

Story Consultant SAMPLE - by Suzanne E. Gillis

SCREENPLAY TITLE: **'TWITCH'** (screenwriter not mentioned)

GENRE: Broad Comedy/Farce

OVERALL IMPRESSION: Very funny and original premise. However, I still felt the overall 'theme' of Ethan being the 'bearer of bad news' needs more development. Some of the plotlines seem more appropriate for a broad/romantic comedy than a farce. The love relationship between Ethan and Alyss seems to be just as much an essential story here, as is Ethan's job. Therefore, more attention needs to be centered on these two major issues, rather than random acts of farce. The over the top humor feels to forced at times and isn't directly related to Ethan's work or emotional issues. There are also too many characters in this story that are also not directly related to Ethans job problems or clients. This makes the farce element feel unnatural. Nor does this farce element related to the over riding theme of Ethan being so removed from his feelings that he is so great at being the 'bearer of bad news'. If he gets paid for this job then we need to know who is hiring him and why and what the outcome of this news brings to these peoples lives.

SCREENPLAY TITLE: Doesn't convey enough of the humor of the original premise of the script. I think you can come up with a much better about a man who career is based on bringing bad news to good people.

LOGLINE/PITCH: Too long and wordy. Doesn't convey the real hook or conflict of the story.

"Imagine a job were you get paid to give other people bad news. Enter Ethan, a professional bearer of bad news. His life has been easy going until he finds himself in a town where his feelings get the best of him and he finally makes a connection with someone. Insert a mysterious Guild, a vengeance seeking mafia, psychic encounters, and a jealous Frenchmen and the world will become a much more twisted place."

Try of something shorter like: *"A professional bearer of 'bad news' who hates his job, finds his new romantic happiness suddenly interrupted when he is hired to deliver the ultimate 'bad news' to his newest girlfriend."*

OVERALL STORY/PREMISE: The premise is far better than the actual second and third act. We need to see Ethan have more of an emotional breakdown and come back from this and grow on en emotional level somehow. How you do this is your choice. But the script starts to fall apart when you take the focus off Ethan and start to focus far too much on The Mambo Mafia, The Guild, Eric and Mac Mann do not have any direct relationship with Ethan so they become a poor choice to force him to change. We also never even see Ethan's real boss the Head of the Guild or sense why such a Guild or boss is necessary to tell this story. The kidnapping is also random and should have been reserved for Alyss who actually has some emotional tie to Ethan. The biggest problem is that Ethan's clients (who should be giving the biggest laughs in this film) are completely

overlooked and replaced with characters that don't put Ethan in any real shame, embarrassment or actual physical danger. Some of these clients should be seeing serious revenge on Ethan, rather than focusing on the Mambo Mafia who are out to find some sacred plant to get out of their country. What does this really have to do with the story of Ethan and his 'funny' job and the trouble it is causing him and his personal life?

Ethan's story should be completely focused on how he got this horrible job, who is hiring him and how his acting out this job is affecting his life in a horrible way -- which forces him to want to either get out of this job or change it, or change himself. That is your story. Instead, you bog the story down with characters and issues that take the story away from the funny original premise you have created, which is the real story we your audience want to see and hear about. See the movies like 'HITCH' for more ideas on how to bring up a good premise and stick with it until you come to the ultimate conclusion which forces our hero to take a look at his job, why he has it, and if he wants to keep it in the end at all. Also, TWITCH sounds too much like HITCH which is another reason why I'd change the title of the film. Try and stay away from trying to do a 'PINK PANTHER' or other such scripts filled with gags and slapstick humor, and find a tone more similar to a romantic comedy or broad/buddy film genre instead like 'THE WEDDING CRASHERS' or 'HITCH'. These stories deal with men who have career issues that are messing up their personal lives. This is what your story should be about, instead of all the farce and Mafia nonsense. Your subject matter is too interesting to rely on old tried and true slapstick humor, and it's far too original also. So try and avoid this type of 'farce/slapstick' humor creeping back into the next draft, if you want to have a script that will truly stand out and grab a producer's attention enough to actually want to buy it and make it. It's also, a great film with the right leading character. Keep it personal, with Ethan at all times, and you'll be on the right track.

