



STORYPROS DEEP ANALYSIS

TITLE: Perchance To Dream **WRITTEN BY:** Steve Beshekas
FORMAT: Screenplay / 121 pages **GENRE:** Thriller
BUDGET: 10-20 million **SETTING:** Present Day

LOGLINE

A hypnotherapist works to uncover the truth about a young woman with a secret past.

SYNOPSIS

Dean West is a hypnotherapist whose life is going nowhere. Every day it's the same old thing — hypnotizing the overweight to be slimmer, or smokers to quit. He's got a son that he loves, and an ex-wife he doesn't, and he needs something new.

And something new walks into his office one day in the person of Sarah Jennings, a young attractive woman troubled by recurring nightmares. After a couple of sessions, Dean gets to the root of the problem: he discovers that she's got another entire personality named Chrystal which has been somehow erased from her memory. Chrystal worked in the government and was involved in a mysterious project called the Carson project. During this time, Dean and Sarah are being watched by a shadowy figure named Mr. Eldridge. Dean starts getting anonymous phone calls telling him to stay away from Sarah. He ignores these warnings, for he's intrigued by her case — and he's falling in love with her.

After another phone call threatening Dean's son, he and Sarah try and get to the bottom of the mystery, but can't seem to make any progress. Then in the middle of the night Sarah calls — she's remembered the whole story, and she is off to Mexico. She quickly signs off, but she's left a letter in his mailbox telling him more.

In Mexico, Sarah wanders through a deserted town. Dean catches up with her, and she tells him the story — the Carson Project was a State Department water purification scheme that went horribly wrong and killed 50 people. The deaths were covered up and the participants had their memories erased. The man who was in charge is the current Vice President, William Danforth — and he was once Sarah's lover.

Trouble descends on the deserted town in the form of Mr. Eldridge. He intends to kill Sarah and Dean and their local guides, but Dean turns the tables and kills Mr. Eldridge instead. The pair flee back to the US, intending to retrieve tapes of their sessions to give to the media, in order to expose Danforth — but Danforth himself is waiting in Dean's apartment. After he explains his nefarious plans, Sarah tries to kill him and is herself killed. Dean's taken away.

An epilogue has Dean arriving at a hypnotherapist's office, calling himself Martin Turner...he's been having strange dreams. He's been reprogrammed, and the bad guys won.



COMMENTS

The script takes a while to get going and suffers from some fairly long scenes that meander. A general lack of focus indicates a script a couple of drafts away from being fully realized. Some good opportunities here for creepiness which were not fully exploited — the reprogramming, secret machinations within the US government, an *Andromeda Strain*-style mass death in a desolate place — as well as mysteries of the mind and heart in which Dean and Sarah were entangled, or could have been.

The first act needs to be half as long and all the dialogue tightened and shorthanded. The characters should be fleshed out in the second act and the B story of Sarah and Dean in love — currently only hinted at — should be pumped up. And since there's no thematic message about evil being more powerful than good, there's no reason not to have a happy ending. Makes the script more saleable in general. Right now, it's not quite in saleable form — not recommended.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
CHARACTERIZATION		X		
DIALOGUE		X		
STRUCTURE			X	
STORY LINE			X	
PACING			X	
RECOMMENDATION	PASS			

PAGE NOTES

- p. 1 Description blocks too long. Each block should be no longer than three lines.
- p. 2 Easy on the wrylies (a.k.a. parentheticals). Use wrylies only when it's not clear how the line should be delivered — e.g., "that's great!" when it's meant to be "(sarcastic)".
- p. 6 Opening scene goes on for 6 long pages, and very talky — what's done here could be handled in two, and would have far more impact. Remember, your first scene is your grabber...you've got to hook the audience quickly.
- p. 7 No need to describe Diana's outfit, etc. Stick to a few pithy words about each character when they're introduced. Less when, like Diana, they're not main characters.
- p. 8 "He is one of Dean's few close friends" — in description, you have to limit yourself to only that which can be seen. If it's in description, the audience will never know it, because they will never read the script!
- p. 9 Danforth on TV — confusing. Show Danforth, with a graphic identifying him as Danforth on the TV screen.
- p. 9 Why does Dean mumble "William Danforth?" Be interesting if somehow he was involved in what follows, if he and Danforth had a secret history as well...
- p. 9 "nuerotic" should be "neurotic"
- p. 11 Use proper montage format. Slug MONTAGE, then number short descriptive scenes A), B), C), etc.
- p. 11 Is this montage really necessary?
- p. 13 "plastered" s/b "plastered"
- p. 14 Remember, every scene should a. Advance plot, or b., Reveal character. Eliminate scenes which do neither, or fold them into other scenes.
- p. 16 Dean playing with executive toy — funny!
- p. 16 "Shot widens" — avoid "directing" in your script. Use description blocks strategically to indicate narrative flow in a visual way, but leave camera directions out.
- pp. 19-20 Sarah's monologues here too long.
- p. 22 Might be more effective to begin the script with this dream sequence!
- p. 28 How does Dean know Mrs. Hagstrom is waiting? Diana didn't call and say so...
- p. 32 This sequence ran from pp. 16-32, and should have been about half or a third as long.
- p. 32 "He sits, puzzled" — why's he puzzled? Just because he couldn't hypnotize her? Or something else? If she were the *only one* he's never been able to hypnotize, that would explain his puzzlement and be more intriguing as well.
- p. 35 "DOESN'T" — indicate emphasis in dialogue with underlining only, not caps, bold or italics.
- p. 43 Scene with Dean & Sean at the zoo — well-written, but doesn't advance the story!
- p. 51 Would Dean really give patients his home phone number?
- p. 52 "seeshore" s/b "seashore"
- p. 52 Cut around her recounting the dream, since we've seen it and we know what happens.
- p. 54 Would he really make a house call? In the middle of the night?

