SENTIENT USA REVIEW

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(**comments on the guide in bold)**

Teaser Act

Recommended page count: 2 -10 pages √

Guide

* The opening image must immediately draw us into the story. √
* Establish a sense of time, place and tone (the world of the story). √
* Introduce your protagonist and their special skill. **I presume JJ’s special skill is climbing, and that this will come in handy later? Or is his special skill his familiarity with electrical cables? At the moment I think it’s the former, as we see him climbing high later.**
* You may choose to introduce an inciting incident or ghost for the

protagonist, (a seed that will grow throughout your story and will be

something that requires redemption). √ **This is the relationship with his girlfriend, I presume.**

* Introduce the central conflict. If not here, then ASAP. **To me I’m not sure what the central conflict is yet. In later acts JJ locks horns with Sal, the miners and Dallas. Given that we meet Sal in Act One, he might be the source of the central conflict.**
* Introduce the theme if possible. This may spill to Act One. **I’d say the theme appears in Act One.**
* Create mystery by loading clues from the Day One storm. √ **There’s only one mystery – Syd disintegrating. Perhaps if the two crewmen die the mystery could be extended.**
* The protagonist may begin to explore the new world in the Teaser.
* Introduce an interpretation of events by the protagonist. **This doesn’t happen, but I’m not bothered by it. The teaser in what I suggest is one of our exemplars, THE WALKING DEAD, doesn’t feature any interpretation of events, and you don’t feel the lack.**
* The protagonist’s interpretation ~~may be partially right but~~ is flawed.
* ~~First look at the Sentient – shroud it in mystery – for now they live in~~

~~the shadows.~~

* The protagonist may meet another character. The other character

may act as another set of eyes, a different perspective on the event. **Doesn’t happen, but I’m not bothered by that.**

* End on a shocking reveal. Seeing the storm or the aftermath or? √

Must-See Content

* Day One – Arrival of the storm √
* After Day One – Wake in fright √
* The protagonist’s inciting incident (a crisis in their life leading up to

Day One), then either 1 or 2 √

o Whichever 1, 2 or 3, the protagonist wakes up in a new world. √

o The protagonist does not know what has happened, but they may make a presumption.

o Day One mindsets might presume terrorism, war, invasion, chemical or environmental disaster, act of god or religious view of rapture or end of the world, etc.

* Create mystery. Start loading clues, like the protagonist discovering a stack of holocaust-style bodies, piled up against an exit, then make them disappear. The audience is unable to discern whether or not the protagonist is hallucinating. They will take the journey with them because they, like the protagonist, want to know what the hell is going on.

**TEASER – GENERAL COMMENTS**

Overall, it does a good job of establishing the main character and introducing the storm, which is very effective. A few more points:

• The texts seem very long, like dialogue. They could be compressed.

• If the radios don’t work, why does the truck work? It could perhaps go a few yards then conk out. As the men exit, a pylon or tree falls and kills them, increasing the stakes and the drama.

• I’d like to see the electrical cables break, snapping round like giant whips, increasing the danger.

• The time passed between the storm arrival and the incident in the cave seems more like 15 minutes than two hours.

• There’s an opportunity to elevate the dialogue in the truck as they drive along. Increase the entertainment value of what they say.

• “Headquarters” seems the wrong word. Perhaps “the suits” or “The ops guy”?

• “I don’t have the equipment.” Are they really that unprepared? Perhaps the equipment JJ needs is in the vehicle, and he has to come down again to get it?

Act One

Recommended page count: 12 -15 pages **Perhaps a bit long at 19 pages. The dialogue and some of the action lines could be trimmed. It needs to end on a cliffhanger or a revelation.**

Guide

* Your protagonist lives through the aftermath of the Teaser act’s shocking reveal. √
* Intro the new world, your abandoned and damaged city. √
* Discover the new world through your protagonist and characters. √
* Afflict your characters with temporary physical and mental problems

from the Day One storm, (blindness, deafness, dementia,

anaphylactic shock, paranoia, disorientation etc.) **There doesn’t seem to be enough of this. Sal in particular seems extraordinarily healthy.**

* Kick-in with your A-story: Your protagonist pursues their external

goal based on their interpretation of the Day One event. **Is the external goal to get to his girlfriend?**

