

## SCREENPLAY FEATURE COVERAGE

<b>TITLE</b>	Waking Nightmares	<b>GENRE</b>	Drama
<b>WRITER(S)</b>	Dantonio Torres	<b>CIRCA</b>	Modern Day
<b>SUBMITTED BY</b>	Dantonio Torres	<b>LOCATION</b>	Fictional Earth
<b>FORM / PAGES</b>	Screenplay / 90	<b>BUDGET</b>	High
<b>DATE</b>	5/14/2023	<b>ANALYST</b>	Devon Flynn

### LOGLINE

A lonely teenager in search of love is driven to despair after discovering that he lives in a fictional world.

### SUMMARY

The story opens up with KEN, a teenage boy who lives a monotonous existence, walking through a dreamscape. His dreams are possibly his only escape from the tedium of the waking world, but even then, they don't do much to improve his mental state. He wakes up in his bed, realizing he's late for his first day of school.

The day goes by normally. Ken's life is boring and uninteresting, spare for the time when he is nearly mauled by a moose on his way to school. He sits at a lunch table tucked in the corner of the room, alone. That is, until MARION sits across from him. She is an energetic and optimistic girl who Ken almost immediately develops a crush for.

An entire day passes without Ken even realizing it. At lunch, Marion introduces Ken to ZACH, an arrogant "cool kid" whom Ken immediately dislikes. We learn more about Ken and Marion's interests throughout the day, until all students are brought to an assembly about college planning. Ken thinks about Marion, but then gets an uncanny sense of déjà vu. This has happened before, and his consciousness says that Marion will reject him. Realizing that nothing will change if he doesn't take action, Ken musters the courage to invite Marion to go to the carnival with him.

Ken's unconscious mind tells him that pursuing Marion will "sober" him, as if a horrible truth awaits him in the future. He stubbornly ignores these warnings and prepares for his trip to the carnival. Meanwhile, Marion dreams about her childhood. She and her friend, MELISSA, climb a great tree. However, the dream quickly distorts around them, forming a lake of black ink at the base of the tree. As Melissa falls in, Marion wakes up, still in school.

Ken and Marion enjoy their time at the carnival. During a show, Ken gets up to use the restroom, but suddenly finds himself in the middle of a dreamscape. A STRANGER tackles him to the ground. Ken and the Stranger are in the same position: they both feel out of place in the world. Something is afoot, and the world doesn't like it when people question its nature.

Suddenly, a strange creature emerges from the darkness and attacks Ken. Before he is killed, he wakes up beside the ferris wheel with Marion. Ken has prepared for this moment: to kiss her at the top of the ferris wheel. These hopes are dashed, however, when another couple is forced to sit with them in the car. He sits with Marion, disappointed, but at least the view is nice.

The next day, Ken and Marion talk about the dreams they've been experiencing. Ken questions the reality he lives in. He and Marion decide to hang out at the park. Ken then has a flashback about another girl he used to know, DAISY, and how he asked her out on a date, but never saw her again afterwards. After a long day of spending time with Marion, Ken goes home and lays down. In his dream, he learns the truth: that he is a fictional character in a book, made to relive the same story over and over for centuries.

The next day, Ken is overcome with existential despair. His entire life is meaningless, and he is doomed to restart from the beginning for eternity. In his frustration, he pushes Marion away and storms out of the school. In the woods, he comes across a child named BRANDON, who claims to be Ken's son. Reality unfolds around Ken, and it's difficult to tell what's real and what isn't. With no hope left, Ken attempts to drown himself in a river. He immediately regrets this, and with a fierce determination to live, he struggles against the current. Brandon then pulls him out of the river and ceases to exist.

Ken dreams about Marion and laments how he pushed her away. The figure impersonating Marion transforms into a mysterious woman named DEBBY. She is a fictional character who, just like Ken, found out the truth about the world. Instead of falling into despair, however, she accepted her place in the world and became sentient, almost like a lucid dreamer. Ken realizes that while he isn't real, he still has the freedom to change and make the most out of his life. He heads out to make amends with Marion and forge a new path for himself.

Meanwhile, Marion also learns the truth about the world from her ART TEACHER, and sets out to find Ken in the dreamscape. As Ken ventures through the dream in search of Marion, he is forced to confront his fears and past mistakes. These fears manifest in the form of the ENTITY, the embodiment of the fictional world. The Entity, too, is overcome with despair, forced to endure the same story for eternity. During a tense conversation, Ken teaches the Entity the same lesson that he learned. Ken accepts his place in the world and strives to take initiative in his life.

Ken finally reunites with Marion. Despite not being real, they vow to live their lives to the fullest. The story repeats itself once again, but this time, they remember everything.

## **COMMENTS**

*Waking Nightmares* has an interesting premise, but is hindered by several poor writing choices. The story has an incredible amount of potential with its existential themes and *Groundhog Day* style of plot, but the execution needs some serious work.

