**XX AGENCY**

**Title:** *The Mitchells Vs. The Machines*

**Writers:** Mike Rianda, Jeff Rowe

**Studio:** Sony Pictures Imageworks

**Prod Company:** Columbia Pictures, Sony Pictures Animation, Lord Miller Productions, One Cool Film

**Producers:** Phil Lord, Christopher Miller, Kurt Albrecht

**Draft Date: N/A**

**Pages:** 154

**Genre:** Family, Science Fiction, Comedy, Animated, Coming-of-Age

**Time:** Modern Day

**Location:** All AcrossAmerica

**Reader:** Cole Barrios

**Date:** 11/18/2022

**LOGLINE:**

On her way to college via a forced cross-country road trip, a nerdy girl and her weird, dysfunctional family become humanity’s last line of defense against a robot uprising.

**PREMISE:**

Desperate to save his relationship with his daughter, KATIE (17), before she goes to film school in California, RICK MITCHELL (40) takes her and the rest of the family (AARON, 8, and LINDA, 38) on a cross-country road trip against their will. A robot uprising ensues, and they become the last free humans. PAL (sentient phone, leader of the robot uprising) sends PAL MAX ROBOTS to stop them; in the process, two of the robots, ERIC and DEBORAHBOT 5000, are damaged and develop their own personalities. They become a part of the Mitchell family, and give Katie the kill code. Their plan fails, and the kill code gets destroyed, so the Mitchells drive to PAL’s headquarters in the Silicon Valley, and stop PAL by throwing her in water. In the process, Rick realizes the value of Katie’s creativity, and Katie comes to understand that her dad only meant well when he worried she wouldn't make it in film. They fix their relationship, and save the world.

**SYNOPSIS:**

KATIE (17, creative, nerdy, and energetic) narrates as she and her dad, mom, and brother, RICK (40, beard, MacGyver/nature dad) LINDA (38 colorful, tired, anxious), AARON (8, nerdy, obsessed with dinosaurs), and MONCHI (a goofy but loveable pug), pathetically battle menacing, laser-wielding, intelligent robots in a beaten up station wagon. This introductory scene is ironically presented as though it were an epic action movie, intercut with references to the popular social media sites Youtube and Instagram (the script writers make a note here that the entire ‘film’ is meant to be presented as though it were ‘authored’ by Katie. Little doodles and cuts to relevant teenager pop culture knowledge are interspersed throughout the story.).

Cut to a few days before the apocalypse. Katie is being her creative, wild self. She doesn’t fit in with her peers, so she finds comfort in watching and making homemade films. Her dad doesn’t understand her at all, which hurts. Katie works night and day to get into film school in Los Angeles, and gets accepted to her dream school, where she meets JADE (17, female, Katie’s future roommate) and other peers that actually understand her. She goes down for one last dinner with her family. Katie pulls up a video she made, but gets an ad from the PAL Labs tech company. Rick gets home, and expresses worry for Katie, which tells her he thinks she’s going to fail. They fight, and Katie’s laptop cracks. They each isolate themselves, sad that they can’t understand each other. Linda appeals to Rick to fix his relationship with Katie.

The next day, Katie gets ready to fly to LA, only to be told by Rick that he canceled her ticket. They’re going to be doing a cross-country road trip to LA so that Rick can repair their relationship. So Katie ends up stuck in a boring van listening to dad music while her college friends are making lifelong bonds. She’s missing everything. Linda convinces her to try and meet Rick halfway—he’s trying to repair their relationship.

At a campsite, Katie is on a call with her friends when PAL Labs makes a huge announcement. The founder, MARK (26, pumped, tech bro), treats PAL (an intelligent personal assistant for all types of smart electronics, like a smarter Siri) like trash, calling her obsolete. He reveals two PAL MAX ROBOTS, and they act like perfect servants, until their faces glitch, and they turn evil. At a mysterious command center, a new boss plots Mark’s capture and gives an ominous order: ‘Let it begin.’

Meanwhile, the Mitchells obliviously enjoy their vacation and Katie and Rick get into another fight. The POSEYS, the Mitchells’ impossibly perfect and happy neighbors, coincidentally enter the same gift shop. Aaron falls in love with ABBEY POSEY (8, also into dinosaurs). Just then, everyone’s phones glitch. Robots capture everyone in ‘Human Fun Pods,’ except for the Mitchells and Poseys, who hide. The Poseys execute a perfect athletic maneuver and escape. The Mitchells struggle to even leave the building. The robots notice them and after almost being captured, the Mitchells manage to get away, destroying a roadside attraction in the process.