ORIGINALITY: The original premise, had you stuck to it all the way through, would be excellent. Right now it's good to average. However, the humor of the premise is still not fully realized yet. As I mentioned above, the humor should all be directly connected to Ethan in terms of his personal and professional life. There should be a point in the plot where his secret identity is suddenly revealed and all shit hits the fan as ex-clients are suddenly seeking him out to get revenge. This is when Alyss should also finally find out about his secret life and that he is in fact not the cuddle nice guy she thought he was. I also missed the real connection between Alyss and Ethan here. You focus too much on the arcade game and don't take it much further. Sure, they should have fun together, but they also need to connect on some other levels too. Think of more things that they have in common emotionally and how they can help each other become better people through this relationship. What is missing in their lives and why? And how is this filled when they are together? What do they do or share together that makes us want to see them ultimately connect at the end? Currently, this relationship is being overlooked as a result of too much screen time being taken up by characters that are not directly related to Ethan's job or life.

STORY PLOT POINTS & TWISTS: Needs much more thought. The farce humor of the Guild doesn't fit well with the rest of the story. It feels too forced and lessens the potential of

the real humor here. There isn't any need for such an organization to exist unless you make Ethan breaking this news to terrorists and important dignitaries and other such politically motivated people. I would suggest taking the humor down and having it center on the people who are currently actually seeking out Ethan's service here. These are everyday people, doctors, insurance agents, banks, and not CIA, Mafia or random men. These people who hire him should be portrayed as generally weak and cowardly individuals. Even the doctors who hire should be so, since it's part of their job to inform patients and family about death. If you choose the route for the story, instead of the farce, I would suggest having Ethan's secret identity is finally revealed in a way that would make his entire Snowman world suddenly collapse. This would be sweet revenge for all the people that suffered at this hand of "lying" to them to soften the "blow" somehow. It would also force an emotionally crippled Ethan to finally address his "emotional demons" and change in the final act. We need to see him suffer here more throughout *D* for very personal reasons. Right now, the stakes for him aren't still high enough for us to care *D* and that's not good enough to make for a well-written comedy.

The "Guild" is completely undeveloped and confusing. Also, the Mambo Mafia kidnapping Mac Mann is also confusing. Mac Mann is not in any way directly related to Ethan's life or job. He's simply a guy he beat at the arcades game while out on a date with his girlfriend Alyss. The logical choice for the kidnapping would be Alyss or her mother, since they have some personal connection to Ethan--not some random stranger. Even the reason, why Mac Mann is being kidnapped is also confusing. It was a misunderstanding about Ethan taking some plant out of a country without permission. Where is the threat or danger here to Ethan's life? Also, what does this misunderstanding have to do with Ethan's character or your original story? By this point in the story we have to know what Ethan's central goal is and what is preventing him from achieving this. So why the sudden wild goose chase that doesn't lead us anywhere?

This is also true of Eric's character. He doesn't seem to serve any real purpose here to the central plot. He states that he's a friend of Ethan but doesn't truly act like one. He then says he's after Ethan's job. These inconsistencies add for confusion about what his real motive is or why he appears in this story. Neither he nor Ethan confide in each other or help each other out. If Eric does want Ethan's job, then we need to know what Ethan thinks about that. Does he want to be number one or simply give it up? Is Ethan actively helping Eric by being his apprentice? These issues about their relationship aren't conveyed or clear yet. And this again hurts your central plot.

Also Ethan and Alyss's relationship and connection is not developed enough. Even when Eric tries to talk Alyss into giving Ethan up *D* it comes too late-- they have already separated. This inconsistency to character's motivation confuses us and makes us ask what is this purpose of this story? Be specific, make choices and stick to them.

As of now, none of this added characters either challenge Ethan or put him in any real direct danger. This means the stakes are not "high" enough for Ethan. He doesn't have enough real enemies or demons to deal with yet. Just "falling" in love isn't

going to be enough to bring Ethan full circle here. This isn't enough of a pivotal plot point to change his entire direction of his life yet. So far none of this farcical humor is forcing us sympathize with Ethan enough to make us care about his problems or understand that he even needs love

OVERALL STRUCTURE: Still needs work. The whole 'Guild/Mafia' thing seems still feels too forced. Even if his organization did warrant an entire organization of having 'special' agents working for it -- where is the danger for Ethan? The only danger he faces in this script so far is when the Mambo Mafia kidnaps Mac Mann and they are not even after him because of his profession. They're after him because he took some kind of strange plant out of their country, which is against their religion. Where does this plot come into Ethan's job or even threaten to put him in any real danger? It's simply a misunderstanding. This isn't the kind of humor you should be aiming for here. It takes away from too much of the humor of your original premise and doesn't make any sense. Act two and three need to center more around Ethan's arc growth and change, as his personally and emotional life suddenly seem to be colliding. This is where the clients come in, exposing his secret identity to the public, and forcing a conclusion and confrontation with Alyss and her mother. Also, we should see Ethan actually finally delivering this 'bad news' to Alyss mother, and suffering as a result of it, which is something that is needed here. Ethan needs to suffer more, personally, if we are going to route for him till the very end. We need to see him 'get payback' for being so cold and uncaring for so many years. This is the center of your story and character arc and needs to be threaded through this story in a clear and local way.

