



TRAPPED

by Robb Morris

Package: The Final Draft (Feature Films)

Date: 01/31/2021

Page Count: 86

Genre: Horror

Analyst: 3E234

Rating: Consider

Score: 8.00/10

CATEGORY	SCORE
Plot	8.00/10
Characters	8.50/10
Concept	8.00/10
Format	8.00/10
Voice	8.00/10
Structure	8.00/10
Dialogue	7.50/10
Final Score	8.00/10

Opening Thoughts

First things first! Congratulations on receiving a feature writing assignment...though it's not surprising. You're an intelligent writer with a solid set of skills who not only understands how to tell a story, but is also attuned to the changing economic dynamics of the marketplace. That's a valuable commodity and CHICAGO 1919 is lucky to have you on board with them.

Second, thank you for your kind words regarding my suggestions on the analysis of THE BURNING QUESTION. I didn't personally change the direction of your screenwriting career. I simply gave you a map when you stopped and asked for directions. You did all the driving. Remember that!

So, accolades aside...we need to keep you on a roll and get TRAPPED up on its feet and into production. The reader notes that TRAPPED is a marked improvement over THE BURNING QUESTION, but there are a few observations for the writer to consider when giving this script a light polish before shopping it for a potential deal.

Let's begin the analysis.

Characters

The reader notes that TRAPPED is a revision of a screenplay previously titled THE BURNING QUESTION. The writer has tightened the script and changed a few names but in general the characters have remained consistent in their persona and elevated through their dialogue and pace. Subsequently, some of the reader's perceptions will be the same as before which underscores the reader's philosophy "If it ain't broke then don't try to fix it."

As with the previous draft that was analyzed on May 21, 2020, the writer has kept the cast lean. That continues to be a major plus as the majority of productions have been sidelined due to the pandemic. As the reader has noted, scripts with large casts, significant atmosphere and numerous locations that cannot be reasonably bubbled for the set safety protocols are sidelined for the time being. More on this in Final Thoughts.

Lance (Caucasian, late 30's, Australian) is a leading character in this story. The writer has altered this character from the previous draft which has resulted in Lance being much more credible under the circumstances. Lance is simply a surfer dude who still prefers a skateboard to travel around even though he's in his late 30's.

Gee Gee (African-American, early 20's) is also a leading character in this story which may be a bit misleading. Gee Gee has also been revised from the previous draft. In this instance, Gee Gee is simply a young woman sitting in a coffee shop enjoying her surroundings. Anyone could easily envision Gee Gee sitting with a book or a laptop wearing a pair of earbuds and listening to music while she enjoys a cup of coffee.

The misleading reference for Gee Gee and for Lance as well is that while they are both leading characters, they are also catalysts to a certain extent as well as influencers to the other characters and the plot.

The remainder of this ensemble cast has largely remained the same with minor nuances.

Nora Limboria is a lesbian and a Latina in her mid 20's. Nora has a girlfriend named Lou who is Caucasian and in her 40's. Lou is rich and a bit older than Nora who is a looker, so Lou is more intent on "sealing the deal" with their relationship that is sexually charged with some PDA.

Abigail "Abe" Heiskopf is Caucasian non-binary, androgynous (female assigned) Jew. The reader had raised some questions with this character in the previous script. Things change and in a period of eight months since the last analysis the reader surmises that the audience will now accept this character at face value given the proliferation of gender identity issues being discussed openly in the news; particularly with scholastic sports.

Mohammed Henosis is an Egyptian Canadian Muslim. Much of the reader's observations remain

the same with this character and the nuances are primarily through the tightening of the dialogue. The writer has maintained the character's marriage to Dr. Rapha Henosis which is a pivotal point in the character's relationship with Abe. Again, Mohammed is a gentle, God fearing Muslim and the perfect opposite to the angry non-binary Jewish Abe in this story.

Maddie Stallworth is Irish and very pregnant. The writer has kept the essence of this character the same. Maddie is the Catholic in the group and the source of her faith is derived with her stillborn child whom she names Sheila; despite the child being dead. Is Maddie treating her still born babe with dignity or has she gone a bit mad under the circumstances? In the end it doesn't matter because a mother's bond with her child circumvents the dire situation.

Blake Talbott is the owner of the building that is the setting of the story. Blake's son Ben knows the building well since he practically grew up there. Ben rides the elevator with the rest of the group, but it is actually Ben (with a bomb) is who is the source of the explosion in the story.

The Fireman (who is really Lance) and the Boy (who is really Gee Gee) are as the reader (and the audience) will eventually realize are the Devil and the Christ who are playing a game for the souls of the departed. The reader once again saw the same symbolic use of the Fireman not as a person who puts out fires but as one who fans the flames. That's a solid premise.

The reader reiterates the writer's symbolic use of the Boy in the story; particularly with Nora eventually searching for him. That's due to her being an atheist but still in search of the "Christ child" via her upbringing in the Hispanic culture that is decidedly Christian. Again, a solid character and great insight.

The Old Man who is a resident of the building in the story is the creator. The Old Man is a watchful presence and essentially lets the game be played out amongst the characters.