* Kick-in with your B-story: Your nemesis, will interpret the event completely differently and frustrate the plans of the protagonist. **Assuming Sal is the nemesis, he certainly does frustrate JJ, and has a different interpretation on the events. However it seems to me that JJ gives in too easily. Perhaps Sal has a further way to persuade him – he was a prison guard, so perhaps he has a chain and manacles to secure JJ? Or an electric prod? Also, I wonder of Sal and JJ already know each other? Perhaps (and I’m just brainstorming here), JJ’s now deceased brother or father, the shame of the family, was once one of Sal’s inmates? Or is alive and still there? Or Sal is related to Lindsey? Anyway, I think Sal should coerce JJ in some way.**
* Intro C through D stories. **C would be Reese and Lena, D story (the zoo) is intro’d in Act 3.**
* Featuring the A and B story the most and C and D least.
* Continue the exploration of your theme. Pit the protagonist and the nemesis against one another. Explore their values through conflict.
* End on a cliffhanger to shock your audience. **There’s no real cliffhanger at the end. It needs one.**

B through D stories might include:

* The nemesis who knows better, interprets the events completely differently and frustrates the protagonist’s plans
* An opponent-ally (Someone combatant to the protagonist but who is really their ally)
* The ally-opponent (Someone friendly to the protagonist who is really their opponent)
* A mirror character to the protagonist (someone who faces same challenges but makes different decisions)
* A love interest
* Other

Each of these storylines will feature a character, discovering and coming to grips with what has just happened then pursuing a line of action based on their interpretation of events.

Whoever you introduce will be on a line to intersect with your protagonist and the A story either during the pilot or in the following episode.

Ensure conflict.

These are ‘newborns’ to this world and their experience will show us more of what has transpired. They will

be damaged by the storm and bewildered by what they see.

Include:

* Clues (set-ups that get the audience wondering and speculating) OR
* Advance or reveal more of your clues
* The beginning of your mythology. Every unexplained event, piles of

bodies that disappear, burnt human ash, humming phones and so on, all contribute to the growing mystery and mythology

There is no need to spell it out to the audience. Hint at it and let them leap into the gap of the unknown with their own theories.

* A hint of the full season arc, (where we are headed)
* The theme explored through conflict

Theme

Introduce your theme. **I’m not sure I know what the theme is yet.**   
Integrate it into the protagonist’s journey.  
The theme of Sentient-Australia is leadership and abuse of the patriot.

It’s about the smartest people in the room making well thought-out decisions that are all wrong and their insistence that their patriots, in this case Dowd and the military, should carry-out their orders.

Your theme is your choice.

Must-see content

1. Survive the Day One storm–Show the survivors’ experience and how they are afflicted **Not enough physical affliction.**

2. Show the state of the abandoned city/world

* + No power √
  + No communication √
  + The storm has smashed windows and caused mayhem √
  + A red haze hangs over the city √ **I’d like to see more of the red.**
  + Planes may circle your city **Optional**

1. Meet a character who provides another reference point **√**
2. Intro the B-D storylines √

**ACT ONE – GENERAL COMMENTS**

P.10. I’d start with the drips of blood, move on to Reese in the tree, then show the wreckage of the plane, then the airport. Move from the small to the large, expanding each time.

P.10 The glasses. Perhaps first establish that his own glasses are smashed?

P.18 How come the ham radio works? And how does Sal, a prison guard, know Icelandic?

On p.15 it’s night, on p.19 it’s back to dusk.

P.19. Perhaps she sees some body parts, aspects of her dead friends, to up the horror.

P.21. Just a thought. Perhaps when Lena sees the whiskey and birthday hat her reaction isn’t pleasure, but pain. Something that hints that birthdays weren’t always a cause for celebration. Then she puts a brave face on it and with a forced smile behaves as she is supposed to do.

P.27-28. I’m not sure JJ would go along with the shooting unless (a) he was coerced or (b) the prisoner(s) were doing something bad to another human being and had to be stopped.

p.29 With the new guidelines, a first glimpse of a Sentient is not necessary here.