Look at scripts like THE WEDDING CRASHERS and HITCH see how the humor isn't so over the top that it works against the believability of the overall premise. Also, if Ethan's MO is that he's addicted to 'telling white lies' then why didn't we see this in this draft? This should be his 'character stamp' and should be especially important when he finally meets Alyss the woman of his dreams and who he should actually want to have a 'normal and healthy' relationship with which should include being completely honest.

MAIN CHARACTERS: Undeveloped and still one dimensional. Again, why haven't we been given more details about Ethan background and what lead him to take this unusual job? This is the humor of your entire story. We need to know why Ethan is so good at this job that people would actually be willing to pay and hire him to "breaking bad news" to nice people. Also, if he is so good at his job then why is he being so cold and direct in giving all the bad news in the montage? You say he's good at 'giving bad news in a way that isn't bad' but then we see him doing exactly that! These issues ruin the image of Ethan being perfect for his 'shitty' job. There is also an extremely humorous theme that is missing here which is 'bad things that happen to nice people.' So why is Ethan so removed from all this 'emotional' stuff, that he only becomes upset about his job once he meets Alyss? Has he ever had a girlfriend before? If so what happened to her? If not, then why? What is he afraid of? And why hasn't he then suddenly pursuing a serious relationship out of the blue? Also, their connection needs to be much more than just enjoying playing games and having fun. We need to know

exactly what's missing in Ethan's personal life, and how his job is either contributing to this problem or a direct result of this. We need to know exactly what this personal connection is to Ethan's job that is affecting his 'inner-self' in order to understand what is at stake for him if he ruins his chances with Alyss. So far, we don't get this 'connection' or why he's suddenly so tired of his 'day' job. There should be either a much funnier or sadder story behind all this for us to buy why Ethan ended up in this unusual job. If we don't get this, we're missing out too much on the point of this love story and therefore, it's not enough reason for him to ultimately give up this job.

Also, why does Ethan need all these disguises? It is funnier if he breaks the bad news by being himself and having people in the streets recognizing him. Also, the theme you bring up here is more along the lines of 'why do bad things have to happen to nice people?' Is this what is keeping Ethan from becoming one of these 'nice' people? We also don't see how falling in love makes him transition into finally wanting to be a 'nice guy' without such a bad job. What other career goals does he have? How can this new love in his life help him see that? How does she help him grow and change? These are elements that are replaced with Mafia and silliness, instead of heartfelt real changes that are reflecting in a well defined 'character arc'. We need to know what and who makes Ethan grow up and what makes him want to change his life, and give up his 'bad new' job. There is so much funny stuff that can be added here, but you are using too many other characters to cloud the issues, instead of fully exploring Ethan's character inside and out. This is what the audience will want to see, and what can make this a great original comedy. My suggestion is to focus far more on the story of Ethan his problems and his missing character 'arc' instead of focusing on other characters that aren't original and just add wasted farce that we've already seen far too much in other films already. You are missing your mark by not making this the story it can be.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS: This is where the script is weakest. The secondary characters are not personally connected to Ethan's life or job enough. This however, is not the case with Eric. Eric is funny, but still isn't fully developed enough to be a good friend or great secondary character. I almost thought that Jaeane was Eric's girlfriend and that Eric had asked Ethan to get rid of her for him. This would have been a hilarious scene for helping to establish both these characters with a little more development. Why not make it more personal? It adds to the enjoyment of the piece. As it is now too many of the secondary characters are not directly tied into Ethan's personal or professional life. This is the biggest downfall of the script and is something the writer needs to address. If Eric is really Ethan's friend, then he too needs to have his own baggage and hang-ups, which also need to be addressed and resolved. Right now, he's half way between his real buddy and his co-worker, and that's isn't working fully yet for either of them. And if Eric is just his co-worker and is ultimately rooting for Ethan's job then he should be desperately trying to slip him up and figure out his secrets which doesn't make him a real friend. As a friend or co-worker Eric should know Ethan's weaknesses inside and out, and either work to protect him or exploit him. See more films like 'ENVY' or 'THE WEDDING CRASHERS' to see how these 'friends' interact in these kinds of comedies.

