

**eOne TELEVISION**

TITLE: Consent

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SUBMITTED TO: N/A

ANALYST:  
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SUBMITTED BY:

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AGENCY/COMPANY:

LOCATIONS:  
Various locations  
in and around  
London, England

N/A

FORM/LENGTH: Novel

CIRCA: Present  
day

DRAFT DATE: N/A

GENRE: Drama-  
suspense

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**BRIEF SYNOPSIS:**

*Consent* recounts the exploits of an unnamed stalker (let's call him X) in a city that resembles contemporary London, England, and the life of a woman named Frances B, who unwittingly becomes one of his 'favorite' subjects. To describe the tale in such black and white terms, however, is to do it an injustice, because the author tells the story so delicately and beautifully that the reader becomes fascinated by the narrator X's reasons for stalking people and the scientific curiosity with which he approaches his new hobby. X is also writing a record of his "people studies" (as he refers to stalking) and of his understanding of Frances. He hopes to show it to Frances one day. During the course of the novel, the plots darkens when X kills Frances' boss, Phil with whom she is having a dispute. Sometime later he coldly captures, tortures and dismembers a young man named Patrick whom Frances had a one night stand with. The book ends with X tying Frances B down one night in her bedroom while she is sound asleep. He uses the same M.O. that he used with Phil so it appears that he is going to kill Frances too. However when she wakes up, he politely asks her to read his book and inquires what she thinks of how he has interpreted her. She reads it quite willingly and indicates that he has understood her well and described her appropriately. Now what? she asks. Whether X kills her or not remains ambiguous.

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**COMMENT SUMMARY:**

PROJECT:	HIGHLY RECOMMEND, WITH RESERVATIONS
WRITER:	HIGHLY RECOMMEND

## SYNOPSIS:

The narrator-protagonist of *Consent* describes himself as neither young nor old, very rich, and remains nameless to readers so we will call him X. The novel opens with his description of FRANCES B (early 30s) reading a book called *Consent* late one night. It is clear that he is watching her read. The story is about her; her childhood, personality, intelligence and beauty, the work she does as a management consultant, and how she interacts with men.

Then the narrator tells us about his own life, beginning with his Aunt Kathy's funeral. Her lawyer informs X that he has inherited a large sum of money (about \$11 million) and though X is not surprised, he is confused by the news. What will he do now? he wonders. He spends the first weekend of his new found wealthiness roaming the city (most likely London), feeling conspicuous and contemplating outrageous behavior because he is trying to come to terms with the fact that his life has changed forever.

He never has to work again and has a lot of time on his hands. So X decides he will watch people. This past-time starts off innocently enough that weekend with his "first" subject, LAURA D. When he sees her, a hairdresser, on a bus, he is curious about a story she is loudly telling a friend about a client. He follows her off the bus to find out more and tails her for a week or so, talking to her friends, observing her at home, and piecing together the story of her life. As the book goes on, X becomes more obsessed with his subjects, pursuing them diligently, thinking about stalking as his "work", treating it as a full time job, carefully documenting actions, reactions, obstacles, successes and failed attempts. In a sense, this is a man with an empty life, looking for interesting stories and doing whatever he can to get them. More eerily, *Consent* is a memoir of a loner who does not play by society's rules but rationalizes his behavior intelligently without guilt.

X has the perfect profile for a stalker. There is an aloneness in him, there is no mention of friends or family other than the dead aunt, there seems to be no love of his prior career, and no one to miss him if he disappears. And though X likes to see, he states clearly that he grew up not wanting to *be* seen. His wealth gives him the time and finances to indulge his stalking, buying surveillance equipment, a van, and cameras, an expensive laptop, etc., tools that allow him to spy on his various subjects: Jessica C, #40; Carmen G, #8; Amelia P, #83.