Is this a solid cast of characters for a feature? Yes. Some may watch this feature as a horror film and others will see it for the morality tale that it really is. The reader notes that the characters in this revised version of the script have aged well over the past eight months. Perhaps that's due to the pandemic, the violent protests of both the left, the right and those who have been mistreated along with the hope to find some common ground instilled with some common sense and common decency. There is merit with the characters who have had a staying power that is relevant and for that the writer is to be commended.

Plot

While the reader notes that the script has been tightened by almost 10%, the writer has kept the essence of the plot without any loss of impact. Gone is much of the foreshadowing that tipped the writer's hand to the reader and the audience. In short, this is a pared down version of the same story with a much better pace; and subsequently an elevation over the previous draft.

There are some further nuances for the writer to consider. The reader had referenced that it was important to establish that the Fireman was in fact a real fireman. The writer has toned down the "snarky" tone with the Fireman but suggests that they dial it down one or two more notches with some subtle revisions. For example:

On page 27, the sequence with the switch and the locked casing could be revised with some dialogue and dark comic relief.

Abe: Why would they put it behind a locked casing?

Fireman: Don't worry. All firemen carry a master key for situations just like this. It's standard.

Abe: Well, are you going to just stand there or are you going to use it?

With that the Fireman smashes the lock with a swing of his axe.

Similarly, on page 35 in the sequence with the umbilical cord. The reader found the tension being

built about cutting the umbilical cord to be rock solid under the circumstances. The Fireman could be uncomfortable cutting the umbilical cord with his axe as is suggested but that could be a misdirection to instill some additional tension and then have it diffused similarly to the sequence with the lock. For example:

Nora: Give me that.

Nora snatches the axe from the Fireman.

Nora: (To Maddie) Don't look.

Nora raises the axe and hesitates. The tension mounts as Abe and the others look on wincing.

Just as Nora closes her eyes determined to do this, we HEAR a "schnick" from a pair of scissors. Another angle and we SEE the Fireman holding a pair of EMT scissors (or Leatherman utility tool). Nora lowers the axe.

Fireman: Does someone want to tie the cord? I'm bad with knots.

Another sequence for the writer's consideration concerns the timing of events on page 21. With the "elevator plummeting at a breakneck speed" the reader surmised that Nora might not be screaming for Maddie to "push" but simply "screaming" during that moment. It's a minor observation and could play out as written or with the minor revision with Nora resuming her assistance with Maddie once the elevator had settled.

With the tightening of the script, the reader reiterates that this story has weathered well and improved in the streamlined version. The reader did not disengage in this instance and found the plot as revised intriguing enough to sustain interest cover to cover. This was a solid revision.

Structure

The reader notes that in the previous draft, the reader found the structure to be both a "blessing and a curse". With this revision, the writer has scrubbed much of the foreshadowing which had

tipped the writer's hand previously.

With TRAPPED, the writer has structured the script with a non-labeled cold open that is essentially one of two bookends supporting the standard three act formula for cinema. The writer then makes a highly effective use of a time shift and circles back to the cold open where the action plays out once again with further reveals that underscore what has just happened.

At 87 pages the reader notes that this script is in the sweet spot to be pitched as a MFT (made for television) feature for advertiser supported cable. There are also organic breaks within the story that would allow for the potential of commercial insertions.

The current length not only affords the potential of the script to be conformed to a two hour time slot equating to 94-96 minutes of produced material, but also for it to be packaged as a standalone modestly budgeted indie feature; mainly due to its reduced projected running time that not only lowers the budget but still meets the standards for the festival showcase circuit.

Format/Grammar/Spelling

The reader notes that the writer demonstrates a solid skill set for the craft; particularly with the creation of layered characters, the building of tension and the excellent use of time shift. The script is formatted to industry standards for a feature and is free from grammar and spelling errors. Subsequently, the script presents at a high professional level which is a major plus for the potential future prospects for the project.

Dialogue

The reader notes that the writer demonstrates an excellent ear for creating conversational dialogue that reads as credible and natural. The writer has also reinforced the credibility of the characters by infusing the script both Hebrew and Arabic dialogue that is on point under the circumstances.

There are a few observations that the writer may wish to consider in a subsequent polish. For example:

On page 24, the reader would have anticipated that the Fireman would have simply said, "Is everyone all right down there?"

On page 51, the reader suggests that the "Boy" uses Ben's name prior to Ben's line, "How do you know my name?"

The reader has already referenced other sequences that included minor dialogue revisions in the section on Plot. The reader reiterates the importance of keeping the audience on the hook for as long as possible in believing that the Fireman is really a fireman. There is also that subtle balance in that the Fireman knows that it is a game and despite the seriousness of it all, there should be tinges of Lance having some fun with it.

The reader suggests that the writer may want to initiate a table read prior to a light polishing of the script; and before shopping it.

Concept

As written in a congested and highly competitive script market, the reader anticipates moderate to firm (but guarded interest) in the concept. The guarded interest is not an aspersion to the writer but simply the reader's perception of the current environment. Producers or those in development are staying the course and mindful of not only the problems in producing new material but also where the data suggests that they should be investing their time and money.

