

# **SCRIPT GODS MUST DIE**

## **\$60 NOTES SAMPLE**

### **OVERVIEW:**

It was useful talking to you via phone yesterday. I got insight into what you thought your screenplay was, where it stood, and where you wanted it to go. Also, learning about your background in fiction writing, was very telling into where you were coming from with this script, and where you wanted it to go.

Specifically, you told me it was a thriller.

This screenplay isn't a thriller. It's a neo-noir drama. No one dies! I can't think of many thrillers where you could state that. That, in itself, is not the proof but an indicator. The proof is more in the style of writing, which is owing to your book-writing background. It reads a bit literary at times (meaning far too wordy) and not at all in the high-strung, high-stakes, high-speed style of a thriller. I think I mentioned when you pitched it how it sounded like **DOUBLE INDEMNITY**. I must have made note of that a dozen times when I read it. It has a neo-noir style which appeals to me, but for you to pitch it as a thriller, I think, would be a mistake.

You'll need a rewrite before you go out with this. I know, those words are truly dreadful and truly suck. But I wouldn't be honest if I told you otherwise. I was very specific about where you might make these changes.

You've got promising characters in Loch and Natalie. These are archetype-noir style, flawed with every breath, nicely nuanced. The boss, Abner, is also well-drawn and promising.

As for the **DOUBLE INDEMNITY** comparison, switch out DI's insurance investigators for your child-service investigators and the plot is very close. I'm willing to bet other readers will notice this and call you out on being derivative. Me? I like the old time movies and enjoyed seeing the parallels. That doesn't mean it's more commercial or the better for this closeness. In fact, I'd say you'd need to change some of your plotlines in the next draft.

Here are the specific notes:

<b><u>PAGE</u></b>	<b><u>NOTE</u></b>
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| <b>➤ COVER</b> | <b>Interesting title...get rid of the copyright on the title page. Not needed. Dump the "Inside Job Studio Production".</b> |
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- 1                    Sluglines that take more than a single line have too much information. Rewrite, dumping out the DATE, which is VERY distracting, and which you use THROUGHOUT. Dump the dates.
- 1                    FLASHBACK. You never once say it, relying on chunky sluglines. You've got to tell us when we go in and out of Flashback. The fact that you're HEAVILY leaning on Flashback is something we'll discuss later.
- 1                    Nice entrance of your Protagonist, Lock. Nice description.
- 1                    (CONT.) you don't need these after every dialogue continuation. I know it's in the software but it's not needed. Go to MORES AND CONTINUEDS and disable the software. You'll save the reader's eye and make the read more enjoyable.
- 1                    Why are you numbering your scenes? That's shooting script style. This is a spec. Never list scene numbers for a spec.
- 2                    "outside, clouds part." And this impacts character or plot how?
- 3                    "Bill's bar...licensed revoked" Nice. Visual information giving, not explaining, I like it.
- 3                    scene 6, you've got 3 long blocks of screen direction. Why? Not needed. Trim down.
- 4                    "he knows he's alone but imagines a room of people." So this scene, which goes on for the next FIVE pages (far too long) is Lock in an extended Monologue talking to a room full of imaginary people? As you'll find out later, I'd most likely get rid of this entire sequence and start much earlier NOT USING THE FLASHBACK DEVICE. Keeping it in the present time frame and letting events unfold NOW, in front of us. However, if you decide to keep the Flashbacks as a bookending device, you must try to trim this scene down. It's essentially an 8 page monologue. Very static, and certainly not in keeping for the thriller you want this movie to be.
- 5                    "a crashing, clattering, cursing commotion"—Nice alliteration! Told you this was literary...
- 7                    "Abner grins"—So we're seeing these people, but they're all in his head. It's just a very odd setting that goes on far too long. What are you trying to accomplish with the scene? Isn't it just to set up what we're about to see ala INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS? Feels very noir to me and probably unnecessary.
- 9                    Lock's Monologue top of page---this is almost purely exposition. Isn't there any way to visualize any of this? Show, don't tell is the most cliché of all advice, but when you tell me how he's feeling rather than finding a visual solution, the script reads static and, yes, book-like.
- 9                    Flashback Sequence begins. Your lead-into this flashback is too obvious. Feels like 40's noir with the dissolving screen and all. This signals an end

to your first Sequence (10 pages) which shows, for all intents and purposes, a drunk talking to nobody about “simple human desires” and “wanting a family”. Here’s my recommendation: Rework your structure. Dump the Flashback sequences—both at the top and bottom of the movie. Also dump the VOICE OVER that is about to take hold. If you keep us in the present tense and have the story unfold in real time you have no need of flashback and voice over.

