PROJECT ANALYSIS

PROJECT TITLE:	**SENTIENT**
WRITER:	David Steinhoff
MAIN GENRE:	Sci-Fi
SUB-GENRE:	Action
SETTING:	Sydney, Australia
PERIOD:	Present Day
POSSIBLE BUDGET:	High
PAGE LENGTH:	64
FORMAT:	TV series
LOGLINE:	A group of survivors wake up in the middle of a city-wide biological warfare attack, not realising just how dangerous the perpetrators truly are.
COMPARABLE TITLES:	STARGATE SG-1, LOST
IS PROJECT VERDICT:	Pass
IS PROJECT SCORE:	48/100
CONSULTANT:	dOo
REPORT WORD COUNT:	2,668
REPORT DATE:	02.09.19

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Sentient is an ensemble Sci-Fi TV pilot about a group of survivors who wake up after their city has been attacked by an apparent devastating biological weapon.

The pilot is quite slow and dense, introducing a lot of characters, side stories, and (presumably) foreshadowing for later episodes and moments in the series. However, this ends up becoming quite detrimental to the script itself, as it worries so much about setting up way may happen down the line, that it ignores telling its own, more cohesive story.

NOTES:

Story (plot, premise, theme, execution):

The pilot throws out some interesting mysteries, starting with the opening teaser with the faceless figures, which is a great, exciting hook. It packs a lot of promise and potential excitement into a few pages, and gears the reader up for what should be an interesting ride.

It's only natural after throwing the reader and audience in at the deep end with the action, that the script would want to take a step back, and build towards that eventual ending. However, the issue stems from the fact that the script ends up spending too much time slowed down.

The way it reads is that not a lot happens for far too long, to the point where it feels like the entire pilot is being paced as if it's a 120 page film script, setting up so many supporting characters and side plots. Obviously, setup is hugely important in a pilot script – any writer would want to be able to write a full season, and maybe beyond. But at the same time, a pilot should still tell its own contained story in a vacuum.

For example, the BREAKING BAD pilot tells an incredible standalone story of the dull chemistry teacher, his cancer diagnosis, and his decision to try and cook meth to make money for his family. This eventually leads him into a run in with some dangerous gangsters, where he nearly dies, and even almost kills himself when he thinks the police are about to catch him. It ends with Walter White getting home, having been through a wild adventure, and only a few people knowing about it.

Not only does it set up several things – the secrets Walt has to hold on to, the dead bodies in the trailer, and so on – but it tells a cohesive, complete, and satisfying story on its own. That's where Sentient falls a little flat. It feels like it's mostly setup for a fuller story that doesn't come to fruition in the full episode.

There are ways to work around this, while still setting up a lot of the plot threads and characters that need to be introduced for the pilot. For example, if it was possible for Dowd and the supporting characters around him to have an initial run-in with the aliens around the midpoint of the pilot. It would be a great action-packed scene, while also showing the full premise of the series –

a vulnerable and outnumbered humanity against a terrifying and devastating alien threat.

The story thread with Dowd and Teicher trying to help Beata feels like it should be its own episode. As part of the pilot, it takes away from outlining the show a little more clearly. It perhaps makes sense to introduce Beata as an obstacle, but unless she's supposed to be a long-term antagonist (which the script doesn't seem to imply), then too much of her arc is given away in the pilot.

It's good that the script takes a moment to breathe as Teicher and Dowd talk about what might be going on from Page 29 onwards. However, the conversation is so cryptic and vague for the most part. The way it reads, either the audience is meant to be left in the dark about what's really going on – which is not what's needed, when they're already in the dark for the most part – or, the writer doesn't realise that the dialogue is way too vague and cryptic. There needs to be a balance between mystery, and outright exposition with clear plot points to answer some questions.

For example, in LOST, there's plenty of mystery going around with the strange occurrences on the island, but several plot points are clear: they crash-landed on the island, they're in crisis mode, and they have to figure out how to survive while they wait to be rescued.

