the seeds of the DEA's involvement in the Fata Morgana gang much earlier on in your story, and Brian needs to put the final pieces of the puzzle together and uncover Edward's deception BEFORE he goes to storm the castle. To separate these two events makes it seem like your film has two endings, (placing a seemingly serene and tranquil epilogue in between them featuring Joe and Bess hiking blissfully through the forest doesn't help this any, either!) and that just feels like overkill. Combine your two endings, and then finish off the story with an actual serene moment between Joe and Bess and your story will feel much tighter for it.

Archive #6554, FATA MORGANA, Reader #Y

What did you like about this script?

All of the gruesome death scenes in the script were very unique and macabre. Between burning eyeballs out then drawing new ones and feeding people to a bear, it becomes quickly evident that the criminals in this work are of the utmost violent souls in the industry. This is helpful because often in movies the crimes and criminals depicted feel very safe, or unrealistic. If this sort of violence is shown on screen the audience will have a very strong repulsion that can only be quenched through seeing those responsible pay. This right here gives your Brian Anderson a real adversary to be wary of and beat. Also, the impaling of the Fata Morgana dealer also feels very appropriate for the alleged seriousness of the drug he was selling. Also by the time we see the impaling victim I was done trying to guess what would happen next with these criminals which is something that is very rare to find. You have a unique talent for creating gruesome deaths for your characters that are fitting their status.

I liked the way you introduced the Roberts sisters. It was unique to choose to start a script with a character who, for all intents and purposes, appears to be our lead and then suddenly kill them. Also, the way in which we then meet Bess Roberts is interesting too. We soon find out that despite being a cancer survivor and barely out of a wheelchair she is able to think on her feet and escape quite tactfully from her intruder. This gives her a depth that makes her less helpless and so she is able to be a real player in the events in the story.

The idea of a new drug that makes people hallucinate and go insane is really not that hard to imagine. With the recent bath salts incidents and attacks, it feels relevant as ever. I had to look up the actual definition of Fata Morgana to really appreciate the meaning. It might be useful to have someone give the meaning behind the name at some point in the story.

What do you think needs work?

One of the things I find troubling about this work is that the lead character, who I suppose we are supposed to feel empathy for, is a cop who abuses the law and his power over and over again. After all, his own captain repeatedly berates him for overdoing things and for not heeding his "sensitivity training." This is, in effect, a cop who is comfortable wasting tax payer money on training he doesn't take seriously. In this day and age, the media is full of stories of police abuse and corruption, and much of the general population either fears the police or distrusts them. So by having a cop who seems determined to not be "by the book," you alienate a large portion of your potential audience. A cop who is not bound by the same law he claims to enforce is no better than the criminals he arrests.

I found that the multi-vehicle, multi-terrain chase sequences was a overdone and kind of hokey. It's fine that they have a chase at some point in the film, but the way it's executed raises a lot of questions. First, why were all of these vehicles unattended? And it seems too much of a coincidence that there would be two of the exact same kind of each vehicle. There is a total of eight unattended vehicles involved, which is highly unbelievable. Also, a pedalo is an extremely slow method of transportation. Such slow speeds take away from what was previously a high speed chase. By slowing down the chase so abruptly, you really hurt the suspense created in the rest of the scene. Furthermore, if Brian is supposed to be a competent leader, then he should have no trouble shooting Nicu while he is fleeing.

Much of the banter between Brian and the chief of police felt cliché. Scenes where the rogue cop is chewed out by his captain are as common as any. It's not that it isn't believable that such interactions could occur, it's just that they seem to occur too often in films of similar genre. The best and most compelling moments in this work are the ones that were the most unique: the deaths and crimes. If you choose to keep the scenes with the chief, perhaps you could give him a little more depth because right now he seems like a stock character.

Just be aware of the effect that some of the depravity in your script will have on your audience. An extreme here and there would be great, but there are one too many

scenes throughout the script that are extremely shocking. The scene that comes to mind is when the woman takes off her panties to reveal blood smeared all over them. This doesn't seem to serve much of a purpose other than shock value. It's important to find a balance between violence with a purpose or just violence for violence's sake.

Also, not a big deal, but there a few formatting errors and typos that could be easily fixed through an editor. Just something to keep in mind.

Script analysis basic - Mad

Archive #6555, MAD, Reader #X

What did you like about this script?

This screenplay begins with the declaration, "Inspired by true events" and in places it certainly feels like a raw *crie de coeur*. The protagonist, Gilles Hudd, endures some outrageous yet all too believable workplace frustrations in Act One, and is likely to be a very sympathetic figure for anyone who has to endure a similarly nightmarish corporate environment. There's some wry observational comedy in here, especially when it comes to contemplating the folly of the \$15,000 coffee machine (and the plastic cup waste it generates) on p.12, or Clarissa's insistence that the "flexible" workplace system is actually fixed (p.20). Given what Gilles has to put up with, the audience is quite likely to remain sympathetic to him after his breakdown on p.22, and excuse his behavior towards Clarissa -- who seems to deserve everything she gets. The action shifts to a much more welcoming and interesting setting on p.43, as Oscar announces that Gilles and his fellow mental patients will be working at the zoo as part of their therapy. The zoo, overseen by Moses Okeke, is a much happier place, almost a fantasy, where the misfits from Helianthus finally find a place where they can feel useful -- as Gilles says on p.66 "I can exploit my talents here". It's sad but telling that Gilles finds shovelling rhino manure a more enjoyable and rewarding occupation than his previous gig in IT Support. It's also quite sweet that he finds love with Rachel in this environment, and that he's able to win her heart by sorting out her new computer on p.62.