The marketability of this screenplay is another huge concern. Many of the scenes are so surreal and abstract that the special effects required to visualize them would be unaffordable for a live

action film. Since the story is intended for an audience of young adults, the best course of action would be to make this an animated film.

The story of *Waking Nightmares* is incredibly confusing. It constantly shifts between dreams and reality, and it's difficult to tell when these transitions happen. The screenplay is mired with completely random events that happen for no reason and serve little purpose to the story, like when Ken is attacked by a moose on his way to school, or when the image of an elephant makes him uneasy for some inexplicable reason, or when shadow people stalk him in his own house. It's impossible to tell when the descriptions are meant to be literal or metaphorical, and nothing is ever explained. Another problem with the story is how incoherent the meta-narrative is. Ken lives in a fictional world where the story repeats itself over and over, but the reader never gets an idea of how the story typically plays out. One suggestion that could mend this problem would be to change Act 1 to showcase the typical story in its entirety, where Ken goes to school, does nothing, doesn't get the girl in the end, and goes home unfulfilled (Although, that doesn't make for much of a story, either). We then go back to the beginning. Act 2 would begin when Ken notices the loop and attempts to change the narrative.

The story has a semi-clear structure, but the pacing is mediocre. Act 1, which are all the events leading up to the carnival, is very fast paced. It's difficult to believe that Ken develops a crush on Marion so quickly. The introduction would benefit greatly from slowing down and exploring the characters, their conflicts, and their desires more. Act 2 is incredibly short and only lasts for 30-or-so pages. The midpoint, where Ken learns the truth about the world he lives in, occurs on page 48. After cutting ties with Marion, he wanders the woods and has a seemingly pointless encounter with a child in the woods. Act 2 ends with Ken's suicide attempt and his conversation with Debby. Act 3 is unfortunately drawn out just to meet the minimum page count. The ending is satisfying, but the journey to get there is irregularly paced, leading to a very slow read.

On paper, Ken is a relatable character, especially for a young adult audience. However, he does not have a compelling personality. He is perpetually bored, antisocial, and frequently complains about everything with his internal monologue, which honestly makes him unlikeable in some parts of the story. Another problem is how he barely reacts to any of the strange stuff that happens in his dreams. It's as if he reacts to everything with mild irritation.

Marion is the love interest of the story, but her character comes across as obnoxious and sometimes outright disturbing with her child-like attitude. She is incredibly naive and overly energetic, as if she hasn't aged mentally since preschool. This could lead to some unfortunate implications about Ken and Marion's relationship. Having an extroverted and energetic character pull Ken out of his comfort zone is a great idea, but Marion's personality honestly needs to be toned down.

Throughout the story, Ken runs into several characters that are aware of the fictional world like he is. The Stranger is introduced at the carnival, but never shows up again aside from a few voice overs. Debby is the only interesting side character, since she is essentially a character who managed to transcend the story by accepting her place in the world. She serves as the catalyst for Ken's character growth. The story would be much more interesting if it delved into these characters a bit more.

The other side characters aren't that engaging. Daisy and Melissa represent a theme that is hardly explored and far removed from the plot. They are essentially Schrodinger's Cats, where they cease to exist when Ken / Marion stop thinking about them. The story introduces these elements, but doesn't really do anything with them.

The antagonist of *Waking Nightmares* is the story itself. The conflict is Ken's rebellion against the narrative and his struggles with anxiety, existential despair, and self-doubt. No problems here; it's a solid conflict with interesting obstacles.

The dialogue needs some work. Some of the conversations don't sound natural, especially the ones towards the end that are drawn out to meet the page count. However, the biggest issue here is with Ken's inner thoughts. Voice-overs are commonly looked down upon nowadays, as they are seen as cheesy and really only good for comedies. The problem with these voice-overs is that they serve to *tell* the audience what Ken is thinking, which is a lazy way to express his feelings.

*Waking Nightmares* deals with themes of existentialism, depression, and taking initiative in life. No problems here, either.

The screenplay is riddled with typos and errors, and is in need of a thorough proofreading session. The script also refrains from giving some of its characters proper names, such as "Stranger", "Familiar Voice", or "The Girl" (who is Melissa). A character's name should never be kept from the reader, as it creates needless confusion while reading the script.

Overall, *Waking Nightmares* is a decent idea that is hindered by a confusing writing style, poor pacing, and underwhelming characters. While the script is just a first draft, some revisions to the story, structure, and characters are needed.

**PASS**

## RATINGS GRID

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Poor</b>
<b>Concept</b>	<b>X</b>			
<b>Story</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Structure</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Protagonist</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Antagonist</b>	<b>X</b>			
<b>Stakes</b>		<b>X</b>		
<b>Minor Characters</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Dialogue</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Scenes</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Pacing</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>X</b>			
<b>Tone</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Writing Style</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Marketability</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Formatting</b>		<b>X</b>		
<b>Grammar</b>		<b>X</b>		
<b>Title</b>		<b>X</b>		