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SAMPLE FEEDBACK: FEATURE SCREENPLAY

This is an example of feedback on a “Full Length Feature Screenplay.”

The Feature Review is for the writer who wants a complete reading with thorough and comprehensive feedback on not only the fundamentals of format and spelling, but on story structure, character development, motivation and more.

PLEASE NOTE: This example is an amalgam of notes from different projects. Thus you may see some contradictory feedback. Do not be alarmed.

WHAT THE WRITER GOT

This writer received her PDF back with *103 individual notes and comments embedded*. The comments point out passages I like, typos, points of confusion, etc.

She also got:

- A new Logline illustrating what I perceived as the protagonist, goal, challenge, and consequence
- A one page Synopsis illustrating what I perceived as the structure of the story

And an 8 page document with a detailed narrative and 1-5 score for each of the following:

- Character Development
- Dialogue and Voice
- Description
- Format
- Spelling
- Concept
- Story Structure

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SAMPLE EMBEDDED COMMENTS FROM THE PDF

COMMENT: "... a drab shift, similar to a hospital gown." PET PEEVE: I'd rather have a specific description than a simile. If "shift" is a term you're not confident everyone will understand, something like "drab, shapeless sack dress" could work. NOTE though that hyperspecific wardrobe descriptions should prove to be story-relevant; otherwise they're to be avoided.

COMMENT: This is the page, and the conversation, that really starts defining the two sisters, right through the next sequence. It's working. But just consider if it's doing everything it can – it's a watershed moment. And everything they each choose to do from here on out should reflect this state of mind, or a motivated move away from it.

COMMENT: Again, nice exposition. Tells me something about Larry. Maybe a bit more clarity on his personal experiments, begin to tease his terribleness even more. But it's good stuff.

COMMENT: "Brownish-green ice" – PET PEEVE. I don't know why this bothers me. Greenish brown, yellowish blue, any of those "ish" phrases... they're noncommittal and don't tell me more about the color. Why not "puke green" or "shit brown"? Note that "chocolate brown" provides a wholly different response than "shit brown." Do something more unique that evokes a specific and personal response.

COMMENT: The whole DREGS thing is interesting, but too nonspecific for me. Feels like a vestigial element from an earlier draft. At first, I didn't understand that "DREGS" is a euphemism for people who scavenge the dump. The phrase needs some kind of introduction. What are they doing? Eating the bodies? I know that later we learn the Rebels pose as Dregs to get ID tags from the bodies there. But I don't get the impression that's what REAL DREGS are doing. This needs more clarity from the get-go. But it'll add more great texture to our understanding of the culture and society at large.

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EXCERPTS FROM THE 8 PAGE DOCUMENT (I DO NOT PULL PUNCHES)

DESCRIPTION SCORE: 1.5

Your description text is overwritten and redundant. This script could easily be twenty pages shorter just by editing the redundancies and run-on sentences (and imagine how much more time you could spend on character and plot with twenty new pages to play with.) You are hyperspecific in your detail, and should not be concerning yourself at all with wardrobe, makeup, blocking, or camera direction. This is not supposed to be literature. This is a blueprint for a movie.

SPELLING SCORE: 1

I said all I need to say above. It's unreadable as it is. Align yourself with a writing partner who can at least function as an editor. No matter how great you make your characters and plot, nobody will read your screenplay when it's got these problems. Seriously, if you have more than six typos in the entire screenplay, you're in trouble. And you should be sure to have ZERO in the first ten pages.

DIALOGUE AND VOICE SCORE: 1.5

Some of your characters do have unique voices. While I'd be hard pressed to tell most of the teens apart based on their voices, they do all sound decidedly more like teens than the adult characters. Unfortunately, your adults also all sound like one another. So you're on the right track but you need to work more on finding each character's unique voice.

Your dialogue ranges from naturalistic and charming to horribly expository. There are moments, mostly when it's intimate moments between characters (either as lovers or as bros), that the dialogue is very sweet and charming, or natural and true.

Then, when it's time for the adults to speak you fall back on stilted prose that doesn't flow naturally, or using the dialogue to explain the plot to the reader. This is expository, and it's not a good thing. If you must "explain the plot" through dialogue – the reasons why people make the choices they do, or why they take the actions they take – you need to find more subtle ways to do it. Assuming you can't avoid it. Which you should whenever possible. What you have now feels very much like you made a story outline about why certain things happen, and then just turned the bullet list into dialogue.

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EXCERPTS FROM THE 8 PAGE DOCUMENT (I TRY TO BE VERY INVESTED IN YOUR STORY)

If I had to hazard a guess I'd say that you know the intricacies of your fictional universe, its politics, and its people intimately. But you're struggling to decide how much to communicate without getting overly expository. And maybe you want to save some info for future installments (there's sequels, right?).

I think you've chosen to withhold too much information.