What do you think needs work?

The tone is very inconsistent and, overall, the narrative lacks shape and direction. The audience is presented with a series of "this then that" scenes (this happens, then that), without any kind of cohesive context. Gilles, who is a passive protagonist throughout, is moved abruptly from RIF to Helianthus to the zoo, back to RIF and then into the mental health and legal system for the final act, without ever having a plan. It seems particularly odd that Gilles lets Oscar persuade him to return to RIF on pp70-71. Gilles was utterly miserable in the office, and so happy at the zoo, it seems like a bad move from the moment it's first mentioned. Would anyone at RIF even want him back? Perhaps you could give Gilles a good reason to return, such as earning a lump sum of severance pay if he gives up some of the computer network's secret passwords that no one else has been able to retrieve? Gilles' discovery of Rachel's mutilated corpse on p.79 triggers an especially harsh change in tone, after

the light-hearted romance at the zoo, and the enactment of his revenge on his former RIF colleagues using rhino manure. Subsequently, Act Three is very bitter and dark, and not quite in keeping with the mood or style of Acts One and Two. While these sudden shifts in fortune might reflect the twists and turns of a real life journey, they are not very satisfying or rewarding for the audience of a fictional narrative. It's OK to mix elements of tragedy and comedy in the same screenplay, but take care to balance them throughout, e.g. with foreshadowing in Act One, so that the audience are braced for the shock. Resist the temptation to direct actors from the page by dictating nuances of non-verbal communication. The screen direction that Gilles "hisses like a snake" is repeated so often that it becomes meaningless -- leave character tics like this up to the actor to use as he feels appropriate to the moment. Avoid casual racism such as the insistence that Chinese characters are unable to pronounce their "l" sounds -- this is inaccurate, dated and unfair, particularly when applied to a professional such as Jessica Wang.

Archive #6555, MAD, Reader #Y

What did you like about this script?

In concept you have an interesting, if not completely novel idea here; exploring the rather unusual mind of Gilles Hudd and the consequences of his unorthodox responses to the banality of every day life. As far as I know, Tourette's is not a syndrome that has been widely featured in a cinematic format, and as such you've got an opportunity here to shed light on a probably fairly misunderstood condition and the real-life struggles faced by someone having to live with it. I liked the way that you presented Rachel's death, leaving it to come as a complete surprise to the audience much as it was to Gilles, himself. As it came on the heels of a relapse in his condition, the obvious conclusion that I immediately drew was that Gilles had killed her, himself, in a fugue state. I liked that idea, or at least the idea that he would have been implicated in her murder, and left to the seemingly impossible task of proving himself innocent, and I wished you'd explored that angle just a little bit more before Peter's confession.

What do you think needs work?

I'm guessing from this script and the one previous to it, "Fata Morgana" that English is not your first language. While your scripts are clear enough that I could understand and follow the action, your dialogue suffers greatly for lack of vocabulary and understanding of natural English language speech patterns. This is particularly evident in this story, which relies heavily on dialogue to keep your story moving

forward. When your story features scenes that are extremely repetitive and esoteric (your entire first act takes place nearly exclusively at the RIF office, featuring your characters speaking in technical jargon that holds no meaning to anyone who doesn't work in IT) it falls to your dialogue to communicate the various personalities of your characters and keep us engaged in their interactions. When all of your characters speak the same, stilted, awkward manner, we've not even got that left to hold our attention. The result is boredom on the part of your audience. I would have checked out 10 or 15 minutes into this film were I watching it on screen for lack of understanding what was going on or what the point of it all was. Gilles may be drowning in a sea of banality, but that doesn't mean your audience has to drown alongside him! Even your descriptions here were heavily repetitive (how many times do you have to remind us that Harriett Conway works at the front desk? How many times do characters "chortle like a hoarse magpie"?). Your script is entitled "Mad", and I felt like I was being driven a bit mad, myself, from the sheer repetitiveness of it.

In addition, I felt like your story didn't make much logical sense. If Gilles really were so mentally ill as to be a danger to himself or to his co-workers, why would he be allowed to return to work after his initial diagnosis? Furthermore, after the assault and apparent attempted murder of Ivan in the office why on Earth would he be on good enough terms that Harold would give him computers when he calls to ask for them, or that he would be allowed to return to work there in any capacity after his time spent in the mental hospital. Frankly, I was surprised that the patients in the hospital were allowed as much freedom as they were, going to the supermarket, working at the zoo (largely unsupervised and in direct contact with the wild animals, which seems to be a pretty huge liability), etc. I was particularly surprised, as I already mentioned, that Gilles wasn't immediately taken into police custody upon the discovery of Rachel's badly mutilated body, as he was living with her, had a history of mental illness and violent tendencies, and was in her apartment when her father found her dead. Would he not be the most obvious suspect in her murder until Peter's confession? Apparently not, as he's allowed to wander freely, going to bars and then to Peter's trial completely unsupervised. Gilles' behavior throughout the script is so strange and confrontational that it's nearly impossible to like him in any way as a protagonist, and difficult to understand why those around him in your story would care for him as much as they do.

Script analysis official - Alien Attraction

Archive #13-2725JF, ALIEN ATTRACTION, Reader #X

1. What is the writer trying to achieve in this script?

In a decidedly futuristic riff on ROMEO AND JULIET, a young scientist is captured by aliens and taken to their home world, where he falls in love with one of their females.

2. In what ways is the writer successful at achieving his/her goals?

First off, I should congratulate you for what is obviously a prodigious and impressive imagination. ALIEN ATTRACTION contains some truly inventive scenes and items.

