

SAMPLE COVERAGE – SHORT FILM (UNDER 15 PAGES)

Notes I made while I was reading...

(Pg1) I really enjoy the surreal, almost nightmarish tone you set up. It becomes clear very early on that the Goalie figure is in a way supernatural, an embodiment of the protagonist's fears and insecurities, and that he's therefore allowed to behave in ways that wouldn't make sense with a more "realistic" conception of the character and the world around him. Establishing this on the first page opens up the possibilities for the direction of your story, and gives you license to push the visuals in a more expressive way than you'd be able to given a plainer story world.

(Pg2) I think the distinction between ice hockey and field hockey, and what that difference says about Chris, is really effective. Feels very suburban/Canadian too, which adds a lot of specificity to the story.

(Pg 3) This line...

CHRIS

How's your cat doing? I remember last year you were saying he wasn't eating much because of a virus. His name was Julius right? How's Julius doing?

...is funny, but you could stretch the humour a lot further than you do. It's funny because Chris has memorized minute details from the life of a person who barely seems to know him, but you halt the momentum of the bit by immediately ending it with some useless patter ("His name was Julius right? How's Julius doing") that might make the dialogue sound "naturalistic" and "conversational," but just sits there as comedy. He could go on a lot longer about the particular changes in Julius' personality, the bureaucracy at the veterinarian's, the financial difficulties in treating the cat – *whatever*, just as long as you give us more, to make Chris' delusion more comically palpable. And after he's done going on and on Marcia looks up from her work and asks "I'm sorry?" – she wasn't listening (or something funnier than that).

(Pg6) I love the prolonged focus on the moment when Brianne bites the éclair. I think the script would benefit from more "throw away" moments like this one. The moment is totally visual, and because the subject is so banal and so devoid of meaning (unless there is some metaphoric significance attached to the éclair that I'm not getting) the effect of the disproportionate amount of attention it's given is somewhat unsettling. This is the most genuinely dreamlike moment in the script, and has that creepy effect of a confusing dream (or a David Lynch movie), where you feel that there are forces at work around you that you don't understand.

(Pg7) I thought you did a great job with the first meeting between Brianne and the Goalie, where we can't hear what they are saying (but we can guess). This was the section of your script that I could "see" in my mind the most clearly as I was reading it.

(Pg8) it might be true that this exchange...

BRIANNE

So did you shoot on him?

CHRIS

No I didn't shoot on him. It was weird. I felt uncomfortable.

BRIANNE

What did you do?

CHRIS

Nothing. I left.

BRIANNE

That's not very interesting.

CHRIS

What was I supposed to do?

BRIANNE

I dunno, I mean you're always practicing by yourself. Wouldn't it help...

...

BRIANNE

So what did he do when you left?

CHRIS

He just stayed there, I guess.

BRIANNE

Hmmm, now that's interesting.

...Is just as bland as we might expect a conversation between two regular people to be, but do you want the dialogue in *this* story to be "convincing" in that hum-drum way, or do you want it to emphasize the overall broad tone of your story?

Big Picture Critiques

I enjoyed the blackly comic outlook you have on your main character and his arch. There is something very classical about the story of a schmuck whose failure is always as great as the effort he makes, and that familiarity gives the narrative a feeling of inevitability

which is essential to all dark comedies. You also clearly understand irony, which is crucial if you want to be a writer.

The particulars of Chris and Brianne's characters should be clearer and stronger. About Chris, I wasn't sure for the first half of your script whether he was a conceited jock or an insecure schmuck. The distinction is subtle but important. When he explodes at Brianne and the Goalie on the hockey field, telling them that he knows they think he "can't cut it," he reveals a level of *conscious* insecurity that up until this point was not apparent as a defining attribute of his personality. If you build Chris' awareness of his own faults into the earlier scenes, he will come across as a more complete character. He might be trying to *suppress* his indefatigable insecurity, but that evident, *active* suppression will make him more comprehensible and relatable, in the first half, than he currently is. And funnier, too.