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- p. 56 Mr. Eldridge appearance — good to get another element involved. He should appear far earlier — you want your bad guy, or his minions, to be visible as early as possible.
- p. 57 How come Dean is able to hypnotize her now? What changed?
- pp. 58-59 No need to indicate "END ACT I" and "ACT II". Act breaks in spec scripts should be evident from story alone.
- p. 60 This sequence might be more effective with POV shots of the action being described — show, don't tell!
- p. 61 Dean impersonating the Secretary of Defense — funny!
- p. 69 "check my methodology" — he just said the same thing on p. 68.
- p. 71 Note that they're playing Dean's session with Sarah on the tape.
- p. 73 Islington — if he was Dean's rival, that might be a good source of additional drama here.
- p. 74 End scenes earlier — no need to waste time on pleasantries or exit chit-chat. Always end a scene on a decisive note, and never trail off.
- p. 74 "The expression of vulnerability on her face is heartwarming." Nice, but not really appropriate for screenplay description. Be spare and telegraphic in your descriptions.
- p. 75 "pysically" s/b "physically"
- p. 79 Why won't Dean introduce Sarah to Laurel? What in their history would justify this?
- p. 79-81 Use proper montage format. Better yet, consider using something other than a montage here — series of shots or, even better, actual short scenes to show their developing relationship.
- p. 92 Message or letter, not both — you could make this part flow much more smoothly if it was just a message that points him in the right direction. Or if he's forced to sniff out where she's gone, because, to protect him, she's left no scent for the others to find.
- p. 93 Islington mentioned again here as being responsible for "deconditioning" — so a bad guy has been lurking about all along? More on this!
- p. 94 "We've had this conversation before" — but we haven't heard it...what are they talking about?
- p. 101-102 Carlos & Pepe, cool characters!
- p. 107 Need more "why" on this cover-up, or at least a hint of why it might've occurred...
- pp. 115-117 Lots of bad guy monologuing here...a bit standard, undermines the ending.
- p. 121 Clever ending, but does it need to be sad?

GENERAL ANALYSIS

OVERALL

This is a script a few drafts away from being fully realized. Mainly it needs a thematic think-through in order to find the real emotional core of the story and the true function and significance of the characters. All the working parts of the story can and should be beefed up to raise the stakes and increase the "wow" factor. At the present time, unfortunately, it's never going to catch a reader's eye and rate anything above a PASS. But the problems are not insurmountable and the seeds for a compelling script are all right here — they just need some refinement.

FORMAT

- Scene numbers are not needed.
- (CONTINUED)'s are not required. Only CONT'D needed when a character's speech carries onto the next page.
- CUT TO: and other transitions are not required in a spec script. When you start a new scene, the CUT TO: is implied. Other transitions border on "directing", which is a general no-no.
- Difficult to estimate page count due to dot-matrix printing. The printing doesn't make the script look very professional, and works against its chances of getting read — recommend you import it into any widely available screenplay-formatting program and let the software format it for you, in the right typeface, margins, and tabs.

STRUCTURE

- Structure is lopsided because the first act is almost 50% too long. A lot of flailing around before Dean meets Sarah on page 16 — and then a long time before Sarah's secret is revealed.
- 2nd act is 33 pages long, and should be the longest act in the script. If you shorten the first act, then you can use those additional pages added to the 2nd act on characterization, increasing emotional connection and impact.
- The A story — Dean solving Sarah's problem — falters a bit toward the end, but more or less carries through. There is a B story — the love story between Dean and Sarah — but currently it's completely undeveloped and unexploited.

CHARACTERIZATION

- Dean not proactive enough. Story seems to happen *to him*. His goal not sharply determined — and what's more, it's not interesting enough. He seems to be at loose ends...what's specifically is he looking for? What does he want?
- Sarah/Crystal's goal is defined — she wants to stop the nightmares. But once she finds out the secret, and presumably stops the nightmares, what then? She goes off to Mexico, for no apparent reason other than to...jog her memory? It'd be more effective if she was going for some specific reason — perhaps to find evidence to somehow defeat Danforth. Then she and Dean could join forces in order to get justice for those who died, and remove a corrupt man from office.