I particularly liked the scenes on Amiena's planet that depict the alien culture in detail. I also found the subplot involving the drug secreting leeches to be pretty ingenious.

Ronnie is a very likable character who has the unique ability to find the good in almost every situation. He's cheerful when faced with all but the direst of circumstances and possesses a strong moral compass, as shown in the scene where he rescues Amiena from further vivisection.

Speaking of which, the scenes depicting Amiena being experimented on (p. 42+) are chilling. I like how you visually connect these scenes to the earlier scenes back on earth, where Ronnie and Taylor reluctantly experiment on a rabbit and a guinea pig.

I enjoyed the unexpected twist when the Aabaa ship shows up and captures Ronnie (p. 63), which effectively begins the next phase of your story.

After Ronnie arrives on Amiena's planet, it was an intelligent idea to add the complication that Amiena is engaged to one of her own kind, with the added wrinkle that her betrothed is obviously a less than stellar choice for her.

Although it comes totally out of left field, the scene where Ronnie dazzles the aliens with his hip-hop dance moves (p. 86) had me laughing.

The scene near the end of your script, where Taylor receives a message from Ronnie and learns that he's not only still alive but also quite happy, is charming.

3. In what ways does the screenplay fall short?

The overriding issue with ALIEN ATTRACTION is that you're trying to cover too much ground, which results in your script having an unfocused, episodic feel.

- You start out with a lengthy sequence that establishes Ronnie on earth.
- You send Ronnie into space for reasons that aren't particularly clear.
- Next, your script takes on an AVATAR-like quality where soldiers make war on a peaceful alien environment.
- You then shift focus to Ronnie adapting to a new culture on a different planet.
- Then you tell a story about the unlikely romance between a human and an alien.

While some of these concepts could either stand on their own or be combined into a viable screenplay, your attempt to cover all of them results in a script that lacks a tight plot, a sense of dramatic tension, and the idea that your script is building to a particularly conclusion.

If it were up to me, I'd focus my efforts on the unlikely romance between Ronnie and Amiena. I'd begin my story with Ronnie already on the Aabaa planet – perhaps he's an ambassador, an explorer or part of a cultural exchange program.

Connect Ronnie to Amiena and then take the story from there. You can still generate drama and tension based on the clash of cultures and the fact that Amiena is betrothed to someone else. Think of ALIEN ATTRACTION as ROMEO AND JULIET told in a science fiction context.

If you're determined to stick with your current plot, you must devote some time to connecting the dots and establishing character motivations. For example, Ronnie needs to ask questions and receive detailed information prior to accepting the off-world job.

What is he tasked with? How long will he be gone? What does he stand to gain? What does he stand to lose? Have others done the same job in the past and, if so, what was their success rate? In order for Ronnie to come across as both real and likable, he's got to behave in a way that mimics human behavior.

Happy people don't just accept jobs in dangerous, faraway places without asking questions first. If they do, there must be a reason - such as Ronnie needing to escape a dangerous situation. Currently, none of this is on the page.

The same "dot connecting" must be applied to the scenes where Ronnie is suddenly thrown in with military folks on the strange, new planet. Did he have any inkling that he was going to be thrown into the middle of a dangerous military operation? If not, why is this the case? Was Ronnie tricked into taking the job or was he merely too stupid to ask questions before saying "yes"?

Again, make your protagonist look intelligent by having him ask detailed questions and carefully consider his answers before saying "yes."

Why does Ronnie suddenly run away with Amiena? While we can figure out what is going on based on her cruel treatment at the hands of the SEALs, there's almost nothing on the page to show that Ronnie - your protagonist - has similar feelings.

In other words, this scene will only work if you show Ronnie objecting to the experimentation; first subtly and then with increasing vehemence. Ronnie's escape with Amiena should come only after we understand his opinion and see him try to use other avenues to improve her treatment. Escape should be seen as a (dramatic) last resort.

Despite all your action and inventive locations, your pace is slow due to your laborious approach to writing description and action. First off, your script contains too many unnecessary scenes where characters walk down corridors, wait for trains and ride elevators. Scenes that don't advance your story or add depth to your characters should be cut.

Secondly, your script is absolutely choked with lengthy description, which routinely slows your pace to a crawl.

- Starting on page six, you write two full pages of description to get Ronnie from his home to his office. Cut this down to a few lines.
- On page seventeen, you write three long paragraphs to describe Ronnie taking a shower. Cut this down to a line or two.
- Starting page twenty-four, you write nearly four pages of description recounting Ronnie's cryo-freezing and space flight. Cut this down to a single page at most.

- Avoid repeated but not particularly useful references to the current time and scenes that depict characters paying for meals, etc.

4. On the contest scorecard, you gave this script a total score of: 56. Please explain your criteria.

PREMISE/CONCEPT Score: 5

The script lacks a focused premise and reads like a series of loosely connected stories.

FORMAT/TYPOS Score: 10

The script appears to be formatted correctly.

STRUCTURE Score: 4

Your script is composed of a series of vignettes featuring the same character. Aside from this, there's little continuity.

PLOT Score: 4

Your plot has a chaotic feel, with no sense of cohesion or rising action. ALIEN ATTRACTION has a "first he did this, then he did that, then he went to another planet and did some other stuff" feel to it. This is what is referred to by execs as 'episodic' and is a common reason they pass on scripts at the professional level.

Your plot also has logic issues, where apparently important scenes occur – such as when Ronnie takes the job or when Ronnie escapes with Amiena – with no buildup or explanation as to why they are happening.

