

“Snow White and the Huntsman” by Evan Daugherty

Notes by Christian Savage/Scriptshadow

Note: This feedback is based on the draft Evan Daugherty sold, and not the shooting script.

Pros:

- Smart choice to use a well-known story in the public domain
- Eric the Huntsman is a pretty strong character
- Shows a solid understanding of the three-act structure
- Professional writing style

Cons:

- Evil queen doesn't have enough direct conflict with the heroes
- Scenes written in short hand sometimes feel incomplete
- Dialogue too modern for an old-fashioned fairy tale
- Rules of the world kind of hazy
- A little too familiar

OVERVIEW:

I'm happy to say that you've made a very good business decision. You wrote the kind of script that studios like to buy. The plot and characters of Snow White have stood the test of time and are already popular. And because it's part of the public domain, no one has to pay money upfront for the right to use this story. It's a clever way to choose a concept, considering how hard it is these days for writers to break through with original material. You also know what a professional script looks like. Action paragraphs are no more than two or three lines, and there's a lot of nice white space. Plus, you kept the script within 110 pages, which is the sweet spot for the industry. So, it's obvious a lot of effort has been put into making this an attractive studio script. Good job on that. Moving forward on the re-writes, there are a few issues that could be worth another look. In particular, the rules of the world could be clarified more. It was sometimes hard to know what was or wasn't possible in this kingdom of fantasy. It'd also be beneficial if Ravenna, the evil queen, were more personally involved in the conflict with Snow White and the gang. You have an excellent villain at your disposal, but it felt like she was kept at a distance much of the time. It's also worth thinking about taking some additional risks with the story. Snow White has been around forever, and outside of some aesthetic changes, this is basically a re-telling of a tale many people know. Luckily, you've got a lot of the hard work out of the way already. With a few touchups here and there, this script can be polished to shine like the apples in Snow White's favorite tree.

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Snow White – It can be challenging to turn a fairy-tale heroine into a compelling movie lead. Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and even Alice in Wonderland, have a history of being passive characters. Stuff happens to them, and they simply react, when they should be driving the story forward through their own actions. They also tend to be less interesting than their eccentric supporting casts. When I was reading your script, I felt that you understood those challenges. You took a few steps to make Snow White more active and fleshed out. And I think there's an opportunity to take a couple more steps. For example, Snow White's character arc could be sharpened a bit. You've already done a lot to tie her arc in with the script's theme of female empowerment. It's a nice touch. But, more can be done to drive that theme home. All you really need are two extra scenes. In Act I, before Snow White runs away from home the first time, there should be a scene with the sole purpose of showing us that she's helpless, without the men in her life. Whether it's a scene with her father or Prince Charmant, the point is that Snow White is not ready to fend for herself. Then, near the end of Act II, after Snow White and the Huntsman have done some survival training, there should be a scene where the Huntsman is in danger. Maybe the evil queen or her guards capture him. Maybe a woodland creature seriously injures him. Either way, this is where we get a role reversal, so the Huntsman is the "damsel in distress," and Snow White plays the hero. The audience would realize at this point that Snow White has become a self-sufficient woman, who can take on any obstacle.

Eric the Huntsman – In this draft, I'd say the Huntsman is the best-developed character so far. He's the one with the deepest backstory. When the white wolf kills the Huntsman's wife, his one true love, he loses interest in living. And he's willing to do just about anything for a purse of gold coins, including kidnapping young women for the queen's nefarious purposes. It was actually kind of bold to make the Huntsman the male lead, and still keep him as one of the queen's servants. And not only that, he's even attracted to the queen in the beginning! That was one of the main surprises that stood out to me in the script. I was also surprised that the Huntsman never became the full-fledged love interest for Snow White. She showed interest in him around the halfway point, but the Huntsman always backed away from her advances. At first, I couldn't understand why. A love story between them made sense. But, then I realized that the Huntsman was only there to be her teacher. And he respected the boundaries of the teacher/student relationship. I appreciated that about him. The only thing I'd probably change about the Huntsman is his age. The demographic for this movie will probably skew young, so he should be in his late 20s to be a little more relatable.

Queen Ravenna – Snow White's stepmother is considered by many to be one of the greatest villains of all time. Her murderous jealousy of Snow White is legendary. When you chose to write this story, her potent venom became yours

to wield. In this draft, she has a certain menace to her. But she deserves to be a stronger presence in the script. Basically, she should do more of her own dirty work. I noticed that she had a tendency to delegate the kidnappings and killings to her minions. Instead of killing Snow White's father herself, she instructed the guards to do it. Rather than sneaking through a beautiful woman's bedroom window, to drink her youthful essence, the queen has someone like the Huntsman to snatch up her victims. This creates a distance between her and the rest of the characters. In fact, I think she only shares one scene with Snow White in the entire second act. In the rewrites, the queen could be a more terrifying and immediate threat if she spent less time in her castle, and more time actively chasing Snow White around the countryside.

