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Feature Film Development 1
08 March 2025

SCRIPT NOTES FINAL

OVERVIEW

This story is the next *Uglies* franchise, unrelenting with its raw and vivid discrepancies of exterior presentation versus internal reality.

Reminiscent of a science horror fiction, the screenplay has pivotal potential to become an enlightening chronicle, shedding light onto gender roles, internalized and inherent misogyny within society, as well as a crucial commentary on plastic surgery and body dysmorphia. Within our modern world, appearance and youth—especially for women—is a superficial but weighty crux in social status, power and influence. Globally, countless people suffer under the unrealistic and ever changing beauty standards, finding comfort only in risky, damaging and expensive cosmetic procedures. Insecurities are vainly veiled behind their outside image, silent competitions and constant dehumanization—subjecting vanity as an entire person's worth. Graver, self-image begins to become a salve to external conflicts; relationship conflicts, success, approval, and more. Thereby, such a premise promises great financial prosperity and success within the entertainment market, as well as deep insights on the hideous distortion of idealizing veneer beyond merit and authenticity.

CHARACTERS

Our company would like to see more complexity and depth to characters within the given setting. While characters are uncannily compelling, distinguished, believable and realistic, there seems to be characters who lack insight or even challenge the status quo. Willow appears to be one of the only central characters to such a motif, though she is later consumed by Amelia's madness. Though it serves to showcase the endless cycle of outward influence—whether familiarly or societally—audiences are not shown enough varying perspectives or oppositions. Additionally, it is difficult to understand how Willow would make such a transition despite her previous prying and retaliation to Amelia's methods and views. Though a prestigious student, Willow is still a young adult susceptible to influence, however, her deep self-awareness, values, and even own appearance completely juxtaposes Amelia entirely. Though the two briefly bond about feeling like they are never enough, it is not persuading to believe that Willow would simply find dead corpses in Amelia's apartment—*Amelia's own mother nonetheless*—and feel inspired to conspire with her because of a small 'bonding moment' and serum injected into her skin. It would be more believable to see Willow attempt to outsmart Amelia when cornered in her apartment, convincing her of motivations to help, only to betray or turn in her mentor. However, if the story still sought to have its eerie ending, showcasing Amelia's emptiness and dissatisfaction despite her outward radiance, it is more than likely Willow would have been killed off rather than agree to aid the mad dermatologist. Moreover, as Willow appears to constantly be undermined and a rather timid character, having her stand up for herself and what she believes could be a significant character development for her—further cementing the theme that arbitrary beauty is shallow when compared to character.

Additionally, it would be more enticing to see other characters have the same level of intellect and deceit as Amelia does, especially to avoid making Amelia seem unmatched and invulnerable. Although Samantha tries to leverage Amelia's project against her discreetly, other characters (i.e. Penelope, etc.) do not seem to reserve enough common sense to navigate even life-threatening situations. While their personas help reveal their shallowness and the absurdity of their pursuit of perfection, the screenplay would greatly benefit from having genuine threats to Amelia's agenda. For instance, when Samantha comes back to get 'fixed' by Amelia, it would be believable and engaging to see her attempt to set Amelia up. Samantha would then become a formidable foe, seeing through Amelia's antics and tactics.

Furthermore, Willow's classmate should likely be cut from the play. Our company finds that this character does not actually add importance to the plot, despite being someone Willow is seen confiding her doubts to. Contrary, if the classmate is to be kept, her character should be revised to serve a greater purpose, such as helping Willow investigate Amelia further. It is vital that the screenplay seeks to create intentionality and meaning behind every character, and retain scenes and characters that are essential to the overall storyline. As a result, we believe that potentially all scenes with this character should be cut from the script. Willow can simply reinstate that she is undergoing the internship to get into UCLA either to a passing patient, or briefly in a scene with her classmate should they be kept or when she tries to get a signature later on from Amelia. However, it does not seem necessary to imply why Willow is desperately trying to stay within this internship—the fact that she is already a participant implies that there is something related to this field that has her attention and interest at heart. Moreso, if the script is intent on leaving Willow to assist Amelia in the end, perhaps it can be secretly hinted that Willow stuck around because she learned of Amelia's more sinister work—perhaps her 'timid' act was another farce as a woman working her way through the system to get what she wants.

Barry is influential in showcasing the constant degradation of women and the roles they are forced to succumb to, it is requisite to further showcase how his own toxic masculinity influences sexism. Their relationship is a hallmark of toxicity and validation seeking on both parts than it is of love (EX: Amelia shrinking herself down to make Barry feel superior and competent, Barry needing to validate Amelia's external and internal worth), an interplay between machismo and internalized misogyny. Barry is infatuated and enthralled by the idea of who a woman can be and what they can provide him, whereas Amelia is intoxicated by the need to prove herself to her husband and society by any means.

However, the story seems to largely revolve around how societal beauty standards are mainly an issue for women, neglecting other gender groups and diverging identities. In order to best address sexism towards women, we must also outline how it is a shared struggle between diverse parties which play into each other. A good movie to reference would be *Barbie* (2023), which excellently portrays how sexism is not solely an oppression against women, but also intertwined with men's subjugation. To add on, our company wishes to expand and appeal for communities such as the LGBTQ+, perhaps in writing a non-gender conforming character who struggles with gender and body dysmorphia in regard to their identity.