Your treatment of Brianne is a little more complicated. She is not supposed to be a fully fleshed out character; it's more important that she be that obscure object of desire for your protagonist than she be a "real woman." At the same time you want her to be distinctive enough to be appealing and memorable as a character. I actually really like how few attributes she has: she likes tanning, éclairs, and the Goalie. I think the answer to how to strengthen her character is merely to play up the ways those attributes effect your protagonist. The éclairs I think are suitably oblique. But what about the tanning? There is something you find humorous about this part of her character that I'm not totally getting. If I were to guess I'd say it has to do with her sex appeal, and the way that plays on Chris' insecurities. She is turning herself into a prime sexual object, and deep down Chris knows that the ultimate result of this self-improvement on her part is her unavailability to him, a loser. Is this the source of his aversion to her tanning? You could play this up using only descriptions of Chris' body language, without having to add any dialogue.

Conclusions

I think you have the soul of a comedian, but you are constraining yourself by trying to emulate the same naturalism that is so common of 90% of shorts out there today. The naturalistic pattern for your dialogue is only useful up to a point before it becomes counter-intuitive to the overall broad, satiric, surreal style of your storytelling here. You should punch up a lot of your dialogue by increasing the frequency of jokes, or bits, and eliminate a lot of the padding ('um's, 'like's, and other words that don't add anything). You have a lot of good bits, but I think you should let them breathe.

For instance: the first scene between Chris and Brianne, where he's telling her about the Goalie and we start to get an inkling of her romantic interest in Chris' rival. Now, I don't want you to take what I'm about to say as a negative criticism, because it's not: there is not a great deal of suspense in your story. As soon as Brianne says "Now that's interesting" re: the Goalie, we know that she is going to end up with him. Like I said

earlier, it's a classic comedic arch. That inevitability is only a problem if you only subtly hint at it, instead of milking it for all of its comedic value.

Suggestions

I would recommend replacing the “naturalistic” dialogue with dialogue that is larger than life, exaggerated, funnier; dialogue that emphasizes what is surreal about the situation. Something Chris says could spark an intense, clearly sexual interest from Brianne, and she starts grilling him for personal details about the Goalie. What does he look like? What nationality was he? What was he wearing? Chris, in his eternally submissive way, cannot help but answer, and every new detail adds to Brianne's arousal. Still, Chris stubbornly refuses to acknowledge what is obviously going on with the girl he fancies himself dating. Compounding the humour in this way would intensify the characters' personalities: Chris is hopelessly insecure; Brianne is a slave to her impulses.

Besides Chris and Brianne, the other characters don't need complicating. After the two leads, I would focus instead on the visuals. Like I said, I enjoy that your story lends itself to a lot of expressive visuals. I'm not sure I like some of your choices, though. When you first introduced the lettering on Chris' ceiling (“You are a champion”) I thought you were starting up a motif where we would constantly return to Chris' bedroom until the words had changed to indicate the change in the way the character sees himself. I really liked this idea. But due to time constraints, I think you were not able to return to the bedroom, and you had to fit the written slogan into the field hockey showdown. I think shoehorning those words into the later scene is “showing your hand” a little too much. Although their appearance on the net is dreamlike in the sense that it's a hallucinatory vision that would not occur in real life, it still feels too literally motivated by the scenario, and therefore instead of feeling genuinely dreamlike (ala the moment with the éclair that I like so much) the moment feels like a director trying too hard to tell me what the story means. The story arch is already so clear, the literal emphasis is unnecessary. I would prefer more weird moments like Brianne with the éclair, which throw me off because of their ambiguity, instead of their obvious purpose. Go all out with the dreamy stuff!

The only other thing I'm not sure about is the epilogue. On the one hand, I like the way Chris seems to have accepted his limitations and the final comic twist when we learn he really hasn't. On the other hand it goes on too long and the dialogue from the two nameless hockey players feels a little bit strained. I am also pretty confused about how present Chris and Brianne have been in each other's lives over the past two months. She seems pretty comfortable up in the stands, but when Chris speaks to her afterwards it sounds like they haven't seen each other in a long time.

Having said that, I still think the script comes together at the very end. I think you want to compress the epilogue as much as possible, but leave the ending the way it is.