Act Two

Recommended page count: 6 -10 pages √

Guide

* The Act One reveal, introduced a new reality. Have your protagonist take stock. **Needs more of this.**
* Escalate the conflict, turn the screws on your protagonist. √
* Your protagonist faces their first trial, skirmish. √
* The first casualty, (some damage received or inflicted). **Is this the dead prisoner?**
* Realization or loss of innocence (generally the protagonist stating to

another character, this is the cost of achieving the goal, get used to

it). **Not really seeing this.**

* Protagonist makes a key decision to save the day but this decision

has consequences later, (normally by the last acts). √ **Leaving Sal alive.**

Protagonist determines a new goal to achieve plan of action. **Not really seeing this.**

* The goal has a time-hack, (a clock is ticking and they must achieve

the goal asap). **Not really seeing this.**

The ticking clock propels them into the next act. **Not really seeing this.**

* Add new complications for the storylines. √
* Intersect storylines, introduce characters. **Doesn’t happen yet.**

Must-see content

• A rain of human ash begins to fall over the city. The characters may

not yet know what it is but one should speculate. **This does not appear.**

**ACT TWO – GENERAL COMMENTS**

Having Sal sight on JJ ups the tension – but having him then fire into the air and weep loses it. Better to keep the end as a cliffhanger with JJ in the sights.

Not many of the guideline points appear in act 2, including the must-see content.

p.34 the farmhouse is damaged or devastated, not dilapidated.

Act Three

Recommended page count: 8 -12 pages √

Guide

* Intersect the storylines (They don’t have to meet. You can employ a common point of reference such as the circling jetliners)
* Escalate the conflict
* Increase the time pressure. Time is running out
* Ensure two clean, conflicting lines of action, based on assumptions

of the protagonist and the nemesis  
o Both the protagonist and nemesis will:

* + §  Take charge
  + §  State the facts
  + §  Rally the troops
  + §  Call upon their supporters to serve their objectives
* Must-see content
* The two courses of action should be in conflict.

**I’m not seeing most of the above.**

**ACT THREE – GENERAL COMMENTS**

I like the way we have several parallel storylines here – JJ/Sal, Reese/Lena, the zoo, so I’m not that bothered by the lack wrt the guidelines – with one exception: the ticking clock. In terms of action and conflict, this act is quite soft, so it needs a time pressure to increase the tension.

The intro of the zoo scene seems a bit late – it could perhaps first appear briefly in act 2. That way JJ could have more space in this act.

Damien, Carolyn and Joey don’t appear to be very damaged, and should be.

Surely the night sky would still be red, not clear?

p.44 not sure we need to be told that Damian is a male and Carolyn is a female (we’re not told that Joey is male, for example). Their intros could simply be written: DAMIEN (30s) then CAROLYN (30s)

p.47 ‘appears to be very drunk.’ If he is drunk, he doesn’t ‘appear’ to be drunk. He just is drunk. He only ‘appears’ to be drunk if he is faking it.

Act Four

Recommended page count: 6 -12 pages √ **(perhaps a bit short)**

Guide

* The protagonist and nemesis will enact their plans of action with very clear objectives, (in conflict)
* An observer character may discover the invaders are already here but says nothing
* Advance C and D stories
* The protagonist and the nemesis will realize their presumptions were

all wrong, all is lost

* What shall we do now?

**Again, not seeing most of the above. Might need some reworking.**

**ACT FOUR – GENERAL COMMENTS**

p.49 how come the flashlight is working? If it’s a wind-up type that’s fine, but we need to know that.

Really not keen on Syd’s ghost. It’s very non-canon, and anyway we saw him disintegrate.

The woman scanning JJ with her device kind of gives the game away. I think this could be held off until episode 2.

p.50. now we see JJ’s special skill. That works.

p.51. He doesn’t ‘appear’ disturbed. He is disturbed. The men on horseback do not ‘appear’ to be coal miners. They are coal miners.

p.51. If the bearded man is going to return (and I suspect he will), he should have a name.

p.51. JJ picks up on the menace of the miners straight away, which makes it odd that later he doesn’t see anything strange with Dallas and Lena/Reese.

p.52/53. The encounters with the miners is full of good menace but the miners’ dialogue seems too elaborate. Also, why do they want the girl? Assuming they are not paedophiles, she is too young for sex. So what is her value to them? A servant? (Actually, that could work.)

p.52/53. I like the new, paranoid (and very American) interpretation. It seems Bearded Man and Sal could have a happy paranoid chat together, and I suspect they will team up later.

It feels like this needs to end on a cliffhanger.