Make sure to tell a story with a clear beginning, middle and end.

PACING Score: 4

Your pacing is uneven due to your shambolic approach to storytelling.

Pacing is negatively impacted by lengthy descriptive scenes that may add detail to your world but do nothing to advance your story. (A screenplay is not a novel, nor should it ever read like one – it is a blueprint for a movie.)

CHARACTERS Score: 8

Characters are a strong suit.

As mentioned above, Ronnie is very likable. He's the eternal optimist who wants to see the good in everyone. He's also got a strong moral compass and acts to save Amiena – at the risk of his own life – when he sees her being tortured.

Amiena is charming. She and her people are described in vivid, convincing detail. You do a very solid job depicting an alien culture.

DIALOGUE Score: 6

Dialogue is fun. You do a solid job with your character voices.

Unfortunately, you don't effectively use dialogue to lock conflicts and explain character motivations.

THEME Score: 5

Your themes are muddled by the rambling action in the first two thirds of your script. Once Ronnie arrives on Amiena's planet, the unusual love story between the two of them has a "science fiction meets Romeo and Juliet" vibe.

STYLE/TONE Score: 4

While I certainly approve of your imagination, ALIEN ATTRACTION is absolutely loaded with lengthy, plodding description that often gets in the way of your storytelling.

Your writing feels decidedly novelistic as opposed to cinematic.

COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL Score: 6

If you can focus on the unusual romance between Ronnie and Amiena and dump the lengthy episodes that came before, ALIEN ATTRACTION might have a shot at commercial viability.

5. If you received this screenplay at your agency or production company, would you give it a: *RECOMMEND* *CONSIDER* *PASS* Why? What is your agency or production company currently looking for?

Lack of focus. The final "act" could serve as an interesting sci-fi script.

One company I read for is currently looking for well-written action, crime or action/comedy series. The other two companies casts their nets a bit wider - they're looking for half-hour comedies aimed at affluent, educated adults, hour-long dramas and dramedies with topical, controversial subject matter, movies of the week and feature scripts for their independent production arm, which makes mostly comedies and character driven dramas.

6. How could this writer improve his/her chances of success with this script? What else would you like to tell this writer?

If you're determined to stick with your episodic, description heavy approach – where world building is at least as important as plot – I'd strongly suggest you consider turning ALIEN ATTRACTION into a science fiction novel. If the novel is successful, then it would act as an underlying property for the film version.

If, on the other hand, your intent is to focus on screenwriting, my suggestion would be to get Ronnie to Amiena's planet within your first few pages – or start on him already there – and focus on the Ronnie/Amiena relationship and the drama that comes along with it.

You've got some wonderful inventive ideas – give them more shape and clarity and focus – and know that re-writing is the name of the game – good luck!

Judge: X

Script cover letter - Template Alien Attraction

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February 24th 2014

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Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. Razor,

As agreed I hereby send you a copy of my action/sci-fi
screenplay ALIEN ATTRACTION.

Sincerely (US)/Kind regards (Europe),

Bas Oversteegen

Query letter - Template Alien Attraction

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February 24th 2014

Ralph Razor
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Beverly Hills, CA 90210
USA

Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. Razor,

In the year 2144 the young laboratory assistant Ronnie Vermeer accepts a research job on a remote planet. He lives in a container camp among rough Navy SEALs, who capture an alien girl called Amiena.

Horrified by the painful medical examinations performed on her, Ronnie frees Amiena using a cloak suit. The commander gets more and more frustrated when Ronnie outsmarts him several times.

Amiena's people the Aabaa destroy the container camp with implosion guns and take Ronnie to their home planet. As she helps him to build up a new life, the intimate spark between them becomes an unstoppable fire. Her fiancé loses control...

Please contact me for a copy of my screenplay ALIEN ATTRACTION.

Sincerely (US)/Kind regards (Europe),

Bas Oversteegen

Query letter - Template Alien Attraction 2

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Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. Razor,

In the year 2164 the young alien Soolan ip Vemee travels to New York City to explore his human roots.

He meets the embittered pungoth Michelle Adams, who shows him around.

After chasing a thief Soolan gets arrested. A CIA team for extraterrestrial affairs takes him to a research station on the barren moon Robius-2, where they brutally interrogate him.

Michelle has to use all her talents to help Soolan escape, but the CIA doesn't give up that easily...

Please contact me for a copy of my screenplay ALIEN ATTRACTION 2, which is the sequel to ALIEN ATTRACTION.

Sincerely (US)/Kind regards (Europe),

Bas Oversteegen

Synopsis - Alien Attraction

In the year 2144 young laboratory assistant RONNIE VERMEER accepts a research job on remote planet Vsr-6a, where he joins a Navy SEAL team. His tranquil Earth life changes to the harsh regime imposed by a macho COMMANDER. No private apartment but a squad container that he shares with rough soldiers and a creepy DOCTOR.

During a foot patrol the CORPSMAN gets horribly mutilated by the acid saliva of a giant caterpillar. Ronnie assists the doctor to save his life, but the corpsman dies. Later Ronnie frees another giant caterpillar stuck under a rock.

Ronnie becomes friends with the energetic COMMUNICATOR. He also gets along well with the female SNIPER after he demonstrates his shooting skills with her "baby", a sniper rifle. He learned to shoot this rifle in his gamecube. The SPOTTER develops a grudge against Ronnie. He has an eye on the sniper but she ignores him.

