



2024 SCI-FI & FANTASY SCREENWRITING COMPETITION

DR. SELF-DEFENSE FORCE

by James Cao

ScreenCraft celebrates great writing and provides guidance for writers to achieve their goals.

Standard Entry

Story Analyst 94CB4

Feedback Date: Jun 8, 2024

Feedback

Dr. Self-Defense Force is a very original story. I'm a big sci-fi guy and I enjoyed it. Bio-printing is a trip and a half. I'll break my notes down by character, plot/structure, and concept because these are the areas of the script with the most potential for growth.

CHARACTERIZATIONS:

Luke makes for a compelling main character. As we open on him he's immediately established as a complicated guy -- ambitious, exacting, demanding, and passionate. However, I think that there are ways to make him even stronger. One of these is to clarify and strengthen his overall arc. How he changes from one thing in the beginning of the script into its opposite at the end. In this draft I didn't pick up on that. For example, as part of his establishing/opening beats we see that his passion crosses the line into instability, as demonstrated by the fact that he is violent with the under-performing iterations of himself. (Note that the symbolism of that "self on self violence," to coin a phrase, is very powerful and intriguing stuff. Talk about psychologically loaded. More on this in the section on concept.) However, I didn't track how the plot forces him to confront that flaw, which is what his character leads with. He reads as happier at the end but that seems to be because he has rescued and is reconciled with Belle, which feels like something distinct from his underlying anger issues. To put it another way, his opening marital discord with Belle seems to be a symptom of that underlying rage. Thus, the recommendation is to dig deeper into his character in order to further define his central flaw, and marry his transformation to the progression of the plot.

Relatedly, another character-related suggestion is to think about trimming the cast list. In this draft there are a lot of them, especially once the plot shifts over to Syria. Keeping track of who's who and how they relate to one another can be a challenge but, most importantly, their numbers take away page-time which could otherwise be spent on further exploration of Luke and his emotional journey.

PLOT/STRUCTURE:

This is the area of the script with the most room for growth. In this draft it's both loose as well as over-complicated. The main reason for the former is the fact that it takes a while for the main thrust of the script to emerge. For example, the active clause in the provided logline is Dr. Pattinson "...utilizes the tech he created to build an army of artificial print soldiers to get [his family] back." However, the building of an army is not broached until page 42, which is fairly deep into the second act. That's late.

Relatedly, the plot feels over-complicated by the exploration of backstory (e.g. Luke's childhood memories) as well as detours into the storylines of the many ancillary/supporting characters like Eun, Yao, and others. While it's all fast-paced and a lot of fun (have to pause here to give a shout-out to the awesome cellphone communication scenes between Luke and his team and Farooq -- killer back-and-forth editing in those beats) nevertheless, whenever story focus is off him and his goal of rescuing Belle overall dramatic tension can wane.

The recommendation, therefore, is to tighten things up by having Belle kidnapped as soon as possible because that's the inciting incident and then, from there, have him start building the print army because this is the script's very, very strong hook. Which will be my cue to segue over to the notes on concept.

CONCEPT:

This is the script's greatest strength. A scientist bio-printing an army of warriors in order to rescue his kidnapped wife is great. Very original. The key here is the print-bots, obviously. What a wild idea. Like a high-tech, sci-fi riff on the thousands of ancient [terra cotta warriors](#) found in the Chinese emperor's tomb. That said, the concept's dramatic potential and power feels under-exploited in this draft because it's not explored via Luke's relationship to it. Circling back to the notes about the opening beats of Luke throttling iterations of himself and how they're so very psychologically loaded (an extremely good and original thing), their dramatic potential gets lost in this draft because the army of Lukes (e.g. Left Arm and Right Arm and their unique memory directives, etc.) gets rolled out late and they're all mixed in with print-outs of the other cast members. While that leads to some great and clever chaos -- I definitely grinned at all the confusion they cause -- nevertheless, it blunts the potential for a more intimate story that's focused on Luke, his relationship with himself, and how he changes by dint of what the plot puts

him through.

Dr. Self-Defense Force is a lot of fun. Very original and commercial and the voice is smart. I hope the notes prove helpful and wish the writer much good luck.

DR. SELF-DEFENSE FORCE

