

STORY COVERAGE

TITLE: HELL TO PAY

COVERAGE BY: BWMi

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SUBMITTED BY: Boris Ivanov, Producer
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SUBMISSION NOTES: WGA Registration: 1015691

AUTHOR: Samuel Dulmage & Mike Jackson

ATTACHMENTS: One sheet

GENRE: Supernatural horror

TYPE/DRAFT/LENGTH: 116 pages

TIME/LOCALE: Present day; primarily a rural home

LOGLINE: *Don't kidnap the devil if you can't pay his price.*

COMMENTS:

HELL TO PAY is, as the one-sheet contends, a fresh twist on the classic deal-with-the-devil-story. Among the fresh elements of the tale are several factors:

- The devil in question is not Lucifer himself, nor are the Summoners career Satanists or even experts in the occult, allowing some interesting leeway in the storytelling. This devil is crafty and creative but he is not all-powerful, making the struggle between humans and demon more compelling.
- There is a key story turn on a single character that, while present, is not part of the original invocation ceremony. Again, this twists the conventions and the “rules” of this type of story and opens fresh territory.
- While the characters are prototypes— jock, goth girl, good girl, comedy sidekick, bright young alpha male/aspiring lawyer— they are all three dimensional and detailed. In point of fact, they manage to function less as prototypes and more as symbols of key elements of our culture; everyone has a secret and a weak spot,

from the repulsive to the hugely sympathetic, that renders even the worst of them relatable on some level.

- The base element of the story is a bright young man with a promising future who has been diagnosed with cancer. Not only is this an unusual, possibly unprecedented, template for a lead character, his medical condition has not made him a victim. He is still actively pursuing every avenue to save himself, triggering the events of the story.

There is another “character” in the story that is perhaps more troublesome. In early stages of the bargaining, Asmodeus asks for a TV set. The TV is used throughout by the demon to illustrate and accelerate his bargaining positions. He conjures up game shows, boxing, nature programming and cartoons as well as representations of Rick’s career as a telephone huckster and images of Hillary’s aborted daughter.

Setting aside the disturbing nature of the cartoons and Asmodeus’ appearance as one of the boxers, the other programming can be seen as real programming cleverly hijacked to the demon’s ends. But Rick’s exploits as a phone huckster seem at odds with the TV format. This harkens back to the point about the limited powers of this version of the devil. Having the power to retroactively film history and create original programming seems a bit of a stretch for this powerful but restricted villain. If the segment started with a “real” game show and switched to security footage/taped phone call audio, the point could still be compellingly made. It seems to this reader that the TV material should stick close to actual programming and accessible media. It makes the devil’s persuasion more compelling and more feasible.

Similarly, the TV appearance of Hillary’s aborted daughter seems to stretch the concept. There could be some archival TV material that launches Asmodeus’ gambit, an old horror movie for instance, but where the “daughter’s” dialogue becomes specific, the birthday stuff for instance, the imagery should be generic and the voice over should emanate from the demon himself. Alternatively, he could morph into a representation of the little girl but the contention here is that what’s on TV should seem like TV. Let’s not make this demon so powerful that he seems unbeatable. (As a side note, the idea that the demon is later viewing medical abortion footage is inspired.)

One other thought: great care should be taken to insure that the audience is aware of the exact nature of Tyler’s illness— the stage he’s in, and the rate at which he will decline. He cannot seem to be of supernatural powers himself. Nothing is more of a movie cliché than the beautiful and/or seemingly invincible terminal patient.

Over all the story is well told, the plot is highly credible, even innovative given the genre parameters, and the characters are well drawn and relatable. Still, I’m left with an unshakable sense that the story takes too long to tell. This seems like a two hour film to me and, setting genre running-time conventions aside, I’m not sure that audience engagement can be sustained at this intensity for this long. My worry is that, at best you will exhaust them and at worst, lose them. The best story in existence should not leave you wanting less. I am not a screenwriter and I admit to having no suggestions as to how to tell the story with more economy but my sense is that it is better to tighten the story at the script stage than in the more severe environment of the cutting room.

Still, it’s a fine and well-crafted script that has the potential to be a satisfying film.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	FAIR	POOR
CHARACTERS		XX			
DIALOGUE	XX				
STRUCTURE		XX			
PLOTLINE		XX			
PACING		XX			
CONCEPT	XX				

Script: RECOMMEND with modest editing

Writers: Highly RECOMMEND

Coverage submitted by: David Partridge, Blue Window Media Inc.