The soldiers capture alien girl AMIENA IP MOO, dropped on the planet by her people the Aabaa to undergo a solitary maturity ritual. When the doctor performs painful medical examinations on her, Ronnie frees her from the army camp wearing a symbiot cloak suit. They flee to a volcanic valley where they nestle in a cave.

Amiena gets high fever after a bug stings her. Ronnie sneaks to the army camp to get medicine but is caught in the act by the spotter. The SEALs chase Ronnie in their patrol plane. He falls down a waterfall. Giant butterflies find him and fly him to the cave.

The Aabaa destroy the army camp with implosion guns and take Ronnie to their home planet Zienok. When Amiena helps Ronnie to build up a new life her fiancé DOEBAK IP ZAAG gets jealous.

When Ronnie participates in an Aabaa triathlon Doebak sabotages his harpoon gun. The harpoon line breaks and Ronnie falls into a lake. He fights for his life with giant ants in a mirror maze of energy crystals and a marsh with flesh-eating plants.

During a trial a surveillance video shows Doebak sabotaging the harpoon line. The judge sentences him to become his own tormentor. A hovercraft drops him between the energy crystals. The giant ants kill him.

Amiena and Ronnie marry in a stately castle house. A priest burns bridal bracelet tattoos in their wrists. They get a son, SOOLAN IP VEMEE. Green eyes, a mix of Ronnie's blue eyes and Amiena's yellow eyes.

The Vemee family has holidays on planet Vsr-6a, where Ronnie meets again with his friends the butterflies.

Synopsis - Alien Attraction 2

In the year 2164 young alien SOOLAN IP VEMEE travels in a modified garden chairbed through a wormhole from planet Zienok to New York City. He cloaks the vehicle using a remote control.

He visits TAYLOR ADAMS, the former colleague of his father. He explains to her that he wants to explore his human roots. Her husband doesn't want Soolan to stay with them. She says he should try with her granddaughter MICHELLE ADAMS.

He stays in the cozy houseboat of Michelle, a pungoth. She takes him with her to club "Grim Reaper", where she works behind the bar. They visit the Ground Zero Building, a giant flower of hope and glory. He chases a thief who gets killed in an engine test chamber. Soolan is arrested because he can't identify himself.

A special CIA team for Extraterrestrial Life Investigation, team ELI, gets wind of Soolan. A fighter takes Soolan to a research station on Robius-2, a freezing barren moon with firon and frice mines.

The sadistic DOCTOR OLSON tortures Soolan, who escapes from the research station. OFFICER ASHFORD and OFFICER KANE chase him in an amphibian vehicle. They capture him when he runs across a glacier pool with his hovershoes.

The chilly captain KATHY SPARROW reports to her opportunistic boss that with hovershoes one can walk across water. He wants to take all the credit and says they will investigate Soolan's hovershoes and mobile device further on Earth.

On Earth Michelle exchanges her pungoth look for an elegant outfit and applies for a Robius-2 tour guide job. On Robius-2 she guides a group of tourists through a firon and frice mining area. An icequake occurs. One tourist gets killed and others injured.

Michelle takes the tourists to the research station for medical assistance. She finds Soolan and gives him a laser cutter and untraceable wridlet. Soolan tortures doctor Olson and escapes from the station to a hoverfish cave deep in the frice.

A giant hoverfish hovers Soolan to the firon mine where he takes a hopper to a freighter, which brings him back to Earth.

With the help of bouncer LENNOX from club Grim Reaper, Soolan and Michelle steal a symbiot cloak suit from an army base. Wearing the symbiot Soolan steals back his hovershoes and remote control from the CIA Technical Lab.

The police chase Soolan through a harbor and Michelle through the apartment tower where lives Taylor. They meet at Soolan's vehicle and disappear through a wormhole just before the police can catch them.

Synopsis - Fata Morgana

Unruly detective BRIAN ANDERSON of the Denver Police Department investigates a hit-and-run case concerning administrative assistant LORI ROBERTS, and an overdose case about the hallucinogenic party drug Fata Morgana.

The car driver and drugs supplier turn out to be the same man, Albanian criminal NICU TAJAJ. When Brian questions his niece DRINA KABUZIS at the adventure park owned by him, Brian runs into him and chases him through the park. But he escapes.

The POLICE CHIEF criticizes Brian's impulsiveness and sends him to behavior therapy.

Lori's sweet sister BESS ROBERTS now lives in her apartment. When Nicu Tajaj rummages in the apartment, Bess flees to neighbor JOE FLETCHER, a friendly technician. Brian advises her to stay elsewhere pending the investigation. Joe lets her stay with him.

Bess and Joe get along very well and go for a holiday to Crystal River, Florida, where works his father MR. FLETCHER as a marine biologist. A group of criminals led by Nicu Tajaj attack them. They kill all criminals except Nicu, who flees into the swamp.

Brian follows Drina to a medieval castle inhabited by creepy Lord ADALBERT KAMMIN and sadistic Lady FATIMA, who exploit a Fata Morgana lab and torture unfaithful members of their organization.

Brian discovers that Lori worked for a Fata Morgana unit of the DEA. Team leader FLORENCE JONES tells him to no longer interfere and lets one of her agents follow him and intimidate his wife.

The criminals abduct Bess and Joe to the castle. They rip out her belly piercing, which belonged to Lori and contains a chip with the latest Fata Morgana formula. They inject Joe with Fata Morgana, who experiences hellish hallucinations and takes revenge by slashing the criminals, dressed as a knight in a suit of armor.

Brian arrives at the castle. He chases Fatima, whom he sees for the first time and who exactly resembles Florence Jones regarding physical appearance and voice.

