Script Title: Dead Sexy
Script Author: Andrew Mark
Date: 9/22/16
Script Reader: Arthur T.
Grade: (pass, consider, recommend): Pass

Overall:
"Dead Sexy" is an unusual blend of elements – murder mystery, body-count slasher film, and ghost story, a throwback to the "Happy Birthday To Me" and "Prom Night" and the giallo movies of the 60's/70's. Its use of the beauty pageant as the milieu for its murders is fairly novel, and it is fearless in terms of making its main characters nasty, profane and ruthless.

Concept / Premise:
Script makes the very odd decision at the outset to have the first murder be a combination of causing a car accident and strangling. Why both? Why establish right up front that Char is so inefficient a murderer that she needs TWO separate methods to finish the job?

From there, the script quickly becomes rather by-the-numbers and predictable in terms of its mystery, with the killer turning out to be a ghost seeking vengeance, but compounding the problem of a lack of originality is the inexplicable choice of having practically all the other characters, particularly Lawson and Caldwell, be so hateful and evil. Who are we rooting for? What are we supposed to want to happen? If these victims are all so awful and hateful, what do we care? The cops are never developed enough to become protagonists, and the only kind-of likable guy in the whole thing is Nicco, but if he's in love with someone as horrible as Lawson, then he must be either awful himself, or incredibly naïve, so he doesn't get our rooting interest either. Script needs a genuine protagonist, someone sympathetic to root for, someone who evolves over the course of the story and whose life becomes increasingly in danger as they get closer to the heart of the mystery, and the way they've evolved is what enables them to defeat the antagonist. Without a sympathetic protagonist with a clear arc, we're just watching a series of murders, by a petty ghost, of people we don't care about. What's the fun in that?

Characters
As I say, the characters are all rather hateful and mean-spirited, with the exception of Nicco, who is just a cipher. Moreover, they all sort of talk the same, in stiff, colorless dialogue that doesn't sound natural and doesn't distinguish any character from each other. As I say, what is needed here is a strong protagonist with a clear goal, a clear character arc, and a clear change in priorities from beginning to end. And then conversely, we need a clear antagonist from him/her to defeat by way of the strength and knowledge he/she has gained over the course of the story. And they both, as well as all the supporting characters, need dialogue that is more fresh, quirky, and distinctive, that reflects the rhythms of how people actually talk and what this beauty pageant world is really like. This is not a world many of us are familiar with, so it behooves the script to feel like an authentic depiction of it, and when these characters start getting killed off, the more real they feel, the more their deaths will shock and horrify us, i.e., the more effective a horror/thriller story this will be. Overall, my suggestion would be to read

as many good scripts as you can and get a feel for how really experienced, skilled writers create strong, memorable characters and character arc, and get us to care about what happens from scene to scene, beginning to end.

Structure

Structure-wise, the story is kind of all over the map, because we don't really have a main character to root for, much less an arc to follow them over. What are the "acts" and "act breaks"? What climax is the script building toward? What are we supposed to be rooting for? Who is our protagonist supposed to be, and why? These are basic questions that the script should be able to answer, and the lack of structure to this script reflects a general inexperience with this medium.

My advice would be to closely read the scripts of the films that you are trying to emulate and really break down what makes them work so well, how they hooked you, what makes them so good, what drew you to them and made you want to join their ranks. It doesn't even have to be horror/slasher scripts, even, just scripts that made an impression with their story, characters and dialogue. The more you read, the more the ingredients of compelling drama will become an ingrained knowledge, and then you can focus more on the details of really writing memorable characters and dialogue.

Marketability

Horror/thrillers will always be marketable to some degree, as they are generally low-budget enough and have enough automatic audience that they stand a good chance of making a profit, but beyond that, this script would need a major overhaul, i.e. a much stronger and more original premise, a more compelling plot, more appealing and playable characters, and sharper dialogue to really get potential buyers excited.

Tone

Tone is consistent, in that it's a dark, violent, rather misanthropic supernatural murder mystery/thriller through and through. Whatever its other issues, it remains true to what it is throughout.

Formatting, spelling, and craft

Screenplay formatting and general syntax issues abound. Most egregious in terms of formatting is the use of "CUT TO:" after every scene, which isn't necessary and just pads the page count (which is still way lower than average); "CUT TO:" is to be used sparingly, i.e., when you want to stress a cut as a means of association or transition. You especially don't need it in the phone conversation on pages 2-3, where you can just say INTERCUT THE TWO SCENES at the beginning, and then just let it play out.

More issues: You use periods when you should be using either a single or double dash in your scene headings (e.g. "INT. (and there SHOULD be a period there) CHRYSLER (there's no "t" in

Chrysler) – DUSK (no period at the end)). Your scene description could use more commas (e.g., "Constance Malone, now older but still as beautiful, drives…" and a lot of your description is extraneous and can be cut ""The sun has yet to set…etc." And your dialogue could use some question marks AND commas (e.g. "You won, of course? Took first place?" "Don't you girls have, like, runners-up and stuff?" "Patricia, honey, it's me, Becky."). And there's the inconsistency of "Charlotte", which is sometimes spelled "Charlette."

Basically, there's a sloppiness throughout that suggests a lack of familiarity with the formatting rules and punctuation rules, as well as a lack of proofreading.

Closing Notes
With its underdeveloped characters, lack of a strong protagonist or antagonist, sloppy formatting and punctuation, poor structure and stiff dialogue, script reads like a rough draft by someone relatively new to the craft; as such, script has a long way to go in terms of structuring a story and creating a plot with rising tension, stakes, surprises and a satisfying climax, characters that are original and complicated and can be distinguished from one another and have strong arcs and evolution, and dialogue that is nuanced, quirky and fresh. It needs to find ways to undermine expectations of this overly familiar genre. Main suggestion for the writer would be to read more scripts and familiarize himself as much as possible with strong, professional, successful screenwriting to develop more familiarity and comfort with the medium, in terms of storytelling, character creation and dialogue, as well as technical rules of punctuation and formatting.