

In the Dark
by
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Package: Basic Coverage
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Page Count: 98
Genre: Horror
Analyst: RA56
Rating: Consider
Score: 6.4

Category	Score	Percentile
Plot	6.0/10	(60 percentile)
Characterization	6.0/10	(60 percentile)
Concept	7.0/10	(96 percentile)
Format	7.0/10	(97 percentile)
Voice	7.0/10	(97 percentile)
Structure	5.0/10	(36 percentile)
Dialogue	7.0/10	(96 percentile)
Overall Weighted Percentile		79
<i>Note: Percentiles are based on historical data of scores given out by this analyst.</i>		

About Analyst RA56

Four years experience working as a development assistant to indie producers. Eight years experience making sketch comedy and short films. Favorite Shows/Movies: 2001: A Space Odyssey, American Psycho, Adaptation, Black Mirror (TV), Utopia (TV)

LOGLINE

When ghosts of her past return to haunt a traumatized schoolteacher, she must plunge into an alternate world to save her younger sister and overcome the fears that control her life.

SYNOPSIS

For a 2 page SYNOPSIS of your project, consider purchasing a FULL or PREMIUM COVERAGE.

COMMENTS

OPENING THOUGHTS

This supernatural horror feature has a satisfyingly original mythology that puts an interesting spin on the well-worn haunted house subgenre, and excels at crafting terrifying images that echo elements of the zeitgeist while remaining unlike just about anything that has made it to theaters in recent memory. The plot is twisty as hell, dialogue is solid and realistic, and you generally write action description with a good pace and sense of clarity. The script suffers from a largely inactive protagonist, inconsistent supporting characters, and odd pacing that results in the story feeling more like two halves stuck together than a fully-integrated whole. Conceptually, the story is strong; you may simply need to reconceive the order of events.

CHARACTERS:

NEVAEH - As a protagonist, Nevaeh is instantly likeable for her distinct personality as a child, and the trauma that she suffers. The audience immediately wants to see how witnessing such an event would impact a woman's life. She never quite articulates this, but it's easy to see how the disappearance of her sister would lead Nevaeh to become a schoolteacher, so she can watch over other children. However, consider that she might not be so good a teacher - maybe her class is violently unruly to the point that she becomes overwhelmed. This kind of conflict (a relatable one

to any teacher or parent) would make it clear that Nevaeh needs to change in order to improve her life, as well as provide resonances with the children of the Gray World. Otherwise, the only real sign we have of that is the state of her bedroom - which is weird, but she was clearly able to live a mostly-successful life while having a weird bedroom. Furthermore, and more detrimentally to the story, Nevaeh is not a particularly active protagonist. She doesn't choose to reveal her secret to Mark - it comes out sloppily in a moment of panic. She only decides to try out exposure therapy reluctantly, at the insistence of two other characters. The only time she chooses to enter the Gray World, it's a weak form of choice in that she's merely responding to an invitation. She's utterly unsuccessful at saving anyone from the Gray World, and must be saved by Mark just to make it back home alive. A tragic ending is fine, but audiences have a hard time latching onto protagonists whose actions don't impact the plot much. Since the story is about Nevaeh going into the Gray World to fetch Sophia, her active decision to go into the Gray World should come at the end of Act 1. This notion about exposure therapy is appropriate to the story, but it takes up too much time, and you don't make a strong link between the exposure therapy and meaningfully increased stakes.

MARK - Mark is likeable and realistic in his joking ways, although he's very inconsistent. In some scenes, he reads as the strong, stoic, nurturing veteran with a philosophy of healing. In other scenes, he's short-tempered and irritable, seemingly only because you need him to be to fuel tension. If that duality is key to your conception of this character, that's good - it makes him less of a Manic Fireman Dream Guy - but you need to establish that earlier. It's not until page 43 that Mark reveals the short-tempered side to his personality.

CHRISTINA - While she's ultimately a fairly minor character in the full arc of the plot, you do conceive of this character well. Her response to Sophia's disappearance functions as a kind of dark mirror (pun not intended) to Nevaeh's, which creates an interesting back-and-forth between them. Her willingness to be manipulated by the evil

behind the mirrors is truly chilling to watch, especially because it's one of the few ways that that evil can extend its power into the Alive World. Look for ways to wring even more dread and tension out of Christina allying herself with the evil, leading up to her outright attack on Nevaeh.

AUNT SHELLY/OTHER FAMILY - These mostly feel like wasted page space, given how much impact they have on the story. However, Aunt Shelly's line about Xanax on 29 functions as a very nice tension valve to help the audience settle back into the domestic plot before the chaos of the Grey World rears its head again.

SOPHIA/LITTLE BOY - Sophia claims that a consequence of dying in the Gray World is that you never grow older or change. In the opening prologue sequence, we know that Sophia wants to be an adult, and she is protective of her sister. However, in the course of the main plot, we don't really see the protective side of Sophia because she's been overtaken by the Little Boy's evil influence, and of course because she hates Nevaeh for failing to save her from the Gray World. Look for ways you can set up character traits in Sophia that can be paid off even when she's under the Little Boy's thrall. The Little Boy is harder to critique because there's not much character there - he's more of a force of nature. It would be nice to know who he was (if he ever was a "real" person) and how his evil world works, but it's not strictly necessary if you can't find a way to fit it in.