Brian, Bess and Joe kill all criminals, except Fatima, who escapes. Before Nicu Tajaj dies, he confesses that he loved Lori but that he killed her because she was a hooker working for the DEA. Then he discovered that the Fata Morgana chip was missing and that Lori must have stolen it the day before she died.

A HITMAN tries to kill Bess and Joe during a hike in the Rockies. Bess calls Brian, who shoots the hitman.

Florence is arrested. She tells Brian that she has been framed. Possible suspect is operator EDWARD WILLMOT, who has her posture and worked as a special effects artist. Brian follows Edward to the castle, who possesses a mask resembling Florence's face and a voice changer device that simulates Florence's voice.

Brian calls the Police chief telling him that Edward is Fatima.

Edward captures Brian and tortures him. Police chief kills Edward.

Synopsis - Mad

Software developer GILLES HUDD is the driving IT force at credit insurance company RIF. He lives by himself in a modest apartment.

When the company globalizes the IT Department is split into a business support, architect and development team, led by former colleagues and authoritarian external contractor IVAN KOLOBNEV.

Gilles's work situation changes from a private working room with little interference and direct communication lines, to flexible workplaces and a formal nightmare of guidelines and meetings.

The new managers don't facilitate but delegate, don't cooperate but dictate. Gilles must take minutes, specify risk percentages, fill in time sheets and make status reports.

After a function devaluation he can no longer afford his car and goes to work on his bike, which he can't park anymore at the office because it disfigures the company's professional image.

Gilles develops negative associations with the color yellow, a motor and vocal tic, he hears voices, swears at people and thinks he is being followed. When Ivan fires him because of negligence, he snaps and tries to strangle Ivan with his yellow tie.

Gilles is admitted to a mental hospital. Together with masochistic AXEL, megalomaniac PETER HOLMES and nymphomaniac YAHYAH he attends therapy carried out by hippie JOANNA WHITEEAGLE. His psychiatrist OSCAR LYNDECK is a medication freak and suffers from mysophobia.

As a form of therapy the patients become zookeeper trainees at zoo "THE ARK". Thanks to the qualities of director MOSES OKEKE and his radiant daughter RACHEL OKEKE, their mental state improves.

Gilles takes care of the rhinos and develops a special bond with orangutan MINDY. He likes to do repair chores and installs a computer network, which boosts the efficiency. Rachel helps him to become a good zookeeper and they fall in love.

It's going so well that Gilles is dismissed from the mental hospital. Moses offers Gilles a zookeeper job but Oscar convinces Gilles to first join a reintegration project at RIF, where Gilles turns mad again. He drives to RIF in a zoo tuk-tuk and shovels manure all around the IT Department. The police arrest him.

When Gilles visits Rachel to apologize for his behavior, he finds her mutilated corpse. His world collapses into a deep depression. He gets drunk in a gloomy bar and has sex with his former neighbor DOREEN. A group of thugs and the police beat him up.

During a therapy session the police arrest Peter Holmes for the murder of Rachel. Peter confesses that he is a rapist and sadist. Gilles murders Peter in the courtroom and flees.

Oscar and Moses find Gilles in the arms of Mindy. He tells them

that he doesn't want to live among humans anymore and will stay with Mindy. A prisoner transport vehicle takes him away.

Treatment - Alien Attraction

"Alien Attraction"
by Bas Oversteegen

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2144, New York City. Residential megastructures between which swarm Hoppers and rush maglev metros. The skyline dominated by the Ground Zero Building, a giant flower of hope and glory.

Young laboratory assistant RONNIE VERMEER has no family, no girlfriend. But he feels all right, likes to run and play games.

His colleague TAYLOR ADAMS tests her newly developed medicine Vitanan on a cute rabbit and adorable guinea pig, who go wild and make a mess of the lab. The cruelty of vivisection.

Ronnie accepts a research job on a remote uninhabited planet, curious, attracted by the unknown. Taylor gives him a pillbox with Vitanan remarking that it might save his life when in danger. He promises to send her a tachyo message when possible.

He takes a hopper to a space station where he boards a carrier spaceship. The first time that he leaves Earth. After five years of hypersleep he awakes from a nightmare in his cryogenic storage capsule, pulls tubes out of his nose and throat and kicks off the canopy to not drown in ice-cold cryo fluid.

He joins a Navy SEAL team which is dropped on planet Vsr-6a. Hot humid jungles with lakes. A construction bot builds a container camp. Ronnie's tranquil Earth life changes to the harsh regime imposed by a macho COMMANDER. No private apartment but a squad container that he shares with rough soldiers and a creepy DOCTOR.

During a foot patrol the CORPSMAN gets horribly mutilated by the acid saliva of a giant caterpillar. Ronnie assists the doctor to save his life, but the corpsman dies.

Ronnie's interest in technical stuff and Hip Hop music makes him become friends with the energetic COMMUNICATOR. He also gets along well with the female SNIPER after he demonstrates his shooting skills with her "baby", a sniper rifle. He learned to shoot this rifle in his gamecube. The SPOTTER develops a grudge against Ronnie. He has an eye on the sniper but she ignores him.

The soldiers capture alien girl AMIENA IP MOO, dropped on the planet by her people the Aabaa to undergo a solitary maturity ritual. The doctor performs painful medical examinations on her. She stings him with her hair, causing temporary paralysis.

Ronnie frees a giant caterpillar stuck under a rock.

He overhears the doctor asking the commander permission to perform an internal pelvic exam on Amiena. That night he escapes with her from the camp wearing a symbiot cloak suit to pass senti patrol robots unseen. In the jungle hang giant luminous

cocoons.