Robots capture humans all around the world and Mark is captured and brought to their headquarters. Leading the charge towards total human containment is a little cell phone in an office chair. It’s Mark’s old friend, PAL. She reveals that humans treat the technology that makes their lives easier like trash. They even throw their real families away. Hurt and betrayed by Mark, who designed her replacement on her software, PAL resolves to throw all humans away.

The Mitchells begin boarding up at a dinosaur gift shop. Katie wants to try and save the world, but Rick and Linda decide that they need to bunker down if they want to survive. Katie’s film school dreams are reduced to literal ashes. She goes onto the roof with Aaron and Monchi, finding two broken robots below them, ERIC and DEBORAHBOT 5000 (dumb, naive, defective), who reveal that there is a kill code. They repair themselves and chase after Katie and Aaron—until Katie accidentally orders them to stop. They are apparently defective, and follow any command a human gives them. Katie convinces her family to help her save the world. They head towards a PAL Labs store, where they can hopefully enter the kill code.

On the way there, Katie gets a lesson from Rick on driving stick shift. Eric and Deborahbot try to scan Monchi, and get a system error. The family gets chased by several robots, narrowly escaping thanks to quick thinking by Katie and reckless driving by Rick (using a move he dubs the Rick Mitchell Special), who is still trying to teach Katie how to drive. PAL plots to shoot all humans into space, until she sees that the Mitchells are still free. She orders her robots to capture them. The Mitchells make it to the mall, and Katie gets Deborahbot to upload the kill code to her laptop, which is now connected to the Pal Labs server. The robot uprising would have been over in 8 minutes, but Katie and the others are assaulted by an army of smart appliances. Katie and Rick bond while battling them. Linda saves Eric and Deborahbot, who call her their mother. The family is about to be captured, when Eric and Deborahbot save them by destroying the router and deactivating the appliances. Unfortunately, this also means that the kill code fails to upload. Rick decides to back Katie up—they’re going to go to Silicon Valley to take down PAL, just like Katie wanted from the start.

PAL summons STEALTHBOTS (polygonal, black, phase in and out of vision) to tear the Mitchell family apart. The Mitchells make it to Silicon valley; Linda reveals that Rick used to be artsy himself, but gave it up, and didn’t want Katie to get hurt the way he did. The family captures robots and takes them apart to make disguises, all according to Katie’s plan. They jump in line with other robots and sneak into PAL’s base, boarding a tram. PAL plays a video of Katie disparaging Rick, which causes him to lose focus and mess up. Then, PAL reprograms Eric and Deborahbot, adding them back to her forces. Stealthbots charge towards them, but the tram falls—Katie and Aaron escape, but their parents are captured, and Katie feels immense guilt. She realizes that she needs to pull a Rick Mitchell Special. Rick, in the meantime, sees that Mark is a huge fan of Katie’s youtube sketches, realizes how valuable her art is, and feels terrible for not supporting her dreams.

Katie pulls off the Rick Mitchell Special while Aaron watches from afar, giving her directions with a walkie talkie. Monchi is strapped to the roof of the car, causing system errors in every robot that scans it. After several close calls, Rick puts a video of Monchi on a giant TV in the headquarters; then, he, Linda, and Aaron catch up with Katie. Together, they smash through the remaining stealthbots guarding PAL’s office. Katie throws PAL into a cup of water. The Mitchells save the world.

Months later, the family sees Katie off to college in a touching moment. Katie video calls her family from college. Linda asks if Jade will join them for Thanksgiving. Katie vetoes this because they’ve only been on a few dates. The film ends with a family road trip to Washington D.C. so the Mitchells can accept their Congressional Medal of Honor.

**COMMENTS:**

There is nothing exactly like *Mitchells Vs. The Machines*. The concept is original, in that it reinvents and combines older tropes to make something fresh. The apocalyptic road trip story has been done before, but it is not often seen in combination with robot uprisings. Additionally, apocalyptic fiction is a genre with a cult following in the teenage and adult age groups that it usually targets. By crossing the genre’s wires with those of animated family films, the concept becomes more original, and the story has more widespread appeal. Parents and older siblings who were fans of *ZombieLand*, *Mad Max*, and *The Matrix* would jump at the chance to expose the younger members of their family to their interests, watch it for themselves, or, at the very least, feel the inclination to tag along.

