

SCREENPLAY FEATURE COVERAGE

TITLE	The Mist	GENRE	Sci-Fi Horror
WRITER(S)	Frank Darabont	CIRCA	Modern Day
SUBMITTED BY	Frank Darabont	LOCATION	Maine
FORM / PAGES	Screenplay / 111	BUDGET	Medium
DATE	3/2/2023	ANALYST	Devon Flynn

LOGLINE

A sci-fi horror about a father and his son trapped in a supermarket after a malevolent mist sweeps the town.

SUMMARY

The story opens up with a nameless group of SCIENTISTS researching a strange portal to another world. A thunderstorm rages outside, which causes the experiment to go haywire and keep the portal open for longer than what was intended. As the scientists scramble to close the portal, a malevolent mist containing eldritch horrors pours out of it, engulfing the military base.

The next morning, DAVID DRAYTON steps outside his house to observe the damage done by the thunderstorm, accompanied by his wife, STEFF, and his son, BILLY. It turns out that the storm knocked down his grandfather's old tree, which crashed through the upstairs window and ruined one of his paintings. Another tree, owned by David's neighbor, BRENT NORTON, smashed their boathouse by the lake.

David heads over to Brent's house to exchange insurance numbers, and offers to take him to the supermarket to buy some groceries and supplies. He also decides to take Billy with him, leaving Steff to clean up the mess outside. As they leave, they take notice of the mist slowly crossing the lake, but think nothing of it. Things become even stranger on the road as army vehicles are seen rushing to the military base.

David, Billy, and Brent make it to the supermarket, but are soon trapped inside as the mist engulfs the entire town. A bloody man by the name of DAN MILLER storms into the market, telling people not to go outside. Something in the mist supposedly killed one of his friends. Many people rationalize this as some sort of natural disaster or industrial accident, but Dan is convinced that there are things out there actively killing people. Billy is scared out of his mind, but is comforted by David and AMANDA DUMFRIES, a local teacher.

Act 2 begins with David investigating the back room of the supermarket. He discovers that the power generator is malfunctioning. Suddenly, something *huge* presses against the loading door, frightening him. He tries to explain what he heard to the folks outside, including an employee

named OLLIE WEEKS, but nobody really believes him. That is, until a mass of TENTACLES swarm in from under the loading door and kill NORM the bag boy. David manages to sever one of the tentacles with an axe, forcing the rest to flee. It's official: there are monsters in the mist.

David and Ollie try to convince Brent that there are monsters lurking outside, but he doesn't believe them. He even *refuses* to follow them into the back to see their proof, thinking that this is all a scheme by David to make a fool out of him. The rest of the survivors are also skeptical until David shows the severed tentacle to BUD BROWN, the store's manager. Brent still refuses to believe them and leaves with a small group, only to be killed shortly after.

This horrifying revelation sparks the fanatic ramblings of MRS. CARMODY, a religious lunatic who believes that the mist was sent by God to purge humanity for their sins. Of course, nobody believes her... for now. The survivors have nothing but knives and makeshift weapons to defend themselves with. The only one with a gun is Amanda, and the only one who knows how to shoot it is Ollie. Later that night, the store is attacked by giant locusts and pterodactyls, as predicted by Mrs. Carmody. More people start to believe in her nonsense.

With several people injured by the attack, the survivors are in need of medical supplies. David, Ollie, Dan, PRIVATE WAYNE JESSUP, IRENE REPLER, and a few other survivors plan to infiltrate the nearby pharmacy. The mission ends with several casualties as they are attacked by giant spiders.

Private Wayne later admits that the mist was created by a failed experiment up in the military base. Mrs. Carmody orders her cult, which has grown considerably since last night, to sacrifice Wayne to the monsters. This is the last straw: David has to leave *soon* before things get worse.

David, Billy, Amanda, Ollie, Dan, Irene, and a few others attempt to flee the market the next morning, but are stopped by Mrs. Carmody. She orders her cult to sacrifice David's son as punishment for his hubris, but is shot and killed by Ollie. The group rushes out of the market. Ollie and a couple others are slaughtered on the way to David's car.

The only ones left are David, Billy, Amanda, Irene, and Dan. They drive to David's house, only to find Steff dead. They then try to flee the mist altogether, but the car runs out of gas. All they have left is a gun with four bullets. David spares the others, including his son, from a grisly end by shooting them. Overwhelmed with despair, he busts out of the car and begs the monsters to kill him, only for the military to roll in and clear the mist at the last minute. Realizing that he just killed them for nothing, David screams.