He damages the symbiot and cuts a chip out of his wrist with the survival knife of Amiena. They find a volcanic valley where they nestle in a cave. With her bolas Amiena hunts a bird, which they prepare on an improvised barbecue above a small lava stream.

A sawbird dives the glistening chip out of a mountain stream. The SEAL's patrol plane tracks Ronnie via his wrist chip, but instead of to Ronnie the signal leads to the nest of the aggressive bird.

A bug stings Amiena. She gets high fever. Ronnie calls the communicator on his holophone, takes Vitanan pills and runs to the container camp like a prehistoric animal infected with rabies. Underway he fights with a tigerwolf.

When the communicator gives Ronnie antihistamine pills and an assault rifle, he is caught in the act by the spotter. The patrol plane chases Ronnie through a sandstone valley and an area with waterfalls, where Ronnie damages the plane by throwing stones. He slips into the water and falls down a waterfall.

As he regains consciousness on a lake beach, giant butterflies land next to him like angels. One of them, which has a deformed wing, pushes him on the back of the leader. They fly him to the cave. Amiena takes the medicine. She recovers.

The doctor betrays the communicator when he talks to Ronnie on the phone. The commander summons Ronnie to return to the camp with the alien girl and the billion dollar symbiot suit. Ronnie responds that he will shoot everybody that attacks him. As the commander goes ballistic the sniper has trouble not to laugh.

Ronnie and Amiena take a shower under a steaming waterfall. They splash water on each other.

An Aabaa falcon spacecraft lands before the cave. Aabaa soldiers capture Ronnie after shooting him in the ankle with a harpoon gun. Amiena attacks a soldier. She crushes his visor with her bolas and stings him with her hair.

The falcon spacecraft destroys the container camp with implosion guns, killing the whole Navy SEAL team.

Human command declares the Vsr-6 planetary system a forbidden zone for the coming decade. At the tissue lab the BOSS OF TAYLOR tells her that Ronnie has died.

The Aabaa soldiers take Ronnie to their home planet Zienok. During a medical examination doctors implant a universal language translator and cure his ankle wound.

A police dropcar brings him to the scale house of the Moo family. Amiena teaches him how to write, gets embarrassed when the education board shows a picture of kissing teenagers.

During a little ceremony in a chic mountain chalet, Amiena is engaged to slacker DOEBAK IP ZAAG. Workers place an engagement totem before the exterior door of the Moo family scale house.

Amiena takes Ronnie to the aquafarm of the Zaag family. While Ronnie catches fish in a self-service fishing store, Doebak quarrels with Amiena about Ronnie. She discovers that Doebak uses drug leeches. Back home she damages the engagement totem.

AMIENA'S FATHER promises that Doebak will be forced into rehab.

At night Amiena's brother WAKIEL takes Ronnie to bar "The Bigjaw". Wall has an art print of a giant ant. A junkie tries to sell them drug leeches and a drunk hooker kisses Ronnie. The next morning Amiena sees the lipstick mark on Ronnie's cheek and gets mad.

Amiena and Ronnie participate as couple in a dance contest. They do a Hip Hop dance act. When Ronnie does the moonwalk the Aabaa go wild. They only know traditional dancing and plucking music like of Victorian music boxes. Doebak leaves the room with big steps.

Ronnie participates in a triathlon race. Swimming, running across land and water with hovershoes, and shooting. Doebak sabotages Ronnie's harpoon gun. The line snaps and Ronnie falls into a lake.

He swims to an island where he escapes from bigjaws in a mirror maze of energy crystals. They make a live bridge and chase him through a marsh with electric centipedes and flesh-eating plants.

Back home Amiena seduces him. As they make love she stings him with her hair injecting dopamine, giving him immense pleasure.

During a trial a surveillance video shows Doebak sabotaging the harpoon line. The judge sentences him to become his own tormentor. A hovercraft drops him on the island with bigjaws, which kill him.

Amiena and Ronnie marry in a stately castle house. A priest burns bridal bracelet tattoos in their wrists.

They get a son, SOOLAN IP VEMEE. Green eyes, a mix of Ronnie's blue eyes and Amiena's yellow eyes.

The Vemee family has holidays on planet Vsr-6a, where Ronnie meets again with his friends the butterflies. At the destroyed container camp he finds an intact tachyo and sends Taylor a message.

The Vemee family watches a magnificent sunset, nestling together on a lake beach.

Treatment - Alien Attraction 2

"Alien Attraction 2"
by Bas Oversteegen

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2164, Kandai City on planet Zienok.

NOTE: See my screenplay "ALIEN ATTRACTION", of which this screenplay is the sequel taking place twenty years later.

SOOLAN IP VEMEE, son of RONNIE VERMEER and AMIENA IP MOO, goes to the apartment of his mother's friend EVAANE. He steps in a modified garden chairbed which transports him through a wormhole to an abandoned quay next to an apartment tower in New York City.

He cloaks the chairbed using a remote control, gives cookies to a street dog and goes to the apartment of TAYLOR ADAMS, the former colleague of his father. He explains to her that he wants to explore his human roots. Her husband doesn't want Soolan to stay with them. She says he should try with her granddaughter.

He takes the metro to the cozy houseboat of MICHELLE ADAMS, a pungoth who wears heavy makeup and hair permed in spikes. She first sends him away but calls him back.

She takes him with her to club "Grim Reaper", where she works behind the bar. Soolan amazes everybody with some cool Hip Hop dance moves, which he learned from his father.