He describes how he learns to stalk and evolves from early mistakes, using anecdotes of his subjects to illustrate his points. For example, while he's putting a bug under Amelia P's baby stroller, she discovers him but he allays her fears by saying he is a private investigator. As he explains to readers, "Here's something I have learned: any lie can be made more digestible by mixing it with two parts truth. When caught looking furtive, therefore, the trick is not to claim innocence but to account for your actions in a way that accounts for the furtiveness as well."

He sees Frances B at her office in central London, while he is at another job there. As far as this particular man can, he falls in love with his subject. He shadows her, sets up bugs in her home, cannot resist making actual contact with her from time to time, and stalks her to the exclusion of all else. When he first sees Frances she is a successful management consultant at a central London office, giving a talk to a group of colleagues about 'Consent', a flexible working structure for one of their clients, QTel.

X understands that it is Frances who does all the work that her boss PHIL gets credit for. When an anonymous email is sent to Phil about Frances wanting to branch out on her own, he asks her to take the day off till the company's board of directors can figure out a course of action. X follows her back to the house she shares with a friend named STEPH. The next day Frances goes to the office only to be told that she has been suspended with pay till the matter can be investigated and resolved. Her boss tries to reassure that she is not at fault.

She goes to a nearby cafe, certain that she will be absolved but upset at being suspended. This is where X approaches her. Seeing her crying, he asks if she is all right and she responds kindly, although she thinks he is a bit of a buffoon and a klutz. She gives him her business card with her mobile phone number on it, not knowing that X has already seen her home, and knows a lot about her. Since he can watch and hear her at all times, much of her story comes to us because of this surveillance.

Frances asks her lawyer to contact her company to make sure she is not being illegally suspended, so he sends a letter on her behalf. This results in her being asked back to the office the next day to meet with Phil and the Executive Chairman, Jeremy Hapgood who tries to assure her that her suspension is only to keep any hint of partisanship out of the investigation. She is told that the charges against her are serious but that the company does not believe them. At this point, she lashes out against Phil and accuses him of having sent the emails himself. After she leaves the office in frustration, she goes to a nearby pub, The Rising Sun where, as X watches from the cafe across the street, a handsome young man named PATRICK LACEY (who works in delivery and logistics services) approaches Frances.

They begin to talk and after sympathizing with her job situation, Patrick moves in flirtatiously. Both know that they will end up together tonight. At one point, X cannot resist walking up to them. He says hello to Frances and leaves soon after, having taken a "jealous" look at the young man. As Patrick and Frances sit drinking and talking, she sees Phil on the street outside and runs out, confronting him agitatedly. She again accuses him of having written the anonymous email himself but he laughs at her, tells her she's had one drink too many. Phil heads for the Tube station and X who has witnessed the altercation from the cafe, follows him. While he is heading down the crowded stairs to the platform, X trips him and then pushes him from behind. Phil loses his balance, ends up on the track and is run down by an incoming train which has no time to stop.

Unaware of this, Frances and Patrick head to her house where they have sex. X's camera is, as usual, recording everything. The next morning, while X watches from his van on the other side of the street, the police knock on Frances' door and inform her of Phil's death. They have questions for her about her altercation with him so Patrick leaves as soon as possible, giving her a fake phone number to "reach" him later.

Frances now becomes frantic about establishing her innocence, going back to the pub to ask if the staff had seen her and Patrick and trying to establish that she could not have killed Phil. She tries to reach Patrick in vain by phone, and hopes that X will call her so she can ask him to confirm being in the pub and not at the Tube station. At the same time, she gets a letter from her company telling her that she has been terminated, with a severance package of 30 months' salary. X is busy with his own plans.

He finds Patrick's email address, contacts him on the pretext of needing his delivery services and gets his home address. He loads his van with knives, chisels, ties, a tarpaulin, body suit, bags, etc. and shows up at Patrick's door that Saturday. He enters the house using a fictitious story about being Frances' boyfriend. He says he is worried about her having gotten pregnant from her fling with Patrick. The young man, a little dazed, offers him a cup of tea in true English fashion, which X accepts. He drugs Patrick and then proceeds to bring in his equipment from the van. When Patrick wakes up, he finds himself trussed up on his living room floor, plastic under him to keep blood from getting through to the rug. X coolly informs him that they are both going to be curious and explore the possibilities of what can be done to a human body.

