

STEVE CLEARY

Screenwriting & Script Consulting

SCREENPLAY EVALUATION

Script Title: *(withheld romantic comedy)*

Script Author: *(withheld)*

Date: 07/26/17

Grade: (pass, consider, recommend) Consider

Genre: Romantic Comedy

Logline: An aspiring mixed-race stand-up comic struggles to choose love and forgiveness when she discovers that her new boyfriend used to be an alt-right neo-Nazi.

Overall

This is a solidly funny romantic comedy that presents a high concept that's executed fairly well, especially for an independent production where the stakes and spectacle are relatively low. The script has its share of under-developed scenes and jokes where punchlines don't quite hit the mark, as well as a number of typos that might lead one to presume this is an early draft. However, with a bit more polish, this has the potential to become an indie hit.

Concept / Premise

The concept of a black woman falling in love with a former white supremacist naturally lends itself to its set of challenges, but with its well-defined characters, competent pacing, and not taking itself too seriously, the story is deftly executed without being too over-the-top or mawkish.

Characters

The lead characters were well-defined, with their individual quirks and character traits (i.e. Nina love of Doritos and Him's head-banging).

Nina's desire to be a stand-up comic and the need it would fulfill in her life isn't really driven home. She might benefit from having a line or two to more solidly serve that purpose, either early on in the first act as we get to know her, or perhaps in the second act as the story device of revealing how her "original state of perfection" was lost and reconciling that with what she's learned on her journey in preparation for the final act.

Him's character name is very clever and the twist how it originated was a fun shock, though the origin of the name explained in his voiceover conflicts with its origin described in the reveal at the Neo-Nazi house party.

Jeff as the protective drag queen bestie was not entirely original, but then again neither is the protective sister, co-worker, or gay best friend in general anyway, and serves the archetype well.

The esoteric vernacular shared by Nina and her friends (i.e. lurrve) was delightful, and Him joining in on it at the end was especially touching.

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Structure / Plot

The story beats were sound and how it didn't take the easy way out by having Him and Nina reconcile after his bonding night-in with Jeff was a good move. However, Nina didn't seem to face any real consequences to her decisions (ex. sleeping with two other guys), even though they were on the outs. This perhaps could have added more conflict to her relationship with Him that they would need to overcome.

Similarly, no one appeared to have sacrificed anything to heighten the narrative's tension. Him's mother was simply accepting through and through. The emotional impact of Him's getting back together with Nina could be increased if it were a result of him turning his back on his mother or having vanquished her, won her over, etc. in some way.

Nothing really happened with Guy, who also could have been given more of a come-uppance later on in the story. The character Kenny could potentially be written out with Guy serving that characters purpose. Side note: The script running at 110 pages being a bit long for a rom-com, doing so could trim the script a bit closer to an ideal 95 pages.

The dilemma of the imminent closing of the Club didn't really seem to affect the characters involved. It would have been good to see a little more emotional impact on them. Along the same line, the issue of Nina being late on the rent was excused by Jeff as calmly as it was raised.

Moreover, there were no real consequence of Nina's truancy from her job. Perhaps Harvey could have fired her and she convinces him to let her back in based on a new, responsible trait she developed as part of her journey (maybe something Him instills in her).

The first date scene seemed a little boring without any real excitement to draw the two characters together and didn't really jolt them into their journey, and at any point, they could have turned back on taking the journey together.

And a final, minor note, it didn't seem clear why Him dropped off the dating app and lost contact with Nina after their first date.

Marketability

Though the leads are not LGBTQ, the supporting cast heavily favors that market, which unfortunately would make the script a tough sell for a mainstream producer. However, due to the minimal locations, complexity of set pieces, effects, stuntwork, etc, the script could be shot on a relatively modest budget and one could argue that this would be a safe project for an independent production.

The image of the conflicted leads sitting in a childhood bedroom under a looming Confederate Flag, comedically tempered with contrasting yoga gear, particularly lends itself to a strong movie poster visual.

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Formatting, spelling, and craft

The script appeared professionally formatted for the most part, though there were a few minor typos.

The biggest issue in this area was that many of the action descriptions are more prescriptive than visual (ex. "... who often mixes actual holiday themes to her dragsamble.") Although this type of writing can be excused as flair for the writer's style, especially in character intros, care should be taken when used in providing stage directions, which must primarily serve the purpose of presenting a visual of what's happening on-screen.

Nina's voiceover was only used in the first few pages. Same thing with Him. VO is used for their intros, but never comes back, making the narrative feel a little unbalanced. For the sake of consistency, perhaps it would best to have been brought back in the major story beats, at least in the aftermath as a way to wrap a tidy bow and bookend the narrative.

Finally, the Jeff/Miss Holiday character headings were inconsistent, though they were two incarnations of the same character. Though there may not be a conventional way to manage character headings for drag queens, there might be a more suitable way to handle that.

Closing Notes

Fun, quirky, irreverent and real, one could easily imagine throngs of romance-seeking women and their besties, gay and straight alike, lining up at independent theaters or gathering in apartments in hip urban neighborhoods nationwide to enjoy this amusing crowd-pleaser. A little work on the stakes and consequences and some touch-up on the stage directions and dialogue could go a long way in increasing its chances of getting the greenlight.