

Decadent Descent

Written By

Jake Riley



SCRIPT COVERAGE

INFORMATION

Title	Decadent Descent
Form	Feature-Length Script
Length	109 Pages
Writer	Jake Riley
Setting	UK
Period	80's
Budget	High
Verdict	Pass

Date of Coverage | 29 April 2021

OUR STATEMENT

Your script is assigned to one of our consultants on the basis of their specialities.

With our collective experience and rigorous quality control, we encourage you to question us if anything is unclear to you.

We hope the following feedback will provide great value to you and having purchased script feedback you are entitled to answers and explanations.

Thank you for choosing us. Stay writing!

The team at SWN

Opening Comments

There are a lot of good ideas here, and you're clearly very passionate about this story, world, and characters. The script is largely well-written, and I get the sense that you've thoroughly researched it and invested a lot of time in developing it.

Currently, there's a big problem with it for me, and that's its content. This is a sort of compliment and critique, and at this stage of development, this will be good for you to hear. There are great ideas here. There are great stories. However, there's too much going on and I don't get enough focus or development of the stories or characters because of this.

Ultimately, what's this meant to be? Is it the story of a pilot saving his aircraft on his final flight, interlinked with flashbacks explaining his life? Or is it a cop/FBI action-thriller featuring a complicated terrorist plot? I think this should be the former. Dan's story is the most important - he learns the most, has an arc, and a resolution - it's his story. Too much time has been invested in the FBI/terrorist sub plot, and it's slowing the pacing down. This should be about Dan - the aircraft - the passengers - and his life, but currently, there's a lot of unnecessary plotting and too much time devoted to what's effectively a triple narrative. Dan in the present. Dan in the past. Holmes.

They are great ideas, but they're being lost because you're trying to do everything at once. I recommend you develop one idea - the brave pilot saving his aircraft and his life interweaved throughout. Keep Holmes, the FBI, The Curve, and the ins and outs of the terrorist group for something else - ultimately, they aren't important and I'm not invested in them. I'm invested in Dan because I came into the story with him. I know him, relate to him, understand him. I'm rooting for him saving the day - landing the plane - and reflecting on his life. I don't think how they get the cure or why the terrorists are doing it is as important - I think the real story is about Dan and his final flight, and why he changes his mind and keeps flying.

As said, this isn't a direct criticism. This is a 'how to develop this screenplay'. I think, as a TV series, this triple narrative would really work. Similar to 24, I could see the events on the plane and in the outside world playing out in real-time across a series. But, as a feature, there's too much. This is much too long - I've timed it. Due to the dialogue (something I'll talk about below as well), this comes out way over two hours, but it's not a fast two hours. It's a long read, and they could be off-putting to an agent, producer, judge, etc. as a speculative script. It's much slower than it needs to be - it should be fast-paced, exciting, with the flashbacks used for levity and to restore the pacing.

So, I recommend focusing your script and focusing your story on Dan He's far more interesting than anything else in the screenplay, and I'd love to see his story completely developed. The change would be just removing the scenes following other characters. Alternatively, break this feature into episodes - with some adaptation and development, I think you could get six episodes out of this screenplay alone.

I'll address some other points for development in their respective sections below, but I see the potential in this. My comments address all parts of the script, not just Dan's (which is the strongest), if you choose to stay with the triple narrative you have already established. Hopefully they'll be beneficial regardless. I just think you need to hone in on the strongest element of your screenplay and make it fly.

Formatting

Your formatting is largely professional and well-presented throughout. I've noted a couple of changes and suggestions, however.

Pg. 1 - Format separate scenes for your INT. and EXT. and then INTERCUT between them. You need to establish both as scenes, though. Again, establish Atlanta airport and then INTERCUT. Same goes on Pg. 3, and more throughout. Search down your scene headings and create some new ones.

Pg. 2 - Bedroom and Bathroom are separate locations. Format both as new scenes. Each location is a new lighting and camera setup, technical cue for actors and production, and should be formatted as separate scenes. Same goes if action is taking place later in a scene - the new scene should carry the marking LATER. Check this throughout.

Pg. 32 - Assign scene headings to the locations visited in the Montage.

Pg. 34 - The split screen is more of a technical marking in a shooting script. As this is speculative, it would be more effective for you to tell the story - not how it should be filmed. Just format these as separate scenes and INTERCUT again.

Spelling, Grammar and Vocabulary

Check your spelling and grammar throughout for mistakes - even read your work aloud or pass it onto someone else to spot these errors. Some examples of the type of mistakes you'll find throughout are Pg. 2 - 'gets', Pg. 3 'iPad', Pg. 14 'tonight', Pg. 49 '(cont'd)' - just watch for these. The script definitely reads a lot better as it progresses, but you may want to take a look at your first act.