- 10 Driving up to the Mannheim estate. Plays like straight Raymond Chandler. Nice, but...I like this genre but you must enhance it and pitch it for what it is—neo-noir drama. There’s no thriller here.
- 10 Natalie enters. 4 paragraphs to tell me she’s hot? It’s overkill. Trim down, specify, hit me with some killer verbs, make her description savage, but give it to us in a couple lines/single paragraph.
- 12 “inadequately dressed” After her entrance in the thong? That’s hysterical!
- 13 It’s about here I began to ask why we couldn’t just start the movie with him driving up to the estate. In my movie of your movie, that’s how it would begin, right here. But you have to decide if you really need the voice over and flashbacks.
- 14 “eye play” Nice description.
- 16-7 Why are we spending two pages talking about what people are wearing? Why do I need it? How does it advance character or plot? Anything that doesn’t, goes.
- 17 You have her changing in 10 seconds. How will that work?
- 18 Natalie and Lock talk about her husband. Mamet once said that two people talking about a third person is not dramatic. Here, it’s pure exposition. You’re telling, not showing. It’s not visual and slows us down. Trim this or show visually, if possible.
- 19 “He resists her come-hither looks” Yes, good. You have to build this up. It’s the whole ballgame, how these two interact, their arc, the mind-fucking, the instant attraction but not acting upon it, the chemistry. Keep in mind the actors will fill in the gaps with body language, but you must write with subtext in mind. Say it without saying it.
- 20 Good close to the scene. Sexually charged
- 20 If you keep the flashbacks, I need END FLASHBACK to get me out of each.
- 20 Back to Bill’s bar. Why? I just don’t get the Flashbacks, let alone to him talking to a roomful of imaginary people.
- 22 The Mall Molester. How does this tie into our main story. Where is this subplot going? Don’t get it.

- 23                Lock comes off like a cop here. Maybe I'm just missing it, but a DCFS worker is NOT a cop. They're not authorized to do what you have Lock doing on occasion. I was confused, frankly, if he actually was a cop in places.
- 26                Abner. This is an excellent character. Very Edward G. Robinson from Double Indemnity though. You'll hear that from other people, if you send it out as is. I like his boozy weakness.
- 28                Not to be a Syd Field slave, but...I'm looking for a Plot Point scene here. Why aren't we out of the first act yet? Which leads us to a rather obvious note: No way you need 134 pages to tell this story. You should be looking to trim this to 110, max.
- 29                Loch voice over. Simply not needed. Slows down the narrative, slows down the read. You're telling me he doesn't want to go to see her, but goes anyway. I can see trepidation with one look of an actor's face. You don't need to spell everything out like this.
- 30                Natalie and Lock. Only their second scene together, with 30 pages gone? No way. I'd get these two together much sooner, and much more, the mind-fucks, then the real sex, then them getting into bed together and plotting out the husband-scam could all happen by here, end act 1.
- 31-3              "I'm boring you." "I'm listening." We're talking lawyers here. Talking about the husband again. This should be smoldering sexuality. It's very dense dialogue here, exposition-style again, telling me about the husband, a person who I haven't even seen yet 30+ pages in. Look for a visual solution.
- 33                General question: What is Loch missing in his life? What's piece is Natalie providing? Why would he get involved with her dirty dealings beside the sex being very good?
- 33-5              How about quick cuts to SEE the husband doing some of these things? These are FLASHES, not flashbacks, and would open things up.
- 36                "You need to relax." "I'm relaxed" "Tutor me" Ha! Had me laughing.
- 37                "You sense I'm all alone." Too stated, too wooden. Subtext, subtext!
- 40                Scene ends: That was a 10 page scene! Fully ¼ of your movie for a single scene? No way. According to your own count you've got 14 total scenes so far at page 40. That's too few and goes toward my statement about this being too literary. Very static, talky talk scenes that go on too long. No matter how vital, no way this last scene goes 10 pages. T r i m.
- 41                Craps! Yes! Now you've got my attention!
- 41                "I should have put an end to it right there..." More V.O. explaining his mental process. Internal narration for a book is ok. For a movie, one look from Fred McMurry in Double Indemnity, we get it. He's in with a Femme Fatale and can't get out.