Although Barry and Amelia's relationship is believable, there are a few problems. Foremost, when Matilda is found to be 'missing,' Barry is initially depressed for a short period of time before reinvesting in Amelia, despite claiming to 'be in love' with Matilda. While he likely was not in love with her, we feel that it would have a greater impact if Barry rejected Amelia

even after she ‘glowed-up,’ as their marriage already appeared to be loveless and emotionally dissolved. Additionally, this would enrage Amelia, giving her further vindictive to seek out Cyrus and validation elsewhere. In turn, this would showcase that youth and beauty were not the true culprits, but an alibi to more intrinsic flaws within our society and unhappy marriages. This would serve as one of the many ‘opportunities’ Amelia is given to self-reflect and choose an alternative life for herself, but she instead continues down her path of self-destruction.

Amelia’s relationship with Cyrus needs to have more significance. Although it serves to showcase her constant need to gain approval, and only discarding people once they either reject or completely adore her, Cyrus is an empty character. It is consequential that this film does not have characters simply to prop up others, or to solely be a supporter who is there for the protagonist’s development. Perhaps, Cyrus can be a character that reveals how men are expected to conform and appear for society, and their own struggles in trying to not be discriminated against for showcasing ‘feminine’ traits; being kind, sensitive, nurturing, respectful, a decent human being. I believe that he should be the antithesis of Barry, who actually believes in Amelia and her worth outside of her appearance. However, as Amelia is already too far entrenched in her own beliefs and low self-esteem, she would ultimately disengage from that relationship and seek out someone to be ‘won over’. As a result, this would create a cyclical, more rounded and raw glimpse of our current world, while strategically acknowledging how people can chase superficial things over themselves.

Amelia’s relationship with Joan should integrate more context and backstory. Joan has raised Amelia to base her entire worth on her appearance, conditioning her to constantly scrutinize and pick apart her body instead of the system and bad influences around her—that much is evident. However, incorporating flashbacks and creating scenes that garner empathy for young Amelia could be transformative for showcasing how these ideas can be instilled from an early age, conditioned and [sub]consciously reinforced by our environments. Furthermore, it would add more weight and dramatization when she kills her mother later on. Although Amelia is made out to be a mad scientist who harbors virtually no empathy outside of her own lived experiences, killing her mother *should* weigh on her in some capacity. While Amelia is set on killing anyone who opposes her, this is a character she has desperately longed for approval for, who she had spent her entire life trying to appease. To add on, our company would like to see more empathetic and endearing moments with Amelia’s mother, Joan. Perhaps a cut scene where Joan is praising Amelia for maintaining her appearance, or a moment where audiences can see more than just a mother overly concerned with her daughter’s appearance—where the greater motivation underlying this appears. Maybe, Joan truly believes this is what is best for her daughter, and because her husband left her, she desperately tries to ensure her daughter does not meet the same fate. Moreover, our company believes that the revelation of Amelia’s father leaving her mother should come at a private, later scene when Joan is challenged by Amelia, and she desperately tries to convince her daughter in a ‘bonding moment’ that she is only trying to protect her. Such a messed up message of endearment would likely shake Amelia, further compelling her actions and drive against Matilda, versus their previous bickering.

Amelia’s overall descent into madness is beguiling and unnerving. The more people Amelia kills, the more she becomes indifferent and invigorated in her work. The more she ‘perfects’ her image, the more of an empty shell of a person she becomes until there is nothing left. However, these deaths should still weigh on her in some capacity, and she should be

haunted by them, and the shift in her character should become more and more apparent to other characters. Additionally, there should be more risk and stakes within each kill Amelia undergoes; by simply getting away spotless with all of her crimes, it is difficult to truly feel that there were truly any real circumstances in jeopardy. Thus, it is exceedingly important that Amelia's relationships hold more weight and significance, so that their deaths may feel so to the audiences as well. Although it feels vindictive as an audience to see assholes like Matilda be killed, there should still be characters the audiences grow to like and become advocates for—such is the potential Cyrus and Amelia's mother can carry if suggested revisions are taken into consideration.

The ending, while impactful and ghastly, should be revised to leave a greater impact on audiences. Our company would like to see Amelia all alone after coming off her commercial set, waving and glamoring her audiences as she leaves. Inside a room, entirely alone, the smile is transfixed as her botox is...and she is unable to do anything else but smile and stare out hazily into the mirror until. She heaves, unbuttoning her shirt to reveal various incisions and jagged cuts, her entire body and face becoming more and more deformed. With a shaky hand, she takes the syringe to fix another imperfection, before the screen fades to black, and a thud is heard.

Such an ending would cement the message: suddenly there is no one's approval that is worth doing this for; she is entirely alone and no matter how hard she tries, it will never be enough, because the beauty standard knows no end. Contrary, the original ending reveals that she is unhappy and hollow inside, but there is not a greater implication or resolution. Our company feels that this alternative ending could utilize more props that the story initially grants audiences and further play into its fullest potential.