Pg. 1 - Reread your superimpose and rephrase it. It's reading a little wordy and over complex at the moment. Either it's missing some punctuation, it's repeating itself, or it's just too long.

Try not to use technical jargon or acronyms throughout i.e. just use the aircraft instead of a/c. You want to make this the most comprehensible read for whoever has your script.

Pg. 3 - Read through your action/scene description on this page - the action beats aren't clear. There's a lot of run-on. For every new beat of action - new idea - effectively, new shot of Dan doing something, there should be a new line. For instance:
'Now going through the motions, Dan picks up his iPad and scrolls down, looking for something to read. He puts it down, stares ahead for a moment, and then goes back to his coffee.'
'Dan drives by the famous big chicken in Marietta.
Finally, he turns into the Cobb County International Airport and stops the car in front of a hangar.' Space out your ideas - give them room to breathe and your reader time to digest them. Check this throughout.

Dialogue and Characters

I can tell this has been thoroughly researched, but don't overuse your aviation jargon - especially not in dialogue. Pg. 2's 'Tower, Global seven ten heavy, localised inbound, wind check?' doesn't really mean anything to an audience. I think it would be better to give reactions or commentary on what's happening - remember this is a drama and not real life.

Yes, it should be a reflection of real life, but audiences wanted to be captivated, understand what's happening, and relate to the dialogue. By all means keep the jargon in, but find ways to make it more accessible for the audience - and if you can replace it with more accessible, relatable language, try and do so.

I think you need to trim down some of your dialogue too - there's a lot of talk, a lot of technical language, and most of it can be replaced with action. Look at the scenes at the hospital in the first act - a lot of padding, explaining what's going on, what the injuries are - that's not the focus of the story. Dan and the plane journey is. When we're not with Dan try and get to the point of the scene and move on.

There are a lot of characters in this. I think this would do well to either remove or condense some of them. Stacy's husband doesn't need to be in this, Eric's role could be played by Holmes, and various Doctors, orderlies, agents, etc. could be condensed. The additional characters become important during the aircraft scenes, but not before. You don't need to name every character on-screen either, or have

characters introducing themselves, name-dropping, or reaffirming information the audience already knows. It's not natural and doesn't help the narrative flow.

Pg. 44's 'What's your name again?' 'Kathleen Foster, I'm a doctor' is a prime example of this - it seems shoehorned in. We don't need introductions - we need characters doing things and progressing the narrative. Every introduction is the narrative slowing down, and with so many characters and so many introductions, the pacing begins to suffer. This should be whip-fast and exciting - we shouldn't still be being introduced to characters.

Pg. 89 - we're still being introduced to characters, and this is definitely a no-go. How can you expect an audience to become invested in a character so close to the end - especially with such a brief appearance? If you're going to introduce a character, they need to have some kind of payoff - some kind of denouement. We should know where every character is at the end and have a moment that completes their journey/arc. The passengers, individually, don't really get their moment to shine, and Jimmy's denouement in particular is absent. I'll talk more about this below.

Arguably, the characters who have the most effect on the plot and that we become most invested in are Dan Brooksy, Mike, Stumpy, the flashback characters, and the passengers. So, I would look into focusing in on them.

Pg. 2 - We don't really need to know that Stumpy is 5'10" - it's overly specific description. Medium height, if that's hugely necessary. It's always better in a character description, however, to describe what kind of person they are rather than who they are physically. 'Looks like he wrestles alligators' is the exact kind of description I need to discern who Stumpy is.

Pg. 4 - Let's see the chain before now - perhaps when he goes for a shower. It feels like you're introducing it just so you can have a flashback explaining it. Make it part of your world and establish its existence before you have to explain it.

Pg. 5/6 - Good establishment of Dan and Mary's relationship.

Pg. 8 - 'Babe, you are looking too fine...' This dialogue isn't landing as natural. Dan's dialogue and the majority of speech up till now has been fine, but we're missing some contractions, some rhythm, some colloquialisms, etc. Read all of your dialogue out loud or get some actors to read through your work - notice how they say the lines in an informal setting and take notes. It'll really help your dialogue sound all the more realistic. 'You're lookin' too fine, babe. C'mon. Come out with me. Saturday Night. The Tongue and Groove. I've got a table reserved - and the band's great, etc.' Try and push your dialogue further and capture how people would say these lines in casual conversation.

Here I'd think Eric would be trying to get to the point. This is, of course, an example of what you should do with dialogue throughout - not just here. Arguably, Eric has no role in this story other than to briefly provide exposition - making me wonder if his part should be removed and this scene should follow Holmes (if you decide to keep it).