- 43                “Setting up your husband.” Cards are on the table. Loch isn’t stupid and we got it too, quite a while ago.
- 45                The pond. Nice setting here. This is visual and original. Good work.
- 46                The seduction. Also good. Just wish it came sooner, like page 25. At 134 pages, you’ll need to cut down. Consider getting to this seduction much sooner. This is the true end of ACT 1.
- 48                The goal is “primary custody”? How is that thriller material? They don’t even want to kill the dude? POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE is also noir-style for plotting against hubby. I could accept this if someone actually died in the back end, but that doesn’t happen. We’ll talk about this later...
- 48-56            Natalie and Loch talk about the scam. Another huge scene. 8 pages???
- This is what I mean by overly-bookish. It’s just too verbal, talking out every single angle. Leave some subtext! Not to mention, these two, right now, should be all over each other sexually. Smoldering attraction should never be greater than right now. She shouldn’t be arguing with him...should be taking him into the back of the kitchen and... Let me repeat this: Just don’t see why he’s throwing over his whole life for her. If he gets caught, he’s screwed. You have to make me buy that he’d do that.
- 56                He’s fully in here. Three pages ago he said the plan was “amateur hour.” What changed his mind so quickly?
- 56                Back at Bill’s bar? You just changed time & location without any FLASHBACK ENDS or even your DATE device.
- 56                First time we see MANNHEIM. Cap his name and give some description. How can we be 56 pages in and have never seen him before this?
- 58                “Big Brother”                Dump the reference.
- 60                “shit in your bonnet, Natalie.” Ha!
- 61                “I need you.” I need to believe this. They need each other at the core. You need to ramp up this need, this lacking, this urgency that they find in each other. It’s the entire rationale for why he would do it in the first place.
- 63                The baby. Ah, the baby! Prop, not a character. Gotta be a baby though, when we think about how the scam will go down. Do you show her as a good mother? I get almost none of that. Should we?
- 64                “I’m getting out.” 8 pages ago he was 100% in. This guy is flighty!
- 67                “I had considered everything and had everything under control.” Huh? 3 pages ago you said you were out, now....?
- 69                The scam. Here we go...the scam sequence is actually pulled off rather well. It moves. I’ve been waiting for such suspense the entire time. We’ve got a sense of what will happen, how organized he is, how he’s planned everything out. But we also damn well know something will go wrong...

- 73            **A taxi driver? When I first read it, I wondered if he was needed. Later he was paid off, so yes, this set up and character is needed.**
- 75            **“everything was going right.” The V.O. here utterly takes us out of the flow of the drama. Every time you lean on it, you detach us. We’re seeing the action, why narrate it? Cut it.**
- 76            **Scam plausibility. Good news, I buy how you’ve set this up. It’s believable. The flow of events makes sense and seems inevitable. And, heaven knows, noir is nothing if not inevitability.**
- 76            **They’re putting a baby solo in the car! All the women in your audience will hate Natalie here. Leaving her kid in that car alone? It’s a nice touch tough, extremity, these two are fucking around.**
- 77            **“a mile up the road” How did we get a mile up the road, you never cut away with a slugline. You may need one there.**
- 78            **too much dialogue here. Keep this edgy, visual. The cops pass them on the way to the car wreck. They’re both about to puke from nervousness, or maybe he is and she’s steely cool.**
- 79            **did I mention dumping the dates from your sluglines? Absolutely must do that. Two line sluglines?**
- 79            **Back to Bill’s bar? Cutting away from the drama here??? Why do that? Totally saps the drama tension you’ve established. This isn’t **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**.**
- 81            **Abner informs them about the wreck. In your version, the baby survives despite the car being rear-ended by a drunk. This is the twist they didn’t expect. The drunk who hits the crashed car. The baby is hurt. I like it and buy it, but...I’d consider having the husband or baby die. It would add much more resonance to the drama, would ramp up stakes, would make Natalie’s fall more believable. Would also make the investigation of them that much more intense and would bring in your character Goldberg sooner.**
- 81            **With the scam done, the drunk husband set up, you’re out of ACT 2. Page 80 would be ok, if it was a 120 page script. I think, ideally, you’re looking at 100-110 pages for this script. Look to trim, if possible. Get us here sooner.**
- 82            **Investigation begins. This is straight Double Indemnity. One can almost hear Edward G. Robinson in Abner.**
- 83            **Cameras? There were no deaths. Why cameras? These aren’t cops anyway. Since when are DCFS investigators out front and center like this?**
- 85            **Back to the V.O. we go. I wouldn’t. Detaches us. Explaining, not real psychological insight. Simply don’t need these V.O.’S and trimming then will help cut page count.**
- 87            **There should be full-on scenes with Natalie and Loch in here. There aren’t. Abner takes over and Natalie seems to disappear in here. It actually seems**

like the Abner/Loch relationship is more complex than the Natalie/Loch relationship. I missing Natalie here. If the baby died, she'd be falling apart here. Or even if she wasn't, Loch would be. Makes it much more complex. If the baby doesn't die, you still need to show their relationship disintegrating in stages, with multiple scenes of them trying to cover their asses.