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- Sarah dies abruptly and in a way ultimately unsatisfying. If a main character is going to die, then their death should be meaningful in some way — most likely to give the survivors added motivation to succeed in their goal and avenge the death. Or, there should be thematic reasons. If neither of these are at work, then why bother?
- When did Danforth become Vice President? Was there an election somewhere along the line? He was a "potential running mate" on page 9, then on 89 he's the "favored choice"...what happened here? Did the previous Vice President die?
- What about the Mexicans in the village who died? If we learn some of their story or if Sarah had a personal connection with some of them, then their death is more tragic — and justifies revenge on Sarah's part and increases our yearning to see her do it.
- Certain characters are underutilized — Charlie disappears early on and never resurfaces. Dean's ex-wife and young son are not utilized. If they are in the script, then they should be developed or dropped. Dean's son might be threatened by the bad guys, for example. Or Laurel and Sarah have some conflict. Or Laurel could be working for the bad guys herself!

DIALOGUE

- Tends to wander. People in movies tend to speak in short cryptic lines and half sentences, and get right to the point. In this screenplay, they meander and wander through their scenes. Often what's being said is interesting, but just too vague to keep an audience's attention.
- Noticeable lack of subtext. Every film should have at least some subtext — when the characters are saying one thing, but they mean something else. If Dean and Sarah's love were ramped up, that would be the perfect way to bring in another level of communication. Subtext is generally a byproduct of strong thematic underpinnings, so we'd expect there to be more in the next draft after the theme's been more fully realized.

CONFLICT

The villain is invisible until the final moments of the screenplay — far too late. Eldridge, his proxy, appears halfway through the script — far too late. The villain should appear in the first act. Antagonist should be clearly defined as early as possible so you know who your characters are up against. Otherwise, we're just looking at postcards, and the story really hasn't begun yet.

STAKES

Raising the stakes is usually the first improvement that can be made in a script — the stakes are rarely high enough. Here, though, it's not clear what the stakes even are. What do these characters stand to lose? Presumably their lives, but...is that all? And in the end they don't even lose their lives (for some reason unknown to us). If Danforth had some sort of agenda (currently unknown) and Dean and Sarah worked to defeat him (and did) then that would load it up and make it more important — get the audience more invested in the outcome.

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BELIEVABILITY

Fairly believable in terms of tone and execution. But when it comes to the Carson Project, there seems to be no real justification for it. It's a little half-baked. Danforth "just wanted to see what (he) could do with the authority" (p. 116), and that's not quite good enough. And it's not quite clear how or why a water purification project would earn the United States "brownie points" (p. 106).

DEVELOPMENT NOTES

Dean and Sarah are two individuals traveling a parallel course — both drifting through unsatisfactory lives. Dean's got an unsatisfying life and needs something in it. Sarah's troubled by nightmares — on top of a life that's also unsatisfying. She and Dean are very similar people. They're the answer to each other's problems — he can solve her problem, and she can solve his. This is probably the best way to go because it utilizes them both in a complimentary way that makes a unified whole.

Dean doesn't probe the nature of the Carson Project early in Act 2 — he seems hot on the trail, then inexplicably backs off. This is exactly the kind of mystery that he's been searching for in life, and you figure he would be keen to find out more about it. There could be a conflict here with his need to know vs. his growing love for Sarah.

What's the nature of Sarah's memory blockage? Who did the memory erasure? Why are these memories resurfacing now? Is there some cue, some environmental stress in her life that's triggering them? Perhaps some case in her insurance office could be the trigger — a family just like the one in her submerged memories perhaps. Or perhaps that ties in also with a family in Mexico who she got to know. Any of these would strengthen Sarah's character, and make the script more interesting.

We need to know more about Danforth. He should be revealed as an active antagonist early on in the piece. We should ultimately come to know nearly as much about Danforth's motivations as we do about Dean & Sarah's. Part of this involves the Carson Project — build and strengthen that, and you strengthen Danforth. A clear reason should be found why the project is necessary, and what it brings both countries should be spelled out. Danforth should have benefitted (probably financially) from it. Whatever he's done here, it's a golden opportunity to show just how evil and conniving he really is.

The first act should be shortened by half. The second act should focus on developing the characters and more importantly, bringing up the B story of the love affair and uniting it with the A story to lead us to a satisfying resolution. The third act should supply that resolution, and it should lead to Dean & Sarah's triumph over Danforth — and if they do not, then there'd better be a good reason which flows organically from the events leading up to it.



As mentioned, a thematic think-through — not a revision, but a "re-vision" of the script, is really needed here. Break it down into its abstract pieces and decide what story is really being told or should be told. Is it the story of Dean's redemption? How does Dean's redemption correspond to Sarah's redemption? How (and why) does Danforth prevent them from realizing their goals? Do they seek justice for the dead, or is there some other way to play it?

Does Danforth's accession to the vice presidency threaten the country in such a way that Dean and Sarah must risk heaven and earth to stop him? Questions like this help you pinpoint the thematic core of the script. And you'll be surprised how this kind of clarification can really snap your story into focus. When you have the core all figured out, you know what scenes are necessary, and what are not, and can spend your time wisely on sequences you'll keep.

Thank you!

Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate your script! We hope you find these comments and suggestions useful, and that they lead you to better writing and greater success. We look forward to seeing more of you and your work in the future!