Pg. 9 - 'Please, I need your vehicle' - more straight to the point. The badge is enough to seize the vehicle. That and the driver's reaction are all you need here.

Pg. 15 - How do we know Domanik has six kids?

Pg. 44 - With 'tainted food' and ill passengers, I'm almost expecting an 'Airplane!' reference.

Pg. 48 - 'Everyone except a small few...' This seems really vague. Of all the moments to be specific, it's this.

Structure and Plot

Pg. 9 - 'Holmes walks out'? Rushes? Dives into action? Streamline your action and keep your scenes flowing, and exciting. Use this to show what kind of person Holmes is, too.

Pg. 32 - 'Met Brooksy over there...' I feel this scene is something we'd like to see. Rather than watch Dan get ready (again), a nice heartfelt scene of character development between the two would be welcome - establishing where Dan stands on relationships, and even foreshadow what's going to happen. 'At least I've got my health' or something to that effect may be a cunning line.

Pg. 38 - 'SUPER: 2 HOURS SINCE INFECTED - 8 HOURS TO ATLANTA' - They haven't moved, so why has the time till arrival in Atlanta gone down? Are you including the waiting time? I think the problem here is that the Superimposes should just say the infection times, not the journey times.

Pg. 40 - This scene where Brooksy walks around naming the passengers and apologising for their illness could probably be trimmed down for time. She should notice that people are getting ill, yes, but we don't need four conversations about it.

Pg. 53 - In a medical emergency where the only person able to land the plane is not affected, a quarantine to keep him safe would be put in affect. It seems unlikely that outsiders would be allowed to breach protocol and enter the cockpit. I'm not suggesting you remove the beat, but I think some more development around the credulity of it would be welcome. Dan strikes me as being by the books, that's why it's jarring to me. If you established prior that he doesn't play by the rules but is still respected, this may work. Have a think about it. It does seem unlikely, though, that Dan would make a kid the co-pilot. There's a lot of realism in this, and this crosses over into suspension of disbelief territory - something that's already being pushed to the limit with the strange and somewhat vague terrorist plot and delivery system.

I tried not to think too much about the logistics of the terrorist plot because I could suspend disbelief, but I find his plot point harder to ignore. Again, if this story is solely about Dan him educating and taking Jimmy under his wing works - you could intercut it with him not having a son of his own to teach, or Stacy not being interested, or maybe he did have a pilot son who died. Regardless, Jimmy is a character who doesn't fit in the story you've currently crafted as a whole - only in one section of it and one of the reasons I think you should rework and reframe this.

Pg. 65 - The fight breaking out is something that should be visualised. It's a really dramatic moment - we shouldn't hear about it or its diffusion through expository dialogue. Remember, if you can Show, Don't Tell.

Pg. 88 - 'I've known Captain Ahern for thirty years' - For all the great flashbacks, I think it's a missed opportunity we don't get any featuring Brooksy. She's a great character - definitely well-developed and realistic. Some of her history with Dan would be welcome.

Pg. 115 - 'You're the second' - this is just the callback and excellent character moment we need, and tells me this story is about Dan If you're going to use Jimmy, though, I feel we need some denouement here i.e. Dan taking him under his wing, training him to fly, etc. It's a good ending, though.

Closing Comments

Overall, this is a largely competent script and your ideas are there. I just think you need to focus on them and develop the strongest. Hopefully you'll be able to implement some of the changes I've suggested, or even reframe your work. Don't throw anything away, though. If you're cutting scenes and characters, or entire plot points, keep them and use them elsewhere. They're good. Just, don't add too many ingredients to the soup, as it were.

Keep writing, and I hope this helps with your development.

15 Point Checklist Rating:

(1) *Needs Significant Improvement*

(10) *Entirely Effective*

Main Plot	7.5
Characters	7
Characters Desire	7
Theme	7
Protagonist	8
Antagonist or Antagonistic Force	8
Protagonist Empathy	6.5
Orginality	7
Sub-Plots	6
Dialogue	7
Pace	6
Setting	7
Cinematic Potential	6.5
Opening	8
Ending	8

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THANK YOU & GOOD LUCK!

Dear Jake,

Your feedback is vital to progress your skills and measure where you're at and whether or not you're ready to be placed in front of industry contacts.

The fact you have asked for feedback means you understand that you need to improve - never lose that, as that's the day you will stop growing as a writer.

The best screenwriters of today still ask for feedback and doubt their abilities. Don't beat yourself up, just understand it's a vital part of the process.

Never give up, be ambitious and be consistent.

Don't fall out of love with the art by expecting too much of yourself. You can still write a page a day and make it as a GREAT screenwriter!

We hope to hear from you again.

All the very best!

Alex Edge

Director

Screenwriters Network.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized five-pointed star followed by a cursive flourish.