- 87-91 Casino scenes. Look, you know I love a good casino scene. It interests me as a reader. It might not others, though. Please tell me why these poker scenes are essential? Is there a payoff? It dilutes your dramatic tension and grinds the story to a halt.
- 96 My note on the fly was: Where the hell is Natalie? Almost 20 full pages now of Abner. He's taken over.
- 98 A pot bust? Huh? How's this impact anything?
- 98 V.O. explains who Carlo is...ok, interesting. Any time you surprise me with a plot twist, I'm all for it. Didn't see that one coming. Just another brick in the wall against Loch. Fate and Karma closing in...as it does in every noir flick!
- 100 Been waiting for this Loch/Natalie scene for over 10 pages.
- 102 Suspicion placed on Natalie's lawyer. OK, I can buy that. Makes sense.
- 103 "Gil changes his mind about the Poconos..." How exactly is the camera seeing that?
- 104 Here's where you need the taxi cab driver. Good payoff. A human witness, not to mention pot guy Carlo. The evidence is growing against Loch. He feels it. We feel it with him. Make no mistake: He's the protagonist of this movie. Natalie doesn't have enough solo scenes to make her any more than the primary secondary character. In some ways, we know more about the insides of Abner than we do Natalie. Is this something you're ok with?
- 109 "she doesn't have the brains..." Lawyer boyfriend is suspected. I buy it.
- 110 the bottle speaks to Abner. That's twisted, but original!
- 113 Without the baby dying, the ending doesn't have that desperation it needs. Natalie never falls apart. Death of her daughter could destroy her. Or it could destroy Loch. Just a thought...
- 114 The Abner/Loch interplay is right out of Double Indemnity. It's vital and believable dialogue, though I think it could easily be trimmed. Some of those dialogue paragraphs are thick.
- 114 'you were getting too close, Abby...' You're telling us something we already know and can see. Cut the V.O., especially in places like this.
- 115 "he's convinced it's you and someone else..." we just heard him say that. Don't repeat dialogue/information we know.

- 115-6 “the blue Mercedes your boyfriend drives...” This feels totally out of the blue. What boyfriend? Did I miss it? And why is Loch so emotionless when he reveals this? I thought he loved her? If he didn’t love her, why did he get involved? He opts out emotionally much too fast here.
- 116 ‘he’s just your boss...” “we’re closer than that.” Exactly. Way closer than he and Natalie, apparently. Maybe this is the revelation after all, that he values this relationship much more than he ever did with Natalie.
- 118 “why are we fighting?” Agreed. They are debating the pros and cons for far too long. They should be frenzied rats here, trying to cover their asses, breaking apart, making threats etc. It should all be falling apart and that is savage, and quicker.
- 120 Goldberg character. I don’t know, I don’t get much from him. Makes me wonder if we need to see him at all. I’d probably pump him up or dump him.
- 121 “you’re pathetic, a coward and a loser.” Barbara Stanwyck was a bitch too, but she was never this shrill, and always had ruin and emotion in her voice. Natalie is such a user here, but we never really had many “good times” with her, saw much beside this side of her.
- 122 Telephone call? What the heck just happened?
- 123 Pills? Suicide? Huh?
- 123 Evidence? No idea how he was found out.
- 124 Back to Bill’s bar. Bookend device paid off. Frankly, I don’t think you need it. Or end it here but don’t begin the movie here.
- 124 Real people appear. He confesses. Why would he do that?
- 127 Aha! They fed him misinformation. “The baby died.” That’s a nice twist. And I buy that he would fall apart there. The scene you’re missing is Goldberg confronting Abner about Loch. To see Abner suddenly realize that it could be his friend would be a killer. This is good though, nice twist.
- 127-130 3 pages of dialogue here, just not needed. Overly wordy in places, wooden in others.
- 130-3 A happy ending? Hmmm...I wouldn’t have gone that route. True noir: He dies there. Yeah, I know that’s Double Indemnity, but you’ve come this far using that formula! I can’t say I buy that he only gets a year for this crime. And she gets away with nothing? How is that possible? I never sensed that she really ever cared or loved him, thus this ending doesn’t feel plausible. Find a spectacular ending location and kill Natalie. Loch survives long enough to face Abner. Either this, or anything but the happy ending as is.

**GOOD WORK!!!**

**Paul Peditto**