But Sentient's pilot doesn't set out any clear plot points for what has happened, and where the story is going to go. There needs to be some kind of parameters outlined early on, other than the storm, and the vial that may or may not have caused it. Dowd mentions they're at war on Page 45, and then mentions a WMD has hit Sydney on Page 50. However, it becomes apparent they this exposition is coming from an unreliable narrator-style character, or at the very least, the exposition is misleading.

Furthermore, it feels like the script is offering conflicting answers for the same question. Teicher drops the vial, which releases a supposedly devastating biological weapon. Meanwhile, Dowd thinks with absolute certainty that they're at war with someone, which is the reason for all the chaos going on outside? Whether or not Dowd has reason to know for certain what's going on is unclear.

There is also a lack of clarity regarding why Dowd doesn't seem to trust certain people, such as Eid and Babic. He has this idea that there is some kind of war going on, and yet he doesn't believe that he should be working with

the other people in the base, nor do the other people think they should be working with him.

Regarding Teicher carrying the vial of the dangerous biological weapon substance across Page 10 and 11, that comes across as a little bit of a cliché, particularly when it slips from his fingers. Those kinds of scenes tend to be found in most zombie (or general virus or infection) films. It's a weird plot point because the script itself seems to hint at the idea that the vial is what causes a lot of the issues going on outside the military base. Teicher himself refers to it as a biological weapon – and yet, it seems to have no effect on the pilot. It's not the cause of the red storm, or any of the other abnormalities going on, unless there's an unspoken connection between the vial and the aliens.

WRITER QUESTION: The Lt. Aiden Frank storyline. This story is fed, NON-LINEAR into the timeline. It establishes Dowd's military family. It allows the Commodore to use it to pursue his grudge. It is a central tenant of the work. As the reader, were you willing to take that journey OR was it distracting, of little interest etc.?

With regards to the story's non-linearity, it's just about cohesive. However, it may help to add some rough dates as SUPERs for the flashbacks and flashforward, rather than the DAY SUPERs in the script. This may help readers put the episode's puzzle together a little quicker in their head, so trying to figure it out doesn't hamper the flow of the overall story. But that is just a suggestion, and not revealing the various times and dates won't break the script by any means.

WRITER QUESTION: The survivors do not recognise this is an alien invasion until the end. Does this make them look stupid?

It doesn't come across as the characters being stupid regarding the alien invasion, simply because (other than the opening teaser), the descriptions of the storm (and the figures in the military base) are vague enough so that it doesn't clarify much. With some good directing and SFX, it would never be clear that it's an alien invasion based on the scenes after the teaser. Instead, it just comes across like biological warfare (as Dowd claims) crossed with a devastating natural disaster.

WRITER QUESTION: Should the Commodore pursue Lt. Commander Dowd at the end of the story? Does he lose his sting because he goes to rescue his dying son?

Again, this feels like the script is trying to stuff a little too much into the pilot. It is one of the side plot threads that could have an entire genuine arc over the course of the season, but it's packed all of it into this single episode. The plot thread isn't bad itself, nor is it the Commodore's decision a bad one; it just doesn't necessarily have to be in the pilot.

WRITER QUESTION: The Author sells the biological warfare angle. Did you find that hard to believe? Distracting?

As mentioned previously, the biological warfare angle does feel somewhat confusing. Teicher drops the vial, which implies that it's the reason for what's happening outside. That's followed by Dowd being certain that they're at war with presumably human enemies. It can feel misleading considering the truth about what's actually happening with the alien invaders. The idea itself isn't bad, it's just hammered home too much, to the point where both the opening teaser and the ending end up feeling very out of place because of what the reader (and by extension, the audience) would have been told through most of the pilot.

Character (development, depth, dialogue, voice):

While there might be a few too many characters packed into the pilot (more on that shortly), Dowd works well as a protagonist. The script does a good job at giving his personality a chance to shine, while also delving into his history in a way that gives a hint at what's come before in his life, while also showing his own demons that he may have to face further down the line.

One of the most difficult things for any writing a TV pilot is finding a way to introduce the characters that will be necessary for the entire series. It's clear that Sentient is meant to be an ensemble piece, with characters like Dowd, Heidi, Teicher, and Hass making up a full cast of survivors who will all go through their own journeys along the way. Many of these main characters,

particularly the aforementioned ones, are given really solid introductions in the pilot.

