

TEST DRIVE: STORY BEATS

By Sam Tahhan

TEST DRIVE: THE FEATURE

In the COLD OPEN, we meet TOM – a feisty fighter pilot turned hardened prisoner of war. Confined to a tiger cage, Tom suffers unspeakable atrocities; his only comfort wishing upon the stars at night. But when Tom is eventually rescued, he refuses to believe his wishes were answered; instead choosing to harden his heart.

In ACT ONE, we catch up to Tom “piloting” an automated space shuttle for wealthy passengers on trips to the stratosphere. Of course, this job is torture to Tom. So, he secretly uses his space shuttle to deliver black market goods to the mob. But when Tom gets busted, he’s forced to make a deal with FRANKIE, 30s, an underground operative looking for information on biotech company “NTERIM”. With no choice but to comply, Tom uses his “war hero” status to infiltrate NTERIM’s secret compound. Posing as a candidate, Tom discovers NTERIM is offering prospective parents the chance to “test drive” parenting; this, by raising an “NTERIM” – a child genetically modified to age three years every day. Desperate to get his fighter’s wings back, Tom absconds with the child he’s been given: a baby girl named ANGEL.

In ACT TWO, Tom discovers his contact FRANKIE is dead, which forces him to flee with Angel; that, or be killed by NTERIM’s secret security detail. As the two race towards a secret underground facility, Angel continues to age while growing more and more fond of her “father”. But angry Tom keeps her at a distance. That is, until a vicious firefight ends up wounding Angel. Now leaning into his protective instincts, Tom helps Angel fight off a pack of NTERIM thugs; which results in the two forming a make-shift alliance. That night, Tom opens up to Angel about his time as a P.O.W., admitting how he used to look up at the stars at night and wish so hard, he thought he could change the whole wide world.

By the MIDPOINT, Tom discovers NTERIM’s plan: Because drone technology has rendered nuclear war obsolete (meaning all wars are now ground wars), Angel and the other NTERIMS are to be used as “disposable soldiers”. Of course, this discovery infuriates Tom; who decides to keep it secret from Betty (who’s now older than him) while waging war on NTERIM. But before Tom can bomb the hell out of the biotech facility, he is shot and killed by the company thugs.

Now forced to bury her father, Betty (now a middle-aged woman) picks up where her father left off, taking the yolk of her father’s space shuttle. Here, Betty sets the NTERIM children free then races skyward to destroy the NTERIM lab (now on its way off-world); only to find herself in a firefight she’ll never win. Embracing “a life well lived”, Betty suicide-bombs the NTERIM rocket as her own shuttle explodes.

In the final scene, an NTERIM child gazes upward, watching as a shooting star (which is actually Betty’s fiery shuttle) streaks across the night sky. In this moment, the child closes their eyes and wishes upon Betty’s star, believing someday they’ll change the whole wide world.

ALTERNATE FEATURE VERSION

Truth be told, I've also envisioned a version of this story where colonists living on Mars are fighting for their emancipation from Earth. Because nukes are obsolete in zero gravity, all wars are now ground wars; which means if Earth's government wants to eradicate the colonists, then they'll need a "disposable army" they can grow in outer space (on their way to the red planet).

I love this version of the story and am only hesitant to write it because of budgetary issues. Me, being an up-and-coming writer means if I have any intention of directing this film, I'll need to keep the film low-budget. Staying on Earth is the simplest way to do that. But, the little sci-fi nerd in me (inspired by STAR WARS as a child) desperately wants to write this version. And I very well may, knowing I'll have to let go of any chance of directing the film myself; which, to be fair, is fine by me; this, because I believe this story needs to be told for every kid (like myself) who's ever wished upon a star.

AS A TV SERIES

It's impossible to ignore how well this would work as a TV series. Showing Betty at a different age every episode is a gold mine waiting to be explored. I've thought about it endlessly. And, though cancer slowed me down for a while, I'm now back to thinking about that same thing. However, my manager Audrey and I both agree that the best course of action is to finish the feature by the end of the year. Given the strength of the P.O.C. and (hopefully) the feature script, this story should be an easy sell. In fact, before I ever shot the script, DUST almost bought the short from me. Heck, they almost paid for the shoot. So, I know for certain the interest is there. And now it's my job to deliver the best version of this story possible. For now, that's gonna be a high-speed sci-fi thrill ride with a ton of heart. Plus, it's gonna be really cool to see multiple actors playing Angel (as well as their various interpretations of the character).