He gives him a chance to write down something on a piece of paper but warns him that he will pass on no messages. A frightened Patrick vomits, urinates in his pants, tries to warn X that his brother Steve is coming in 30 minutes but finally succumbs to X's brutality, having no other

choice. X dismembers him systematically, bags up the body parts, thoroughly cleans the house, loads the van and leaves. He freezes the body parts in his basement while he researches how and where he can bury Patrick's remains. He finally decides on a Muslim burial ground. He goes there one night, deepens a freshly dug grave hole meant for a man named Anwar Majeed, puts in the body parts, and covers them up with earth. He goes back for Majeed's funeral the next day, pretending to be a mourner, but really to ensure that Majeed is buried on top of Patrick's body.

X also informs us that he is now living in cramped quarters, presumably his van, but is happy there and can keep a constant watch over Frances. Steph meets Frances to tell her that Greg has proposed and they will be living together from now on. Frances starts looking for a roommate, also finds out that Patrick is missing and is very puzzled that two men she knew have disappeared in two weeks. She visits Patrick's mother and brother and offers to pay one month's rent on Patrick's apartment so the police have more time to look for clues. She haunts the cafe where she met X, hoping she will see him and ask him for information about Patrick and the night that Phil died.

Of course, X is watching her but does not call her. While Frances is trying to decide what repairs she needs to make and what items Steph needs to move out of her attic, she discovers a futon, laptop and blankets there. The computer is an expensive one, password protected so she cannot get into it. She asks Steph if the items are hers and she says no. At this point we realize that X has actually been living in Frances' attic and the laptop is his but Frances is puzzled.

She tries calling a policeman who had helped her before, to ask him what he thinks but he is gone for the day. She also calls X but gets no answer. She finally goes to sleep, only to wake up to find her hands and feet tied, her mouth taped and X waiting in her bedroom. He is courteous, tells her she is safe, and that he wants her to read his book. He helps her to the bathroom, unties her hands so she can read, and write comments, and watches her as she does so. After finishing the manuscript, she writes that he did understand her. She also asks, "Is it true?" He laughs. She asks if he will release her and he replies that he needs time to think.

"Can we talk?" she asks.

"I don't know." he says as the sun rises and the city awakens.

And *Consent* ends with these lines:

"So what shall we do now?"

The pen hesitates. We look into each other's eyes."

#### **COMMENTS:**

*Consent* is beautifully and stylishly written, with evocative, unusual and breathtaking turns of phrase, a really wonderful read. For the first half of it, I was excited to imagine it as a television series. The idea is fresh with the possibility to become a really exciting drama. In thinking about the plot though, it can present some creative hurdles.

In some way, everything that the main character shares with the readers could be read as a manual for stalkers, giving frightening detail about how to go about stalking someone, surveilling their home, family and routine, setting up video and audio bugs in their home, favorite haunts and offices, without leaving a trace. While this makes sense in a literary piece, it may not make much sense on TV in terms of action. Much of the novel's action is passive, as described by the

protagonist and would need to be made more direct to work for TV. To this end, some of the narration could be converted into dialogue and action.

The pacing is problematic and the city setting remains somewhat anonymous despite clearly mirroring London. However, characters are well developed, thanks to the protagonist's powers of observation. A minor concern for me is the cold, calculating nature of the protagonist. Not being a sympathetic character, he could be challenging to build a show around and make viewers care about both.

A great part of the novel is X's musings on various subjects, some at great length, some briefly but all used to illustrate his ideas about the science of stalking -- passive information rather than dramatic action. Luckily, where some subjects are concerned, there is enough material to create episodes around them while maintaining the overarching story his pursuit of Frances B, whose life and his interference in it form the crux of the plot.