However, it feels like there are too many supporting characters or one-off characters shoe-horned into the pilot that can make parts quite confusing. This mostly applies to Dowd's story in the Navy base. While Hass and Heidi have quite straightforward stories, there are too many characters in the Navy base that clutter up the story, leaving the reader struggling to remember exactly who is who. While the likes of Eid and Babic are there to fill short-term antagonist roles in the episode, characters such as Dante seem to add very little to the story, other than small pieces of exposition.

The sheer amount of characters can lead to conversations and sequences of dialogue that are bouncing around quickly between multiple characters in way that it can feel like there are two or three conversations to keep track of at once, creating further confusion.

For example, the flashback on Page 52 is a little difficult to keep track of. The script has already shifted gears by throwing the reader into a flashback with several characters who aren't in the present-day story. But the dialogue that bounces around between Aiden Frank, the Navy Vox Operator, Hunt and Dowd just feels a little too dense, even if it is for what is the climactic scenes of the story being told in the flashback.

Overall, a few less supporting characters might help the script a lot, especially considering how many smaller stories it's trying to tell at the same time, across different locations and times.

Also regarding the flashbacks; Dowd's backstory and flashbacks regarding Aiden Frank could be taken out of the pilot episode, and saved for another time. The pilot episode should be far more about what's happening in that moment, and flashbacks clog up the story a little bit.

One final minor note regarding Teicher: some of his lines of dialogue or ways of phrasing things can come across as a little strange. Is it perhaps that English is his second or third language? This is an area that will be made more clear by the actor playing the character; it's just a little unclear in the script.

Presentation (writing style, clarity of action, formatting):

Generally, the formatting is to a high, professional standard that looks clean and clear on the page. This is especially important during some of the more chaotic or dense scenes that could risk being confusing without the clarity on the page.

Furthermore, the presentation is helped by the fact that the lines of action are kept short and snappy. It works well for the more tense moments, such as when Dowd is in the hospital after waking up. Furthermore, it helps keep the action clear, without any details getting lost in blocks of text.

While most of the characters get their own short description upon their introduction, certain characters don't. For example, Dowd, who is one of the main protagonists, gets no description regarding his physical appearance, body language, or general vibe in the opening scenes. This especially stands out considering the other characters get quite strong descriptions and introductions into the script.

Purely from a selling standpoint, it may help the scripts market viability to cut some pages. Very few studios are going to buy a pilot script that's over 60 pages (and for non-streaming companies, 50-something pages).

There is the occasional odd use of commas that can give the dialogue an off-putting rhythm, such as Teicher on Page 13 saying 'What will, 'share' look like when the tank begins to empty?' which is written as though there is a pause after 'What will,' when it feels like the sentence should be fluid, as one.

It happens again in the next action line that says 'The swing doors outside, squeak-open then gradually swing back and forth,' where the comma feels like it's adding an unnecessary beat to the action, on top of the hyphen feeling out of place. Hyphens should be saved for modifying adjectives by combining two of them, while 'squeak open' is a clear verb followed by and adjective, and should be kept separate in this instance.

CONCLUSION:

Sentient's pilot does certain things well. The pacing of the first ten pages in particular is measured and smart, throwing the audience into the deep end

with the opening teaser, for taking a step back and walking the reader through exactly how everyone got to that situation.

However, that step backs seems to last for too long – most of the script, in fact. The pace is kept slow for all of the acts that come after the teaser, as it works hard to introduce characters, their scenarios, and various side threads. This becomes an issue when it takes away from the pilot telling its own, more contained story that would help better explain the premise of the show while also working as a strong standalone episode.

To summarise, with the amount of setup that the pilot matches to pack into 60+ pages, it ends up feeling like the episode was meant to be a full 2-hour film, but at the last minute the second half was hastily edited out in order to adapt he script for TV.

For the next draft, the pilot should be rewritten to have a tight structure, with the episode telling its own story rather than worrying too much about what may come further down the line in the series. This could also include taking out certain side stories and characters that can be reintroduced later if they're really necessary to the long-term story.