COMMENTS

This screenplay is a mostly-faithful adaptation of Stephen King's novella of the same title. Interestingly, the concept for the mist and the monsters lurking within seem to also be inspired by the works of H.P. Lovecraft. Cosmic horror can be incredible if done well, but adapting it into film is extremely difficult to pull off.

What makes cosmic horror so fascinating is its emphasis on the fear of the unknown. You're not *supposed* to understand what's going on or why things are happening. This is why the script loses its intrigue in the first scene: it explains the magic. By opening the story with the scientists discovering the mist, all of the mystery (and thus most of the fear) is lost *immediately*. The mist and the monsters inside it would be much more unsettling if their origins were kept a mystery. Therefore, the best course of action would be to cut the first scene entirely.

A big problem with this screenplay is that none of the characters are truly engaging. David, the protagonist, has a very simple goal: to protect his son from the mist and the other survivors in the supermarket. He is a caring father with a clear moral compass, but that's honestly his entire character. He doesn't exactly have a character arc; if anything, he actually *regresses* as the story goes on, with the loss of his wife and son driving him to rock bottom. These qualities *do* make him inherently sympathetic, but the tragedy of the ending would be much more impactful if he had more of a personality.

The other characters don't fare well, either. David's son, Billy, is just a scared child. He exists solely to be David's motivation to survive the mist. His wife, Steff, exists solely to be killed off. Amanda is the only character who truly grows, forming a close relationship with David and essentially becoming Billy's surrogate mother by the end.

The screenplay suffers from having far too many speaking parts. None of the other survivors in the supermarket are compelling because the script hardly has time to explore any of them. Characters like Brent, Dan, Irene, and Ollie have little to no personality. They never have any heart-to-heart conversations; they just speak objectively. They only ever talk about chores, mundane things going on around town, and what to do next for the plot. Since none of the side characters are distinct, it's very easy to lose track of who is who. There are too many cooks in the kitchen, and the story suffers greatly because of this.

The monsters inside the mist make up a good portion of the conflict, but are ultimately used as a means to an end. The story isn't *about* the monsters or the mist itself; it's about the growing animosity between the survivors trapped in the supermarket. The monsters are the inciting force that drives the wedge between these characters.

However, the conflict between the survivors feels artificial. Towards the beginning, when David is investigating the back rooms, the script *desperately* tries to create tension between him and the mechanics in the most forced way imaginable. David literally witnesses something pressing against the loading door, yet when he goes to tell them about it, he instead just asks them if they "heard" anything strange. He then gets weirdly defensive when they start questioning him about it. Then there's Brent, who outright refuses to believe that there are monsters lurking in the mist even when David tries to show him proof. The characters behave irrationally just to create a rift between them. Even then, this subplot goes nowhere. The *real* rift begins with Mrs. Carmody.

Mrs. Carmody is certainly a hateable villain, but her character feels a bit *too* ridiculous for a story like this. Her character encapsulates the theme of "how fear brings out the worst in people." She takes advantage of the community's fear to spread her gospel, believing that the mist was created by God to punish humanity for their sins. The problem is that her zealotry is taken to an

almost comical degree. Not even the *script* takes her seriously. She's frequently described as this sloppy lunatic. Everyone disregards her nonsense until she correctly guesses that the monsters will attack at night. Even her death scene is treated as a joke: when Ollie shoots her in the face and David nonchalantly thanks him for it. She feels more like a joke (and perhaps even a strawman) than a compelling villain, which messes with the story's tone. The cult would be much more believable if Mrs. Carmody was more subtle and charismatic.

On paper, the ending to *The Mist* is unique, brutally dark, and exceptionally brave. However, it loses its impact because the characters aren't compelling enough. Sure, David losing it all for nothing *is* tragic by itself, but it would be so much more devastating if his character and his relationships were fleshed out more. Another thing to be aware of is that endings like these tend to make the story feel pointless. David and his group managed to endure the worst of humanity, and yet they were still screwed over in the end? Seems a bit unfair.

The theme of *The Mist* is how fear clouds people's judgment. While the mist itself is the inciting force of the story, the true conflict lies between the survivors. Nobody knows what to do. In the face of fear, people will believe anyone who gives them an answer. This theme is certainly compelling, but some scenes convey it in a hamfisted manner. Namely, Ollie's little speech about the Holocaust, 9-11, and how humanity will always dream up excuses to kill each other. That scene is so painfully misanthropic that it comes off as pretentious.

Overall, this screenplay needs some polishing. It has the potential to be a compelling story about fear and rationality, but it doesn't work well as it is. The hero needs to be fleshed out a bit more, and the cast should be trimmed down considerably. What this script needs the most is subtlety.

PASS

RATINGS GRID

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