DIALOGUE: Fair. I didn't get the whole voice over thing with Ethan. It seemed to

come out of nowhere. It also didn't make him appear either very sane or well grounded, which I sense would be more meaningful to overall premise. The situations that result from Ethan's emotionally charged job is what should make him fall apart in the end. He should truly believe that he has everything under control till Alyss shows up and things start to hit the fan. When Alyss shows up and starts questioning him about his personal life of lack there of, that's when he should start questioning his life. This is where friends like Eric can help out. It ruins the tension if we see Ethan talking to himself in his room, because we immediately get the feeling that he does this a lot. And this lessens the sense that he's in control of his life. All that's happened so far is that he's met a great girl. So why should this be suddenly sending him over the edge? We need something more specific to happen to him that leads up to the moment that completely unravels his life for him. As a writer, it's your job to clues us in on what's this is and what is missing in his life early on. Without this, we're lost and asking too many unanswered questions about our central character here.

This should be something that even Ethan himself isn't aware of until it's almost too late for him to even fix this. This is where Alyss, his clients and Eric come in to help him figure out what that something is. Meanwhile, we're still waiting in this draft for him to figure this out and be clued into what this is. Right now, the characters are still too one dimensional to add enough real laughs to the premise here. Ethan has a shitty job and doesn't even seem to realize THAT it's even that bad himself. So something has to trigger this to be the ultimate realization for him. And that can't just simply be falling in love. It needs to be much bigger than this and exciting and funny TWIST!

CINEMATIC QUALITY: Good. Lots of locations and lots of fun action happening throughout. Could use more romantic and touching moments to replace some of all the 'fun' and extra farce that distracts from the relationship and changes that need to take place in the real story behind Ethan job and career conflict/ issues.

CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS: It's obvious the writer had a talent for creating an original and great premise. But the writer still needs to make this script good enough to sell to a producer, and that means it needs more work. There are two ways to approach the next rewrite. Do you continue to keep it over the top, or do you try and tone it down? My feeling is the premise and concept doesn't present enough of a farce element to keep it so outrageous. Telling bad news is a bummer, and doing it for a living is even a bigger bummer. It's an easy laugh in the first ten pages but isn't enough to sustain and audience for 100-110 pages. It's going to have to go somewhere and that can only happen by adding more depth to the overall humor the premise as well as Ethan's character. Given the premise (the job that nobody wants) you have not choice but to add more weight to this story in order to pull it off. If you want a more espionage-type Farce such as the Guild here suggests, then you need to pick a less emotional topic. Bad news is just that. It sucks. Someone's going to have to pay the price for all these laughs and that's ultimately going to have to be Ethan -- our hero.

By not keeping Ethan's job personal enough you miss out on too much of the central humor and conflict. There should be more at stake for Ethan here. Also, he should be a

source of 'pay back' for the people who are the bearers of all this 'bad news.' We need to know more about Ethan, the people who are hiring him, and the effects Ethan is having on these people's lives. Otherwise why do we care to see Ethan change from being a Snowman to finally giving it all up for love? Certainly the Mambo Mafia isn't going to do her to make this character arc come full circle enough.

SUGGESTIONS: I would suggest rather than keeping this a farce you present it as broad comedy or even romantic comedy by focus more on the reality of Ethan's job and making it actually believable. This would provide for more heartfelt and original humor. Remove the 'Guild' organization and other senseless character's who are not directly connected to Ethan's 'inner' problems. Let us know by page ten exactly what is missing in his life and why. Right now we still don't know what is ultimate objective here is. Is his is going to be an active character in this plot or passive? And why?

The 'bad news' is the theme of your story and isn't currently being conveyed here. To use these other farcical elements seems too force, contrived and doesn't feel natural enough. We want to really see what Ethan job is like and him actually 'doing it.' Therefore, unless Ethan is giving bad news to international terrorists or world leaders or politicians why would the 'Guild/CIA' organization even exist? He is merely bringing bad news to ordinary people. So this added humor isn't necessary here and in fact hurts the script.