With a rewrite to fix these issues, the pilot will be able to tell a better story on its own without losing too much of its setup, while also better explaining its own premise, and not getting lose in the 'biological warfare or alien invasion' confusion occurs.

Your Project's Statistical Performance:

	PERFORMANCE AREA	RATING /100
1	**Premise**	60/100
2	Market Potential	60/100
3	Originality	40/100
4	Clarity of Genre Positioning	70/100
5	Marketing Capability	60/100
6	**Structure**	30/100

7	Scene Flow	60/100
8	Sequence Flow	60/100
9	Originality of Structure	40/100
10	Cliché avoidance	30/100
11	Pace	30/100
12	**Character**	60/100
13	Distinctiveness from one another	50/100
14	Originality	40/100
15	Empathy generated	40/100
16	Casting potential	50/100
17	**Setting/Milieu**	70/100
18	Visual Ambition/Flair	70/100
19	Originality of setting	60/100
20	Cinematic moments	80/100
21	Match for the genre	70/100
22	**Dialogue**	50/100
23	Authenticity/Credibility	50/100
24	Succinct, says a lot with a little?	50/100
25	Character Dialogue Distinctiveness	50/100
26	**Themes**	30/100
27	Originality of themes	30/100
28	Sophistication of theme exploration	20/100
29	Clarity of theme exploration	20/100
30	Relevance/topicality of themes	20/100
31	**OVERALL % AVERAGE:**	**48/100**

To put your score in context, here at Industrial Scripts we rate some of the following scripts as follows:

THE SOCIAL NETWORK	89/100
SE7EN	93/100
THE TERMINATOR	90/100
THE GODFATHER PART II	96/100
THELMA & LOUISE	88/100

About Your Consultant: dOo

Your analyst is an experienced pro script consultant who has assessed material extensively for Industrial Scripts and Editing Services, and is also an Interactive Fiction writer with credits on several big-budget projects.

Useful Resources

There's already a plethora of information online about screenwriting, so we thought we'd cut to the chase in this section and describe the best link for the scenario you might find yourself in.

- What you need if you're **struggling to see the wood from the trees** and want to get back to the essentials of screenwriting – the really important stuff: our ULTIMATE Screenwriting Online Course (free with FFN).

- What you need if you're **looking for inspiration**: our list of 31 screenwriting books you might enjoy.

- What you need if you want to know which of your ideas should become your next script: our Which Logline? Service

- If you feel like you have a precise idea of what your project should be, but can't get it there yourself, for whatever reason…consider our Script Doctoring and ReWrite service

- If you just need a good ol' pick me up! Our article on "[10 Great Tales of Screenwriting Determination](#)" will get you there!

Glossary of Script Development Terms

Overall Rating

Note: we give our script consultants great leeway in terms of the verdict they deliver. Their decision is based on myriad factors, and no one score in any column is decisive.

- **PASS** – the script is not ready to be shown to agents, managers or the industry yet and to do so would be foolhardy. Upwards of 80% of the scripts we receive are Passes. Many scripts have, through a thorough development process with us, improved their rating significantly and been upgraded to Considers and Recommends. Whilst a Pass is by no means the death knell for a project, it's important not to shy away from the script's shortcomings, at least at this stage.
- **LOW CONSIDER** – the script *might* be ready to be shown to the industry, but it could be risky. In this case the script displays significant promise, but is letting itself down in a few key areas. Plenty to build on for the next draft.
- **CONSIDER** – this is a strong script, which is likely to provoke a favourable reaction from the industry, without blowing anyone away. The script has a number of strong attributes, but isn't "taste-proof" yet. Many will like it, a smaller number will have a lukewarm reaction.
- **RECOMMEND** – this script is pretty much good to go, or very close to being so. Scripts at the higher end of Recommend will be essentially taste-proof: even if the project itself isn't for that agent or that executive or that producer, they can't fail to be impressed by it, and good things will entail when they tell their friends about it. Less than 1% of script we assess receive a Recommend verdict.

