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SCREENPLAY EVALUATION

Script Title: *(withheld dog reincarnation script)*

Script Author: *(withheld)*

Date: 06/26/17

Grade: (pass, consider, recommend) Pass

Genre: Action, Comedy

Logline: A cop mortally injured in a drowning accident gets a second chance at redemption when he's sent back to Earth as his K9 partner to take down a gang of criminals

Overall

The script overall tells a solid story with well-defined characters, competent pacing, interesting twists and kept this reader fully engaged. The dialogue, however was a little uneven: while there were many clever and funny one-liners, often the spoken lines were either too expositional, on-the-nose or simply fell flat, leading one to presume that this was a first draft of the script. The script is also littered with typos, but with a lot of polish, this script could have potential.

Concept / Premise

The concept of a police officer coming back as his police dog for a shot at redemption is original enough, though the spirit form of Spencer parting ways with Pepper, who is supposed to be his beloved partner, in heaven could have been better driven home for some more emotional impact for the hero. After all, it was Pepper's sacrifice that enabled Spencer to proceed with his mission.

The objective of capturing cyber criminals masquerading as a toy company was an effective outer goal and tying in the mission of bringing the toy company employee's family together, though a convenient coincidence with the outer goal, helped streamline the narrative.

Characters

The characters, for the most part, were well-developed, and the journeys of each of the main roles (Spencer, Justin, Vicky, Eugene) felt complete. At some points it was a little difficult to discern whose story this actually was, between Spencer and Justin. By the end, as he experienced more of a character arc, it appeared that Justin was the actual hero. Spencer served merely as back-up when keeping the bad guys at bay and didn't really experience a defining moment in the climax that served to validate any type of transformation in his character. If this scene could be revised to somehow show Spencer making some sort of sacrifice, surviving through a near-death experience, or calling back on a skill or talisman (lifeline) from his old world in order to save the day, it could go a long way to pack a more satisfying punch.

Moreover, when arriving in heaven, the Angel informs Spencer that he was a heartless jerk, but nothing in the opening scene really confirmed that assertion, only he might have been a little caustic or sarcastic to those around him. The opening scene might be broken up to show Spencer out in the world being a true jerk to a an underling, barista, what-have-you, before being up that tree. Or else, drive home that character flaw in the tree scene better.

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Characters (continued)

Regarding Justin, in his intro, he has a pretty smart mouth and could be described as anti-authoritarian when dealing with Spencer in the tree, but throughout the rest of the story he was a relatively nice kid. Either the rebellious nature could be toned down in his intro, or the rest of the story could have him being more mouthy and disrespectful to authority figures. This character is actually introduced twice, so the description of him in the first Andrews car scene can be repurposed for his intro in the tree, and his name made lower case. His reluctance to taking in Spencer was a good, albeit short, bit of conflict.

Finally, as Spencer is the main protagonist, a little more description about his character would be helpful in his intro.

Structure / Plot

Not much was alluded to as why Spencer was staking the toy company out in the first place, so perhaps a line or two regarding the lead that led him to the stake-out in the tree would be helpful. Also, though it was comical for Justin to be in the tree at the same time as a police stake-out, there really was no point in him being there. Learning later that this was a plant for Spencer in dog form to recognize the boy helped it make sense, but a quick line describing his reason for being there might be helpful. Conversely, it could be a cute surprise to find at the end of the scene that the kid was up the tree the whole time.

Same goes for King, the German Shepherd who turns out to be Spencer's dad. Showing up at the tree during the stake-out was a little confusing as there was also a little boy in the area, while another boy was in the tree. This might be softened by simply not presenting the little boy as a character and using an O.S. voice to call the dog away. Finally, it might be better for King to quickly show up once or twice more before Spencer realizes who he is.

I found the flashback of Spencer's childhood during his stake-out to be distracting to understanding what this hero's ordinary world situation. A simple line or two about his father neglecting him could have served this purpose, while keeping the reader engaged in the narrative.

The twists of Derrick being allied with the Drecks and The Angel being the Andrews' mother were surprising and natural.

The scene of Eugene flying by the Andrews' house in the truck to deliver the Robo Pooch was confusing. And it wasn't till later that I gathered that it was because he had a business trip to get to. That might be better explained with a quick line during the scene.

The passage of time between the car accident and Spencer's death, and him returning to Earth in dog form was a little unclear. Also, when the Drecks get away, using "O.S." for the bystander who came to help him would be helpful.

A final note is with the final montage, which seemed a little awkward (dead rat? Crime in the City headline?) and ran a little longer than needed. A more effective sequence might have the Drecks and Derrick getting their just deserts, and maybe The Angel and Pepper smiling down on the happy family, etc.

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Marketability

The working title of this script is pretty on-the-nose and perhaps more thought can go into punching it up for marketability.

I feel there's always a market for the "boy and his dog" genre, though scripts featuring children and animals are naturally more difficult to get produced. Set pieces with a crashing yacht and a convention center full of catnip-addled kitties also present a challenging layer of complexity

Tone

This was a competent family comedy, with a cartoony element of danger in the Dreck brothers, though the violence in the gun play and drowning deaths may not make this too family-friendly.

Formatting, spelling, and craft

As stated in the Overall Notes section, the script contained many typos, so a careful re-reading to catch them would be in order.

A bigger problem, however is with the dialogue and action description sequences. Again, there were many funny and clever lines, but some of the scenes ran a little long. For example, the scene leading to Vickie pounding her punching back shouting "Unfair! Unfair! Unfair!" was redundant to the kids' sentiments in the first car scene and just contrived and mawkish overall, not really aligned with the overall tone of the script.

Other examples, "Must find that damn dog", " Please take this dog and find him a good home.", "Stop. Stay here boy." could easily be given a little more flair. I would recommend a read-through just to make sure every line of dialogue is punched up, if not natural-sounding.

Regarding the action descriptions, the stage directions were often overly prescriptive or clunky. For example, on page 34, T-Rex is described as using "his big paws to tighten a few collars". I would recommend keeping the descriptions entirely visual in depicting the action to be seen on screen. Again, another read-through just to tighten up the action lines and eliminate as many adverbs and adjectives in favor of power verbs as possible.

Finally, in the technical formatting area, some of the scene headings were confusing like "INT. PARK" where parks are always "EXT.", scenes set in moving cars (use "- MOVING -"), etc.

Closing Notes

A fun, family-friendly story with a lot of heart, "XXXX" has the potential to be a crowd-pleaser with a couple rounds of dialogue polish, tightening up action descriptions, and clarifying confusing plot points.