As I read, I sometimes felt ill-informed, and didn't always understand why things were happening (what forces were acting on the characters) or why people were making the choices they were making (why they responded to those forces the way they did). I found myself flipping back and forth, reviewing what I'd read, seeing if I'd missed something (especially in the first 20-30 pages). But I trusted that as the story moved on I'd get more information to better understand how the world worked. That didn't entirely happen, and so I was left with lots of questions that challenged my ability to stay engaged or invested in the story.

What is the larger political structure? Nationally and internationally? I'd like a better sense of the power structure... are we still working within a Democratic Republic? The Mutants refer to the map as "The United States"... so is it really still? What happened in the US that would allow for this kind of scenario to take place again? It's pretty hard to imagine this happening tomorrow, without some kind of larger collapse feeding it. Did the tectonic and climate changes bring down the infrastructure? Start an economic collapse? Is this international? Are there Mutants elsewhere in the world? How does the rest of the world view what's happening here? Just a sentence... a news report... some info passed verbally via the rebels... give the universe more elbow room.

I feel I'd like to know more about the society beyond this story (and would benefit from it.) I want to feel like the universe extends and exists beyond the story... the glimpses into normal life – the scarification beauty salons, etc – is interesting stuff. How could we see more of that?

A bigger point is in the lack of causality between the sisters and their concurrent adventures.

There's an interesting dichotomy between Mary and Susan... Mary as the comfortable family woman whose life is torn apart by the harsh reality she's perhaps been blind to (or in denial of) who becomes an accidental hero; her arc is from accidental hero to intentional rebel. Susan, on the other hand, starts as the intentional rebel with a political cause, and arcs to someone who questions her cause. Great stuff.

A good portion of the first act is dedicated to establishing these roles (and could do with reinforcement as per my above commentary) but once they set off on their adventures, there's no real relationship between their actions. Mary is on her quest, Susan's on hers. Susan's adventure seems unplanned, and solely in reaction to the unexpected escape of Mary. "Pray you don't get shot, because they're not expecting you." (Yet strangely, they kind of are, since Susan was in fact recruited...) Susan's quest is as accidental as Mary's. It doesn't play to the opportunity or the setup of their different personalities and motivations.

Once they're on their quests, their actions don't seem to affect one another. They each have their adventure, and they seem to accidentally bump back into one another at the end. Susan's not even on

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the transport when Mary's rescued. Could she be? Should she be? "Sorry about these kids, but I'm going with you to find my sister." They don't seem in charge of their destinies the way heroes should... they seem to be living at the effect of the universe.

The events don't feel as causal as they should. They seem to be a series of events in a row, that don't necessarily causally propel the plot forward. The story seems to move from one interesting sequence to the next, and suddenly I was on page 80 without feeling like I was being properly set up for – or led to – a third act.

Sometimes this is a function of a lack of clarity... Susan's escape into the crevasse, for instance. It's hard to know exactly why she did this. She can hear the water below but we don't know that she's aware of the river, especially as a mode of escape. She doesn't seem convinced that the "ghost stories" of Mutant powers are true, certainly there's no reason she should assume she'll be able to breathe underwater. And her actions prior seem pretty focused on re-establishing her life. Is she committing suicide? If so, it needs to be clearer... if not, should she be? Could it be powerful to push her right to the brink of death, make her give up, make her want to die, then have her own freakish biology step in and save her? How would she feel now about herself and her chances at revenge? Would it feel like fate?

As it is, this seminal act feels like an unlikely or unexplained accident.

Sometimes this is a lack of organic integration... Susan's salvation on the shore of the rocky island is a nice set piece ("The Blarg" is a nice toss-away reference that lends texture to the universe btw). I understand the metaphor (I think) you were going for... that even out here, on a forgotten rock in the middle of The Blarg, she isn't safe. That's good stuff, and a good message, nicely presented.

HOWEVER... the plot points that happen here – that she leaves a bloody clue for Donovan about her progress (which I really liked btw) – could have happened anywhere. In a truck stop, a motel room, etc. It isn't organic to the setting. And the remoteness of the rock doesn't make her escape difficult, nor does it keep Donovan from pretty easily getting from wherever he was when he got the news, to the rock to see the map. It doesn't serve as an obstacle for him, either. So it serves well as a metaphor, but not as a relevant location, nor as a causal step in the progression of plot. She washes ashore, she sleeps, she accidentally leaves a clue, she swims away. Story, not Plot.

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CONCLUSION (WHEN I'M NOT NICE)

I think you've sent me this script way too early in its development. You have yet to suss out your plot, understand the workings of your magical universe, or define your characters. And obviously you've not edited for spelling or format.

But I think there are some interesting ideas in this, and if you continue with it you might arrive at a compelling narrative that would do well in some of the horror specific contests.

CONCLUSION (WHEN THERE'S MORE TO RECOMMEND)

I think you've got an interesting universe and characters here, and I'm certain there's a lot more to it than you've let into this screenplay. If you let it in, and don't withhold so much, I think you'll have what, for me, would be a more successful screenplay. And you're awfully close. Most of my concerns could be addressed with relatively nuanced edits to what you already have.