Act Five

Recommended page count: 2-8 pages √

Guide

The surprising climax and resolve. **Not seeing this.**

* BC and D stories advance to a stop.
* End on a cliffhanger **It’s a cliffhanger all right, but has nothing to do with the Sentient. If we have Dallas with the knife, and the flood, and then add a Sentient as a surprise unexpected element, that works.**
* Enhance the mythology with a curious connection between a child

and the Sentient **Not seeing this. Presumably Jenny will provide this link.**

Must-see content

o First real look at one of the Sentient **Obviously this isn’t included, and it needs to.**

**ACT FIVE -– GENERAL COMMENTS**

p.57 Carolyn who appears to be in a state of sheer panic. = Carolyn is in a state of sheer panic.

P.60 JJ should really have twigged by now.

My overall thoughts:

It seems to be this is a good basis for a pilot. I like the parallel stories, and the menace that some of the surviving humans present.

It needs to be a bit more canon, especially at the end. More red haze, more physical damage to characters, less Sentient throughout, then a Sentient reveal at the end.

JJ needs to have more of a purpose. He seems a bit bland at the moment. Maybe, in addition to his job, he had further ambitions, or wanted to join the National Guard, or something. Also he doesn’t seem that bothered about finding Lindsey. He needs a story thread that pulls him through the plot.

I am not clear what the theme is yet.

**FORMATTING AND STYLE AND GENERAL NOTES**

• In general, best practice these days is that action paragraphs should be no longer than four lines.

• Throughout, consider using the active form of verbs to make the action more dynamic, e.g. p.1 “SYD is trying to gain entrance” = “SYD tries to gain entrance”

Or p.12, “something is HUMMING and glowing” = “something HUMS and glows”

• I’d like to see an indication of age for the main characters, e.g. “SYD (40s)”. That helps hugely with casting.

• In general, try to avoid character names starting with the same initial letter, e.g. Sal and Syd, Lena and Lindsey. It can confuse people who, as is typical in the industry, may fast-read a script.

• This may be just me and my picky preferences, but using two spaces in between every sentence instead of one, increases the length of a paragraph unnecessarily, and hence the overall script.

• My two-pennyworth: There’s perhaps two much directing actors in terms of their facial expressions or non-crucial body movements. There are also a few unnecessary wrylies in parentheses such as (nervously). In general actors prefer to work out those things in their performance and with the director. It might be better to focus on the emotion of the scene or the moment, rather that what they are doing with their face. For example, it’s enough to say that a character is frustrated or terrified, rather than describe what they are doing with their face in frustration or terror.

**TYPOS**

p. 2 his rea-view mirror = his rear-view mirror

P.3 Gimmie a break = Gimme a break

up a stoney road = up a stony road (‘stoney’ is relaxed, as in weed)

p.5 over-talking = overtaking

p.6 not sure ‘clamors’ is the right word here. ‘bangs’ is sufficient.

P.8 the electrical tower being, misshapen, distorted by an unseen force.

= the electrical tower being bent out of shape, distorted by an unseen force.

The wind changes it’s pitch. = The wind changes its pitch.

p.12 INT. AIRPORT TERIMAL - DAY = INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

EXT. AIRPORT TERIMAL - DAY =EXT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

running back toward he plane wreck =running back toward the plane wreck

p.16 there’s an extra line space before “Rolling up”

p.17 fiancee = fiancée

p.26 he peers into the lense = he peers into the lens

EXT. P.O.V. THROUGH SPOTTER LENSE - DAY = EXT. P.O.V. THROUGH SPOTTER LENS - DAY

The lense moves back = The lens moves back

The lense moves over. = The lens moves over.

Throwing the lense off = Throwing the lens off

same issue with the word ‘lense’ on many other pages.

p.31 Pittsburg = Pittsburgh

p.34 she bights her lip = she bites her lip

They come upon an escape PRISONER = They come upon an escaped PRISONER

a 45 Cal. Handgun. = a 45 cal. handgun.

p.36 girl of your’s! = girl of yours!

Steaks in the sky = Streaks in the sky

Sal watches him, he eyes glaring. = Sal watches him, his eyes glaring.

p.45 She shakes her. Presumably, ‘She shakes her head.’

p.49 You Let me die = You let me die

p.49 + 50 EXT. MAKESHIFT SHELETR - NIGHT = EXT. MAKESHIFT SHELTER - NIGHT

p.51 her’s were in pretty bad shape = hers were in pretty bad shape

p.52 But we’ve been taken matters into our own hands. = But we’ve been taking matters into our own hands.

p.61 a couple zebras = a couple of zebras

Again a Zebra = Again a zebra