Statistical Performance Explanations

- **MARKET POTENTIAL** – How well does the script fit into the marketplace? Is it in a genre likely to attract an audience? Do the concept and characters have demographic appeal?
- **ORIGINALITY** – Does the script stand apart?
- **CLARITY OF GENRE POSITIONING** – How well does the script fit into its intended genre? Does it manage to uphold the necessary conventions and tone? Is it clearly marketable as a certain 'type' of story?
- **MARKET CAPABILITY** – How well is the script likely to perform once in the marketplace?
- **SCENE FLOW** – How effectively are scenes constructed? Does each beat serve to lead us to a clear point of resolution? Or does the scene feel drawn out and aimless?
- **SEQUENCE FLOW** – How effective is the script's act structure? Is there a sense of cause and effect from scene to scene?
- **ORIGINALITY OF STRUCTURE** – How cleverly is the script constructed? Does the structure serve a clear purpose to the story or the perspective from which it's told?
- **CLICHÉ AVOIDANCE** – Does the script avoid well-worn story beats or lines of dialogue? If it's a genre piece, does it manage to fit into that genre without falling back on tired tropes?
- **PACE** – The flow of the overall story. Do action scenes as written convey a sense of speed or urgency? Do slower sections work effectively to build tension, or do they drag? Does the speed and flow of the narrative fit with the premise/story itself?
- **CHARACTER DISTINCTIVENESS** – Are the characters sufficiently different from one another? Do they have clear, separate motivations, voices, mannerisms and so on? Or do they all sound like the writer?
- **CHARACTER ORIGINALITY** – Is this character just an archetype (grizzled male action hero; ruthless businesswoman), or are they a unique, nuanced creation
- **EMPATHY GENERATED** – The extent to which we can invest in the core characters, their motivations and their struggles.
- **CASTING POTENTIAL** –
- **VISUAL AMBITION/FLAIR** – Does the script display a keen understanding of the visual medium? Is information conveyed to the audience in a visually arresting way? Does that style feel integrated or gimmicky?
- **ORIGINALITY OF SETTING** – Does the setting feel fresh for the genre? Are we avoiding log cabins in horror films and eerily empty spacecraft in sci-fi?

- **CINEMATIC MOMENTS** – Does the story facilitate impressive moments of spectacle? Clever set-pieces? Well-staged reveals?
- **MATCH FOR THE GENRE** – How well does the setting suit the core premise of the piece? Is it a natural fit?
- **DIALOGUE AUTHENTICITY** – Does the dialogue sound believable? Or is it too obviously a vessel through which to convey story information?
- **SUCCINCTNESS** – Fairly self-explanatory. Is the dialogue concise? Does it avoid clunky, drawn-out exposition or pontification and clearly articulate the intended dramatic/character point.
- **DIALOGUE DISTINCTIVENESS** – Do the characters have a clear voice, as distinct from the work of other writers? Within the script itself, is dialogue sufficiently varied to reflect shifts in emotion or the voices of distinct characters?
- **ORIGINALITY OF THEMES** – Does the script's core message/theme feel like something that hasn't been fully explored before? Or are we reiterating that 'if you believe in yourself you can accomplish anything'?
- **SOPHISTICATION OF THEME EXPLORATION** – Does the script have something complex to say about its core theme?
- **CLARITY OF THEME EXPLORATION** – How clearly is the script's central theme conveyed? Is it clearly represented in each character and the broader course of events?
- **RELEVANCE/TOPICALITY OF THEME** – Does the central theme or message of the piece draw on something that will resonate today? Does it have something important to say about the world we live in?

Thank You!

Thank you sincerely for allowing us to read and critique your project.

Please bear in mind that the comments and opinions in this script coverage are not intended to be the final say on the potential of the script or its writer.

Everything in the world of script development is subjective.

Yes, an impartial, truly trained eye that assesses screenplays 24/7 has written this report but ultimately the comments herein remain one human being's *opinion*.

As a Hollywood screenwriter we know put it:

"a script note is only as good as <u>you</u> think it is".

For more info on <u>Talent Connector</u>, *Character-Driven* (our <u>blog</u>) or any of the other products and services we offer just visit the link below:

<u>https://industrialscripts.com</u>

Thanks and we hope to work with you again soon!