While standalone features continue to be less relevant, there is still a significant place for them in the current market and features will remain a valuable asset to any streaming platform looking to establish market share. More in Salability.

Voice

The reader notes that this is an intelligent writer who has created a morality tale within the guise of a horror/thriller. The voice of the writer has remained consistent throughout as has the tone and the underlying theme of the story. In the previous draft, the main drawback for establishing a consistent voice was with the writer's overabundance of foreshadowing telegraphed the reveals in the final act and embedded epilogue. The writer has trimmed the script by removing much of that foreshadowing resulting in a streamlined version that remains consistent.

The writer has also been able to credibly portray the differences in the characters religious beliefs without the appearing to be contrived. Yes, as one character references the potential for "a Jew, a Muslim, a Catholic and an Atheist" get into an elevator joke the consistent voice of the writer underscores that what we are seeing is simply a coincidental melting pot which is often found in a major metropolitan area such as New York.

Salability

The reader notes that the revised version of THE BURNING QUESTION as TRAPPED is a marked improvement and subsequently its prospects in the current marketplace have elevated as well. While the reader noted that the economic dynamics of the marketplace were shifting due to the demise of the theatrical release window, the uncertainty of the pandemic and the emergence of streaming, that situation has progressed even further over the past 8 months.

Most creatives have been caught off guard as to what the implications are for developing an original feature or a television series; with the majority of those writer still being in denial.

The reader suggests that the writer check out The Hollywood Reporter issue of December 16, 2020 where two senior production executives from Netflix discuss the problems that are impacting their productions. The reader suggests that the observations of the current production environment remaining as is for the next two years may be somewhat optimistic. The reader anticipates that this is simply the new normal until further notice and that writers have to plan accordingly or don't write scripts that can't be produced.

Fortunately, that's not the case with TRAPPED. There are far more plusses than minuses.

Since the last analysis, the reader was able to network with several buyers for the major streaming platforms at the virtual NATPE Conference (National Association of Television Program Executives) in September. Their message was clear.

With the emergence of streaming as a viable delivery system the buyers are now focused on enticing and retaining the family subscriber due to its lucrative ROI. Their decisions are driven by data which suggests that series television is the preferred medium to reach their goals.

The flip side of this is that if an original series does not offer the strong potential of an extended run of four to seven years, the data also suggests that the buyers are better off spending hundreds of millions of dollars on re-runs of FRIENDS or the BIG BANG THEORY so to speak. Case in point, according to Nielsen the re-runs of THE OFFICE starring Steve Carell are ranked number one over all the streaming platforms.

Where does this leave TRAPPED. The answer is the cable channels or the indie festival circuit.

Those platforms are now reinventing themselves as the “farm teams” for their parent companies’ streaming platforms until they can move their brand on-line. That transition is going to take several years or more due to their significant investment in infrastructure; much of which has been leveraged.

Original content will have a first run on the network or cable channel to recoup production costs and reinforce the brand. From there it will transition to a streaming platform owned by their parent company where it will be offered with and without commercials.

Look for all the platforms to incorporate this two tiered pricing structure; particularly Amazon, Netflix and Apple+ since they do not own another revenue window tied directly to their original content as the studios now do.

In fact, Netflix is quietly testing a linear advertiser supported service in France branded Netflix Direct which is essentially the same programming and revenue model utilized for broadcast or basic cable in the United States.

So, while the road to a streaming platform for TRAPPED is most likely through advertiser supported cable, the reader does want to touch upon the indie festival route. With the writer having paid attention to the impediments for large scale productions during the pandemic, there may be some interest with indie producers looking for a modestly budgeted project with a lean cast and basic set-up.

There is a significant amount of capital on the sidelines waiting to be deployed into a "seller's market". Savvy indie producers see the potential Federal and State tax incentives as low hanging fruit to entice high net worth individuals in tax advantaged private placement offerings.

The writer may not be aware that Section 181 of the Federal Tax Code was quietly renewed and extended for an additional five years in the last "stimulus" package from Congress and the previous administration. The combination of significant tax incentives, favorable depreciation of product juxtaposed against the prospects of an uptick of the current upper tax brackets with the new administration become an interesting scenario for filmmakers; particularly in a "seller's market" where there is a dire need for fresh product.

While the streaming platforms are unlikely to be the "bank" or first dollars in on an indie production deal, the writer may discover that they are eagerly waiting with checkbooks in hand to acquire a project via a licensing or negative pick-up agreement.

This is simply food for thought for the writer who has two paths to follow for a project such as TRAPPED that has merit in the current marketplace. The reader trusts that the observations have been helpful. All are actionable by the writer who has a demonstrated skill set for the craft.

In closing, the reader often says that while scores are an important measuring stick for a writer, the only numbers that truly matter are those on a check with the writer's name on it. As revised, TRAPPED represents a marked improvement over THE BURNING QUESTION and for that the writer is to be commended. In this instance, the scores should reflect that TRAPPED would be given a "strong consider" for a potential deal. Kudos. Keep up the great work and good luck to you.