

KILLER SHORTS

HORROR SHORT SCREENPLAY COMPETITION

The Devil's Doorman

by Kareline Castor

Package: Short Script Coverage

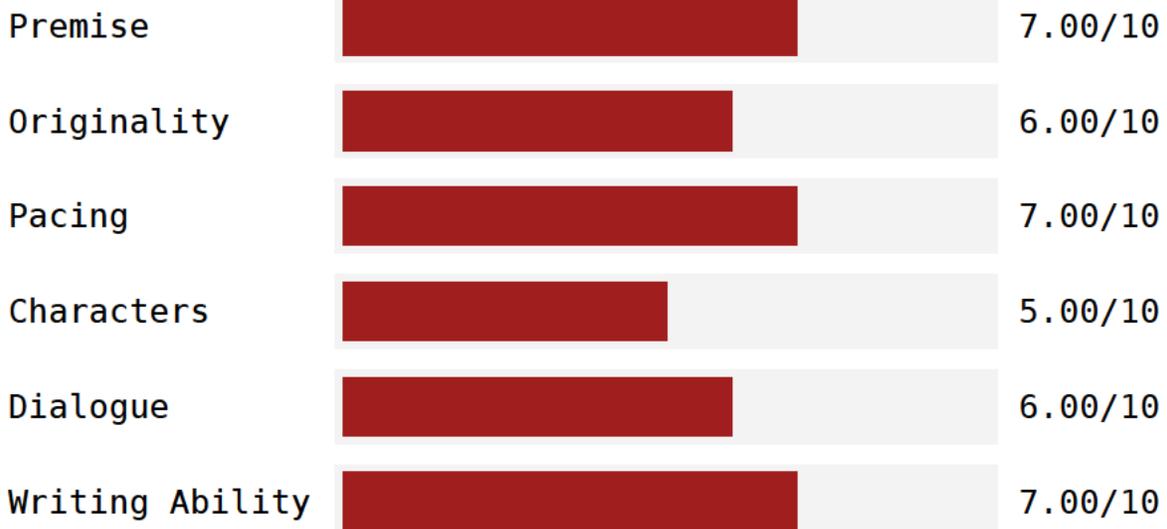
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Genre: Horror

Analyst: [REDACTED]

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Highlighted Strengths

As someone who's driven across the US three times, I've stayed in a lot of hotels like the one in this script. These identical chain hotels in the middle of nowhere (or in a space that might as well be the middle of nowhere) that are pretty much identical to one another. Or at least that's the kind of hotel I imagine this script taking place in, and maybe I'm biased, but I love the idea of them as a location for a horror movie.

Really, there are two aspects of the setting you've captured well. The first is the sense of tedium and boredom that emanates from these hotels. As I said, they're usually in the middle of nowhere, specifically on the highway or far from any semblance of culture within a city. There's nothing around them and there's nothing to do, so as a result, of course there's a kid who comes in every night to fart around in the rec room and of course he's friends with someone on the staff. After all, any staff member would be just as bored as the kid, so there's something for them to bond over.

The other aspect is that these hotels can be oddly eerie. You drive through miles and miles of nothing and then suddenly, there's this bright shining bastion of corporate comfort eating up resources that clearly isn't supposed to be there. Who works there and where do they live? Who made the decision to build something here in the first place? You'll never know. The parking lot will be full of cars, yet you'll rarely see other guests and the only thing surrounding most of these hotels is other chain hotels or chain restaurants. One just gets the sense that it's areas like these you can get away with murder.

I know I'm projecting a lot of my own stuff onto this, and the location may seem like a slight thing to praise. But I can't tell you how many cabins and haunted houses and forests I've seen in these scripts. It's not just the change of location I appreciate, but all the baggage you could bring to said location as well.

Killer Moment

Ms. Ross's death in room 301.

You know she's going to be dead when Jacob goes into the room. The question is how, and if I had to have guessed, strangled to death by a phone cord while drowning in gallons of boiling coffee would've been at the bottom of the list.

There are layers to it as well. At first, I was going to complain about how her being wrapped in the phone cord is a detail we don't need. But then I realized she was being punished for calling too much about the coffee and it suddenly made way more sense. It demonstrates that you've thought this through.

Ways to Improve

The running theme of this script seems to be the mistreatment of labor in the service industry.

Ms. Ross has called over and over again about the coffee (or at least she's done so offscreen), the entire premise of the evil pinball machine revolves around leaving positive reviews online, the ending in which a suddenly alive Ms. Ross yells at them in the lobby despite everything Peter and Jacob have done for her, and so on and so forth. If this theme is intentional, which I think it is, I would say that my biggest issue with *The Devil's Doorman* is that the arc and everything Peter goes through feels a little too disconnected from that theme.

I mentioned the aspect about Ms. Ross yelling at them despite everything they've done to rescue her to say that I do understand what that detail is trying to accomplish. However, one could argue that she, and all the other guests in the hotel, aren't really the cause of Peter's suffering. Sure, Ms. Ross is one annoying guest, but her calls aren't the reason the chaos starts and she's not what Peter needs to overcome in order to defeat in order to survive. That would be the pinball machine. He doesn't suffer at the hands of the guests. He suffers at the hands of the evil machine.

I want to see Peter suffering for his job a little more and I want the plot to reflect said suffering. That way the pinball machine has more of a reason to do what it does.

The reason I'm going on about this is because I think the labor aspect of this script is what makes it meaningful. Without that stuff, it's a script that's just about an evil object attacking people and I've seen a billion of those. But with all the labor subtext, it becomes a script about *something*. It becomes a script about the mistreatment of bored hotel workers, and even though not all of us have worked in a hotel, plenty of us have had similar experiences. It's what makes this script relatable, so I want to see you lean into it a little more.

Final Thoughts

- Just a thought: What if instead of Jacob being a 13 year old, he was a fellow employee? I mention it because that would make him susceptible to the same mistreatment as Peter and if I was working a boring job in a boring Midwest town, I for sure would be slacking off and playing pinball during work hours. I usually try not to backseat write like this, but it's something I thought about a lot. Just something to think about.

- The foundation for a great short is here. I just need a little more in the arc department and I need a little bit more of a relationship between the plot and characters. Keep up the good work and keep writing!