

THE WORKSHOP

– TITLE –

There's so much to love about this script and concept. I very quickly found myself drawn into this world of hope and redemption. This clever twist on the concept itself would appeal universally, and the rules of the world are very well-developed. None of the fantasy elements ever felt jarring either, which is no easy feat. Remarkable work on getting us to buy into an unremarkable scenario. However, the characters feel like they've gotten lost in the world—as such, may need a bit more focus on them.

I had a difficult time distinguishing who the main character was. James, Olivia, and Topher all seem to be fighting for the main character role. We begin with James and Olivia and then quickly move to Topher. A good portion of Act I is spent with James, getting to know heaven, but then he largely disappears from the script except for interludes with Nell. There are hints that James might have become a bit jaded (when Topher tries to comfort Nell and James is angered) and that he's some hot shot angel in heaven (when Topher tells Olivia about James in heaven). It's hard to connect to these moments because we barely know James as a character. Spending some time with him in heaven getting to know Topher would help define him as a character. What could really help is playing out the Intro to Heaven scene through James's eyes. Right now, that scene plays like a monologue and there could be more creative ways to show heaven and the rules. Perhaps let him be the intro to the world.

The flashbacks with Olivia also seem like a missed opportunity to get to know Olivia and understand her pain a bit more. As a character, it's clear her motivation is to be a good mom and take care of her husband, but a question I kept asking is how did she get to where she's at now. I'm not really sure what her emotional state is at the start of Act II. She's clearly stressed given her situation but learning that her dead father has saved a wish for her is a great moment to explore her grief from losing her dad so young. Seeing the funeral play out, the disconnect between her and mother before the time jump, could help develop Olivia's character and show how she's become kind of hardened to the world. She seems to have changed greatly since her father died. I think we need to see some of that change instead of just her getting the news that her father is dead and then flash forward 19 years. This death and the emotional fallout from it resonated with so many of her life decisions, we'd likely need to see how it immediately affects her.

Topher has the biggest arc and I do think he's the main character, but I don't think we've earned the moments with him. I kept asking what drove him to drugs and drinking. The opening feels very much like a bunch of teenagers looking to party, nothing too crazy. To go from that to he's OD'ed at 35 is a big jump. His reactions don't always ring true, and I think a big part of that is because he doesn't feel fleshed out. His need to comfort Nell seems to come out of left field because he doesn't know this little girl and we've only seen him be a cynical asshole. Part of it may be a lack of reaction. On pg. 18 when Topher elects to go to hell instead of helping Olivia, he winds up still having to help her, and there's not a reaction to that. To develop his character, I think building out reactions and his sister Andi is key. Right now, his ex-wife and Andi are kind

of vying for the same emotion moment, and as we met Andi in the beginning, that could be a stronger emotional theme to carry through with his arc.

As I said I think Topher has the arc in the script, but I do believe work needs to be done to refine that arc. There's a need for consistency. Topher is willing to help Olivia so quickly when he could fight the process more—struggle with wanting to help her. Having them go into his darkest moments the second time they see each other might be too soon, unless his character is developed more prior to that. For that same reason, the sweet moment between him and Nell starting on pg. 48 feels out of place. The last we saw Topher, he was in a poker room, so why is he seeking James and Nell out? In the same way on pg. 80 when Topher decides he doesn't care anymore, the change from that attitude to wanting to help Olivia, no matter the cost, happens too quickly. He has a moment with his ex-wife who we've only seen once before and not in a way that would emotionally connect us to her. If that scene was built out to be about his sister and redeeming himself for lying to her, I believe that shift in his character would be stronger.

The script is, admittedly, kind of all over the place with tone. It feels like it could play as a Hallmark/holiday movie, and then the sex scene/almost sex scene on page 30 happens. That whole moment feels unnecessary and tonally out of place with the rest of the screenplay. Topher has a couple of those moments throughout the script, and they do feel like a disconnect between the characters. Olivia and James come off as if they're from a G-rated, maybe PG, holiday movie, while Topher can feel more like he's from a Will Ferrell type comedy. Something to bear in mind when it comes time to sending the script out to managers and production companies.

I think the world is really well-developed. I know the rules, and I'm not jarred by the flashbacks. That said, I think the characters are getting lost in this world. As great as the scenes in heaven with Nell are, seeing how Heaven works, they do very little to push the plot forward, and that space could be better utilized in developing Olivia's character and focusing on Topher's redemption plot. I think connecting Topher and James in heaven will also be stronger. Like if James has to take Topher under his wing, so to speak.

Smaller Notes/Issues

- There's a lot of telling instead of showing. Much of Olivia and Gareth could be shown in flashbacks. Instead of Olivia telling us about Gareth kissing his ex-girlfriend, we could see it from Olivia's perspective? The same thing on page 88—instead of hearing about the stillborn baby through Olivia's dialogue, we could go fully into a flashback or have Olivia narrate the flashback.
- Sequence starting on page 90 is a little confusing. Topher's with Olivia and then he's with Maria and then at the wedding. With the ticking clock of when he has to get back to heaven and Olivia needs to make her wish, there's a lot going on. Adding him making his amends at this very moment too is a bit confusing. I think there's a way to streamline it. Maybe if he's making his amends before and it's his connection to his sister that spurs him to go back and help Olivia instead of trying to wrap up both moments?
- Page 79 – Nana's statement about Michael and Nell "he's not her real dad," comes out of left field. Granted we don't really know much about Nana and there seems to be some tension between Olivia and her mother (which could be developed, making Olivia a stronger character), that even the tiny bit that we know about Nana seems quite cruel. Especially after

we learn Gareth doesn't even try to be there for Nell, and that Olivia sends him pictures but he doesn't not try to be in her life. It doesn't seem to ring true for the character. She appears to really care about her son-in-law and her daughter, so why would she say something so mean after her daughter learns her husband has no options left?

- There's a lot of moments that feel like monologues and are just stagnantly visual, the intro to heaven, the still born baby scene, the poem. Those could be cut down or altered to be more visual.
- Page 110 – after Olivia explains her love for Michael, we don't need to go back to Gareth. Michael is the moment to end on. That moment could be more visual as well, like a montage of the moments she's describing with her VO over the top. We already have devices like flashbacks and angel magic so VO wouldn't be too much.
- Potentially a missed moment, but it's never explained how James dies. In fact, at first, I thought he died because of Topher. That Topher was driving while intoxicated and crashed into James killing him. Putting all of those scenes at the front together and then having Topher come out of the elevator when Olivia is going to find her dad at the hospital sort of leads to the assumption. I think that could work. It would definitely be a darker script, but would have a lot of emotion within it. If Topher had nothing to do with James's death, then we need to know that, because right now it feels a bit like a plot hole or missed opportunity, if I'm reading it correctly.