PLOT:

Throughout the story, you do well at crafting terrifying visual imagery like Carl's body bursting from the bedroom mirror, the eery children that are docile one moment and ravenous the next, and the darkness that bleeds throughout the Little Boy's body and splashes everywhere. You are also adept at character descriptions, which tend to focus more on personality than looks - ideal for informing actors and giving readers a sense of the characters' presence in the story. While some images that you create in action description are less clear, like "the mirror engulfs them" or "the darkness descends", the relationship between

those images can be perceived, and it aids understanding of your vision for the film. Furthermore, you do a good job of defying cliches while utilizing imagery that has history and power in the canon of horror film. For example, the 'child in a haunted house has an imaginary friend' trope is well-worn in supernatural horror, but you make good use of it here by combining it with a jarring burst of violence. Similarly, we have seen the unearthly pale little boy who drips black ichor (most recently in *The Grudge*), but you put a fun spin on this trope by giving him a unique mythology. Consider Nevaeh's bedroom full of lights bears a strong resemblance to certain scenes from 2016's *Lights Out*, which did decent box office. To avoid drawing comparisons, you might simply stick with the lack of mirrors and bedframes in Nevaeh's apartment - especially since neither she (nor the audience) has evidence at that point that any amount of darkness can produce a shadow-hand. Finally, reconsider your construction of this Act 3 - you seem to stumble after Nevaeh's return from a long stretch in the Gray World. The stakes are high, but jumbled - Nevaeh might lose her job, people think she's crazy, and Jenni might be dead, but it's not until Mark gets sucked inside that the climax actually begins. The Sara Cartwright interlude also feels like keeping time - it's dubious proof at best, and feels like it's missing a stronger setup from earlier in the story.

STRUCTURE:

As mentioned above, the biggest structural issue you have is that Nevaeh isn't active enough as the protagonist. The structure of the story should revolve around the protagonist's wants and needs as they evolve through action. While you tend to hit your structural beats at the proper moments, the pace of the story seems slow. Your break into Act 2 takes the form of Nevaeh accepting the idea of exposure therapy and agreeing to try it out. That's a fine idea, but the audience knows the story won't really move until Nevaeh gets back into the Gray World. Rather than spending your time up to the midpoint setting things up so that Nevaeh will appear insane when she returns from the Gray World, consider giving her the impetus to go in there earlier. It's conceivable that the idea of exposure

therapy could lead Nevaeh to think that what she needs is exposure to the Gray World. That her family might consider her insane is a strong tension for this story, but you don't do much with it. If they really believe she has schizophrenia, they might try to restrain or institutionalize, which you should be able to milk for tension. Also, you do great work at finding an organic way to isolate Nevaeh on page 22, and the ensuing trip into the Gray World is an efficient display of the rules, but you pull her out of it without a clear explanation of what the threat is. Ideally, the audience should have some idea of what the antagonist looks like or does going into Act 2 - those stakes are important.

FORMAT/GRAMMAR/SPELLING:

Your script is generally formatted very well, although there are several typos throughout. Additionally, avoid formatting text messages as dialogue, as on page 11. Consider writing text messages as action description, which will be more efficient - like "TEXT FROM MARK: Outside."

For a detailed look through your script for grammar / spelling / formatting errors, consider upgrading to a PREMIUM COVERAGE.

DIALOGUE:

Dialogue tends to be quite enjoyable in this script. It's not easy to make flirtatious dialogue sound both realistic and funny, but you pull it off between Mark and Nevaeh (when Mark isn't going overboard). In other spots, character voices are distinct and you rarely go overboard with drawn-out speeches.

CONCEPT:

The concept of the Gray World and the imagery that lives there are very strong. Your vision comes through in these pages. The settings and types of scares that you use will ring true for diverse audiences, much in the same way that *The Babadook* created dread with a mundane terror and capitalized on it with a supernatural threat. However, the story's theme feels loosely constructed. You touch upon survivor's guilt, post-traumatic stress disorder, faith in

God, and different methods of dealing with trauma - but the supernatural elements of the plot seem to outstrip those themes at times. Your tragic ending gives the impression that, despite all she's done, Nevaeh doesn't deserve relief from her guilt. It's not a very uplifting ending, which is rare for supernatural horror, which tends to be less bloody and more focused on theme.

MARKETABILITY:

Your choice to make the main cast non-white is a strong move that speaks to your unique writer's voice. However, it will make it harder for producers to see how to cast the film with a high prospective value. Since the story requires a large cast of children and considerable VFX, this will be relatively expensive for a horror movie, and the inability to cast recognizable actors will make it less likely to get made. Consider roles you can write in for an older white male actor (a Liam Neeson type) that can add value to the DVD cover. It may sound stupid, but this is how producers actually think.

For a discussion of the estimated budget, MPAA rating, castability of characters, attachments, and how those impact the market for this project, consider purchasing a FULL or PREMIUM COVERAGE.

OVERALL: PASS / **CONSIDER** / RECOMMEND

While this script is technically well-written, featuring strong dialogue and action description, it suffers from structural issues and an unclear theme.