Ethan needs to learn a real lesson for us to route for him in the end. This over the top humor misses the subtleties of the story here and prevents Ethan from having to confront his central problem and finding a way to 'grow' a heart and fall in love. I would suggest rethinking this issue and making the humor more centered on a 'revenge' theme that directly forces Ethan to confront the people whose lives he's ruined, and then having something occur which causes him to snap and ultimately confront his 'personal' problems of being the 'Snowman'.

You have real talent at writing funny scenes, but they are still not focusing enough on the real story yet. For example, you have a very smart scene in the second act where Ethan is telling Jaeane that her boyfriend is dumping her without her actually 'getting it'. At first I thought Ethan was actually hired by Eric to dump his girlfriend, and I said 'wow' this is brilliant scene. But then I found out she was just a client and wasn't directly connected to Ethan's life. Think how much funnier this scene would have been if it impacted other character's directly in the story. Also, why keep avoiding showing us the results of this bad news and how it is affecting the lives of the people involved. This is where the humor keeps getting away from you and why it still isn't posing enough of a threat or conflict to Ethan.

This is exactly the kind of natural cleverness this script is lacking right now. We need to see exactly how this story is driving Ethan into taking a look at what is missing in his own life. His job should be the catalyst that forces him into 'grow' and change. His job should take him from being removed from everything to completely unravel and falling apart and hitting rock bottom. Instead we are left with trying to feel sympathy for Ethan

when we still don't understand why he should deserve our sympathy or Alyss. The stakes for him need to be much higher and much more personal here.

As for the farcical humor, it still doesn't capture enough of the original premise here. Ethan's manner in dealing with his clients should be the central focus of his inner conflict. All secondary characters should be selected in order to elaborate and convey this missing self. We also need to know more about Ethan's past and what specifically lead him to taking this job and ultimately being so perfect for it. Just being 'born' into this life ruins the value of this lessons being learned here.

Again, you bring up such an original premise here but don't follow through on it's potential. Make Ethan's arc come full circle here. Also, Alyss should be challenging him more and even perhaps smarter than him. She should learn through a significant event that Ethan is lying to her about his real job. Then when Ethan's life completely unravels, make him crawl back and try and make amends to the people whose lives he destroyed. Maybe he even writes them all sympathy notes. You have so many more potential for humor here other which centers on Ethan's character; you don't need characters like Mafia Mambo, Mac Mann's or Eric's. Sometimes less is more, even in Comedies.

Right now we're still asking too many unanswered questions. For example, what is the relationship between Ethan and Eric all about? It's not clearly either a friendship or work relationship. He doesn't serve the purpose of a real friend in this comedy yet and offer Ethan someplace to vent. Also, why is Ethan Jewish? This is brought up but doesn't seem to go anywhere. Don't bring up loose threads unless they tie into the central plot or convey something that we need to know about your character in order to develop his/her arc. And why is Ethan so 'cold'? There should be a very clever story behind that should somehow speak to his connection to Alyss. What makes her so special that he would give up his job and change his entire life?

If you do choose to keep Eric in the film, I would let us see them working together effectively as a team instead of being in completion with each other. Have Ethan and Eric pull some real tricks out of their bags as they combat the bad news clients who want to cower out of doing this dirty work for them selves. Show us why they are Snowman guys and what these kinds of men really talk about. We need to see them both develop here in terms of lessons learned through the story. In fact, they should realize eventually that bad news isn't that bad unless you have someone who actually cares about you!

We need to actively see the premise of your story put Ethan into harms way. We need see more legitimate characters that really have it in for Ethan and know why. Ever character should have an arc and specific agenda regarding Ethan's life and job.

We want to see who are hires Ethan and how the recipients of this bad news get back at Ethan and the people who hired him. We also want to see what happens to all these people's lives AFTER Ethan gives them the bad news. This much these much needed

threads are still not being conveyed her and are instead being replaced with random humor and events.

Consider the movie HITCH for the next draft. The audience really wants to buy that this job really could actually exist. Make us believable this for Ethan too. It could be as simple as word of mouth or through a personal or Internet ad. Keep it low-key instead of using the whole Guild or Mafia instead. Unless you actively have people trying to kill Ethan, this plot doesn't make any sense.

My feeling is you are aiming more for a HITCH audience than an outright farce. Keep it as clever and believable as you can and you'll have a lot easier time trying to get this script made!

Keep at it! I'd love to see this story at the movies soon!

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