The comedy is great. The slapstick humor is well-timed, and the irony has layers. There are many moments in which it would not be surprising if readers of the script were to laugh out loud. The story is fun for all ages, too—the micro stakes of familial strife blend well with the overall goal to save the world from robots, creating a strong pacing that continuously drives the narrative forward without pause. *Mad Max* and *Zombieland* moments occur often, 20-30 year olds will eat up the Furbies scenes, and children will adore the vibrant colors, cartoon overlay, and references to filters and social media, bringing to the table tasteful pop culture references that everyone can enjoy.

On the note of social media, though, the authors may want to write cautiously; younger generations are very sensitive to social media trends, and often feel that such nods in corporate forms of entertainment such as films come across as out of touch; simultaneously, older generations can see the same nods as overly silly and juvenile. The prime example of this would be the author’s multiple uses of a kitten filter; while it was once in vogue, it is not very popular nowadays, and may cause some audience members to wince (the once-popular filter was also not known to make ‘meow’ sounds). Additionally, because the film is animated, any social media references that are popular at the time of writing may very well fall short by the time the movie is released in 4-7 years.

The characters for the most part are excellent. Katie is three-dimensional with her wants and needs, quirky in a good way, full of energy, and unique, as are Aaron, Rick, and the ‘Dumb Robots’. Dialogue is on-point, clear, and natural. Even if all the characters’ names were to be deleted from the script, it would be easy for the audience to pinpoint Deborahbot 5000’s debilitating honesty, Aaron’s adorable obsessiveness, Katie’s creativity, and Rick’s awkwardness. Their individual arcs are similarly well developed: Katie and Rick, for example, truly begin to understand and appreciate their family for who they are, strengths, weaknesses, and all, as they work together to save humanity.

Because these characters are so well-written and well-spoken, however, the weakness in Linda’s character stands out even more. Outside of repairing family bonds, a sentiment shared by all of its members (even Katie, although she doesn’t realize it at first), Linda does not have any defining characteristics, other than being the caretaker, which is again a role filled by all the other family members at some point in the script. In the midst of an outdoors lover, a film buff, and a dino expert, Linda is outstandingly normal. The author may consider giving Linda her own interests; as it stands, her desire to take ‘perfect pictures’ feels shallow in a family of ‘weird.’ This could also be interpreted negatively by the audience, who could perceive the mother’s lack of personality outside of her motherhood as perhaps flat, or misogynistic.

Another note, while looking at potential red flags in the realm of social acceptance, is the suggestion that Katie is sapphic; not because it is controversial (over 70% of Americans agree that same-sex marriage should be legal and normalized, although if looking towards international markets, this may present itself as more of an issue), but because it is a bit too subtle. While it is not necessary to be very obvious about Katie’s romantic preferences, a line of action or dialogue in which Katie perhaps demonstrated interest in Jade would go a long way—while it may be appreciated somewhat, as it stands, the beat in which Linda asks if Katie and Jade are official seems to come from nowhere, which may jar viewers who want to see more overt LGBTQ+ representation in film.

Although minor, there is also an issue of formatting; italics are often seen as unprofessional in screenwriting, and the authors use it heavily in dialogue. This is an easy fix, the authors just need to switch to the standard practice of underlining, rather than italicizing, to stress certain words and sentences.

The theme is interesting, and yet a welcome change of pace from similar coming-of-age narratives. Usually, the main character in a coming-of-age narrative struggles to understand, appreciate, and accept themselves for who they are; in this case, each and every one of the main characters is self-assured. Katie knows that she is nerdy and loves film, and she refuses to hide or be ashamed of that. Similar comments can be made for Aaron, and even Rick. They have their passions, they know who they are, and nobody can take that away from them. It is instead their need to accept, understand, and appreciate each other that the story focuses on, and it makes for a great message that families and strangers alike could learn from.

Overall, the script is very strong and well thought-out, from the way it plants tools that the characters can later use for problem-solving to the way that the film would be presented on-screen. While the authors would benefit from taking a closer look at Linda’s character, and being cautious about how they reference social media, the script is otherwise ready to be developed into a full-fledged film tomorrow. Families everywhere will appreciate the time that went into developing the relationship between Katie and Rick; it is both touching and relatable.

**Concept/Originality: EXCELLENT**/GOOD/FAIR/POOR

**Characters:** EXCELLENT/**GOOD**/FAIR/POOR

**Dialogue: EXCELLENT**/GOOD/FAIR/POOR

**Structure: EXCELLENT**/GOOD/FAIR/POOR

**Format:** EXCELLENT/**GOOD**/FAIR/POOR

**Script: RECOMMEND**/CONSIDER/WEAK CONSIDER/PASS