

Title: "Sculpted"
Author: K.A. Plouffe (concept: Kristian McKenna)
Medium: Feature screenplay
Pages: 118
Reader: KT
Genre: Psychological thriller
Circa/Locale: Present / American city
Target Audience: Adults, 30s-50s

RECOMMENDATION (pass/consider/recommend): Strong consider
OVERALL RATING (1-10): 7

	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Concept	8	Not high-concept, but solid hook; once it becomes more clear, the premise keeps interest.
Story	8	Simple, effectively structured, builds dramatic tension and weight, set in a unique world.
Characterization	8	Nuanced, dimensional – no one is too good or too bad, effectively drawn in shades of gray.
Dialogue	6	Effective on the whole, particularly with the character banter and interaction, but often heavy-handed exposition.
Commercial Viability	6	Character-driven thriller makes it harder sell, but its low budget requirements suggest that it could definitely recoup its cost and potentially be very profitable among horror-thriller audiences and some crossover into wider audiences.
Writer	7	Solid handling of the story and structure, as well as tone once it becomes clearer later. Writing style is a bit dense and clunky at times, sometimes obscuring the story rather than fully conveying it – work could be done to enhance.

LOGLINE

When an egotistic and misogynistic sculptor develops a fascination with a young woman, she develops into his muse, but soon it becomes clear that she harbors her own secrets and an ulterior motive for entering his life – which will provide frightening closure to a terrible secret of his own.

COMMENTS

This is a compelling, dark, psychological thriller that feels fresh but also has a strong pedigree behind it – with hints of ‘80s and ‘90s movies like *Fatal Attraction*, *Single White Female*, *Sliver*, and the style of movies that those spawned. It feels also heavily drawn from pop-novel thriller writers like James Patterson and Stephen King, tracking a relatively small set of characters in their particular world. Focusing on an egotistic fine artist, we are drawn into an engaging depiction of the art world and the mind of a somewhat sociopathic artist. The script is magnetic, keeps interest, even throughout the first half when the reader doesn’t quite know where this is heading. The plot itself is rather simple but very effective in the end, when the pieces of the story come together in a satisfying climax.

The ending saves this script – the jury is out until the end, and thankfully the writer pays off our hopes and expectations. However, that is also a weakness, as many readers (and audiences) would not give it that much of a chance – this is a gradual, quiet build, going from rather mundane to the very dramatic – but we need to know more about what this movie is (genre/tone) and what kind of territory it is leading to – much sooner.

The characters are dimensional and imperfect, which keeps interest when the plot fails to really kick in for the bulk of the script. It is nice to have such characters – Aerial is likable in many ways, but also harbors quite horrible things (as we discover later). Cynthia is likable and down-to-earth, making her very empathetic, but we can’t get too comfortable with that because we ultimately learn that we don’t know who she really is – a very good character trait which translates into a strong narrative (and arc). Aerial’s agent, Jeff, could use some work – to make his characterization more consistent, and to better reflect the type of person he is ultimately revealed to be (having attempted to murder someone). More hints in that direction could make things more consistent.

For example of inconsistency in Jeff’s character – I don’t buy that Jeff would only reveal his suspicions and fears about Cynthia on page 100 – he says that he didn’t want to say anything until he was sure, but that feels out of character for Jeff, who says what he wants to Aerial all the time; he would have mentioned something regardless of being fully correct about it, before extensive investigation. In fact, he would at least leave a message for Aerial as soon as he realized that Cynthia wasn’t at the diner anymore and isn’t who she said she is. As his manager and friend, he has a vested interest in protecting Aerial from things like this, and as a guy with no social inhibitions, he’s unrealistic for him to hold back until all the facts are in – it’s clearly done this way only for narrative purposes. On top of that, knowing his backstory, he has even more reason to be extra cautious about the people who enter Aerial’s life.

Some of the dialog comes across as heavy-handed, expository. For example, Jeff’s lines to himself on 91 are on the nose. Most importantly, we already know what’s going on – we and him suspect that “it has to do with the waitress”. Likewise with the

expository dialog on 113, as Lexia and Cynthia “recap” things – while it’s nice to have this exposition to fill us in, it’s too on-the-nose, too much for the audience’s benefit.

There are a few dramatic beats that stand out as insufficient. For example, while it’s a cool concept, it’s a bit of a stretch that Cynthia can use a plaster cast of Aerial’s hand to get through the biometric hand reader (78). Is that true, would that work? Maybe I’m wrong to question it, but I assume biometric readers require heat – not just fingerprints?

Toward the end (78), it’s hard for me to really buy that Lexia is so on board with Cynthia’s double-crossing of Aerial – to not pick up the phone and be simply avoidant. I don’t fully know what they are planning yet – why does Lexia OK with being avoidant and disrespectful to Aerial? I suppose this is because I don’t quite grasp Lexia as a character, or her connection/relationship to Aerial.

By the end (97), I don’t fully grasp or feel the major dramatic beats that they are referring to when he claims she fucked him over – by simply not responding to his concerned calls, drinking his wine, entering his basement? I realize this is problematic for him, but “fucked over” seems extreme, and I struggle to figure out how she really screwed him for some reason. Maybe I’m missing the point, but that’s notable. (Is it because he left his restoration gig early because of her?)

The story and characters are close to being totally solid – I have very few issues with the story, structure, or characterization. This script is still a draft away, though, mainly because the script needs to better convey itself. Primarily, it takes too long to grasp the tone and genre, too long to know what kind of direction this story is taking us. It’s good that there is a slow-build and gradual reveal of how dark this script will become, but it also makes it boring at times – it’s too slow, and gives the reader too much time to wonder if this is merely a slice-of-life relationship drama, too much chance to ask “is this all there is?” After the first 30 pages, when no significant plot turn came that propelled this into darker, more dramatic terrain, I began to drift in my attention – the characters and their interaction is not so compelling to sustain an entire movie without major plot development, so I had to keep my fingers crossed that something would pan out. Thankfully, the last 40 pages ratchet things up, but the writer can’t expect readers to give him so much time for that to happen. Fixing this can be as simple as giving the reader a clue that Cynthia is not what she seems – earlier. Aerial and Jeff don’t need to see it, but WE should, to at least calm our boredom. An attempt is made to do that with the scenes in Cynthia’s apartment where she talks to Melissa (O.S.), but they come off a bit strangely, too much like *Psycho*, and will make the reader think that she is merely schizophrenic (in which case we’ve already seen that done to death), or we’ll realize that it’s Melissa (in which case the audience might be guessing too far ahead).

Bottom line – this is a really engaging thriller that needs to be more clearly expressed earlier on. The writing needs to better convey its unsettled tone, to at least draw the

reader into the horror-thriller style sooner, if only to keep interest. Because it could have a low price tag, the limited scope/scale of this psychological thriller suggests that it could be a solid commercial prospect. It also seems like it could attract talent due to its strong characters and dramatic scenes for actors to sink their teeth into, which would further improve its market prospects. Either way, this is a strong consider – despite lackluster writing that needs to do more to express tone and genre, and despite slow points throughout, the last act brings together the entire story in a very satisfying way.

Similar Films (theatrical box office)

	BUDGET	U.S. BOX	FOREIGN BOX
Hard Candy (2006)	N/A	\$1M	\$6M
In the Cut (2003)	N/A	\$5M	\$19M
Pacific Heights (1990)	N/A	\$29.4M	\$15.5M

Figures from www.boxofficemojo.com, unless noted