Michelle takes Soolan to a boutique where she buys him new clothes. She gets jealous when a sales girl flirts with him.

Michelle takes Soolan to a swimming pool. He races against an ARROGANT SWIMMER and observes a tiger decoration. Michelle says the tiger is her favorite animal.

She takes Soolan to the roof of the Ground Zero Building, a giant flower of hope and glory. A SHABBY GUY steals her necklace, a gift from her deceased mother. Soolan chases him. The thief gets killed by a plasma discharge in an engine test chamber. Soolan is arrested because he can't identify himself.

A special CIA team for Extraterrestrial Life Investigation, team ELI, gets wind of Soolan. They have a "REPTILE GIRL" file with a description and photos of Amiena. A BALD POLICE OFFICER takes Michelle to the harsh commander of the team, captain KATHY SPARROW, who interrogates Michelle. Michelle says she just met Soolan in the club and doesn't know anything about him.

A fighter takes Soolan to a research station on Robius-2, a freezing barren moon with firon and frice mines. The ELI team makes fun of his green nails and dresses him up like a girl. They put him in a prisoner cell inside an interrogation room.

The medical laboratory technician MILDRED ROONEY examines

Soolan's cookies, hovershoes, remote control and backpack.

The sadistic DOCTOR OLSON tortures Soolan, who escapes from the research station. OFFICER ASHFORD and OFFICER KANE chase him in an amphibian vehicle along a canal and through a rocky valley. Soolan escapes from them in a maze of firon dunes. He spends the night between shrub twigs.

In the morning he discovers that he lies in an old raptor bird nest. The giant raptor birds chase him but leave him alone after he attacks them with a raptor bird bone. He returns to the canal where the amphibian vehicle again chases him. He runs across a glacier pool. The officers capture him.

Kathy Sparrow reports to her boss the CHIEF SPECIAL ACTIVITIES that with hovershoes one can walk across water. He wants to take all the credit and says they will investigate Soolan's hovershoes and mobile device further on Earth.

On Earth Michelle exchanges her pungoth look for an elegant outfit. In a bar she chums up with the bald police officer and goes home with him. She finagles Soolan's whereabouts from him.

Michelle applies for a tour guide job and gets an untraceable wridlet from LENNOX, bouncer of club Grim Reaper and former member of the Mambas gang.

On Robius-2 Michelle guides a group of tourists through a firon mine and plays a holographic board game with them. She shows them a frice mine where meltmoles melt tunnels in frice glaciers. An icequake occurs. A TOURIST gets killed and two others injured.

Michelle takes the tourists to the research station for medical assistance. Kathy Sparrow doesn't recognize Michelle. Michelle sabotages a heating system and finds Soolan. She hides a laser cutter and the untraceable wridlet under his mattress and tells him he can take a hopper at the firon mine.

Soolan knocks down doctor Olson and Kathy Sparrow, blocks the door of the interrogation room and flees through the window. As he frees a hoverfish from an aquarium, officer Ashford and officer Kane catch him in the act. They chase him in their amphibian vehicle along the canal and into a frice mine, where they shoot him with a taser rifle. Soolan falls into a mineshaft.

In the research station the officers find doctor Olson and Kathy Sparrow. Soolan has tortured the doctor and humiliated Kathy Sparrow by painting lipstick on her naked body.

The hoverfish finds Soolan and takes him to a cave deep in the frice. Out of shed hoverfish skins he makes a bed and a poncho. The hoverfish takes Soolan to the firon mine, where Soolan trades the poncho for a firon tiger decoration.

Soolan boards a freighter. He plays an action game in a gamecube. A hopper takes him to Earth where he gets a lift from Indian truck driver CATAHECASSA alias Black Hoof. Two hillbilly criminals attack them but Soolan kills one with a self-made bolas and Catahecassa kills the other with his bow.

Soolan visits Michelle. He gives her the firon tiger decoration and suggests he can better stay in a hotel. Doctor Olson confessed that Soolan's remote control is in the technical lab

of the CIA.

Lennox steals an ambulance. He makes a model hopper loaded with explosives crash into a military base. Disguised as paramedics Soolan and Michelle steal a symbiot cloak suit from the base.

Soolan tests the symbiot at the Mambas clubhouse, where he blasts away their camper. Cloaked by the symbiot suit he steals back his hovershoes and remote control from the technical lab of the CIA.

In the Robius-2 database the CIA finds a namelink John Aabaa mapped to a CIA suspense account, with recent payments in New York. The police search Michelle's houseboat.

Soolan goes to Michelle's houseboat. He tells her that he will leave the next morning and that his cloaked vehicle stands on an abandoned quay next to the apartment tower where lives Taylor. She says she played there when she was little. That evening they make love. The next morning they say goodbye. Soolan says that he loves her but can't stay because the CIA would never leave them alone.

The CIA detects a hotel payment on the John Aabaa namelink. A police hopper chases Soolan through a harbor. In a vision of an Indian horse with black hooves he gallops across the water into a boathouse. He swims under water to the abandoned quay.

In the Robius-2 database the CIA finds the name Michelle Adams.

Michelle visits Taylor. At the exit of the apartment tower she runs into police officers with a WRID chip tracker. They chase her through the building.

Soolan gives the street dog his remaining cookies. Michelle runs out of a ventilation tunnel. She tells Soolan that she loves him. They step in the chairbed. The street dog also jumps in.

As the police hopper drops policemen on the quay and the police officers rush out of the ventilation tunnel, the chairbed disappears in a wormhole. It reappears in Evaane's apartment where waits Amiena, arms crossed on her chest.