Prince Charmant – For the first two acts, I was on the fence about Charmant. My initial thought was that the Huntsman should be the love interest. The Prince came off as weak and naïve. And no one in his father's circle of influence respected him. Meanwhile, the Huntsman was the one bonding with Snow White the majority of the script, showing her how to survive in an unforgiving world. I was going to suggest that you cut Prince Charmant altogether. But then, Act III happened, and I understood the importance of his character. Prince Charmant's arc allowed him to change from a weakling to a confident young man, capable of commanding an army against the queen. He also had to learn how to be worthy of Snow White. Because this character arc was satisfying, Prince Charmant can stay. 😊

The Dwarves – The dwarves were probably the least developed of the main cast. The problem was that they kind of blended together. With the possible exception of Constantine, the blind dwarf, there was no easy way to tell all the dwarves apart. Of course, the Disney version solved this problem by naming each dwarf according to his major character trait. I'd suggest doing something similar, like giving individual dwarves a specific talent or personality type. And what would be cool is if the dwarves then had to use all those talents together, to help win the final battle against the queen and her army. That would be a good setup and payoff.

PLAYING BY THE RULES: Story rules are more stringent for fantasy than almost any other movie genre. They help keep the world grounded and believable, while characters face extraordinary situations. The rules in Snow White and the Huntsman were clear for the most part, but there were a couple moments where I got confused. A big question I had early on was, How old do the girls have to be, before the queen is able to steal their youth? Is there some kind of age requirement? Snow White was able to live in the queen's castle for 10 years with no problem. But as soon as she turned 18, Bam!, the queen wants to eat her heart. It gets more confusing because there's at least one 12-year-old girl in the script who's hiding from the queen. The girl even went so far as to have her own face cut up, because the queen won't take females with ugly scars. Sooo... if a 12-year-old is in danger, does that mean age isn't really a factor? If

that's the case, then Snow White's seemingly peaceful childhood makes no sense. The queen would've sucked her dry years earlier. The other weird thing I noticed is that Snow White's blood can either make the queen immortal... or kill her once and for all. I'm not quite sure how that works, but here's the text from the script: "By fairest blood it is done, and only by fairest blood can it be undone." I couldn't wrap my head around the idea that Snow White's blood could both save and kill the queen. Clarifying these rules some more would help people focus on the story, instead of question the logic of the scene.

ACT I TOO FAST: The economic writing style is mostly appreciated, but there were a couple scenes early on that felt abrupt. In the first couple pages, Snow White's mother died and then Snow White's widowed father married Queen Ravenna. This introduction to the story felt somewhat rushed. It's not explained how Snow White's mother died, or whether the evil queen was responsible for her death. As a result, it was hard to get a sense of who these characters were, and what motivations and goals they had. Part of the issue, I think, is that the story of Snow White is so well known, these scenes are written in short hand. The downside is that this short hand style suggests nothing new is being brought to this version that would require more screen time. It'd be nice to see another page written here that gives more background on Snow White's parental figures, including the queen, and how they're responsible for shaping her troubled future. Another scene that could be expanded is where the Huntsman finds Snow White the first time and brings her back to the castle. Snow White's capture happened a little too fast. The Huntsman was told to find Snow White, so the next scene he basically walks up to her in a dewy meadow and takes her into custody. Even the queen remarked on how quick it was. This would actually be a good opportunity to take a half page or so to show the Huntsman demonstrating his tracking skills. How did he know where to find Snow White? Was it her scent on the wind? Did some forest animals behave in a way that suggested she was nearby? This would be a good setup for later scenes, where the Huntsman trains Snow White. And then maybe she has to use these same tracking skills to find the Huntsman, should he be captured or lost himself, for example. Ultimately, the second act starts somewhat early in this draft, around page 20. So, it'd be nice to see Act I get a few extra pages dedicated to deeper character introductions.

CANCEL THE WEDDING: The wedding actually isn't a bad set piece for the third act. But the reason I suggest cutting it is because this wedding is an unnecessary complication that also clashes with the queen's strong feminist beliefs. What it comes down to is that the queen doesn't need to marry King Bloodaxe to achieve her goals. She doesn't need a man to maintain her power. In fact, she would be appalled by that kind of helplessness. The queen already has an army and the resources of her kingdom. And if she's able to capture Snow White and drain her essence, she'll become immortal. So what does she need King Bloodaxe for? Killing Snow White is the key to the queen's happiness, not marrying a man that's barely in the script. My suggestion is to cut the

wedding and the Bloodaxe character and, instead, make the third act about the final showdown with Snow White.

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED: The current draft relies a lot on the source material. As I'm sure you know, that can be a blessing and a curse. There are definitely some perks to using an iconic story as the foundation for your own work. But because Snow White is so well known, the audience will most likely expect any new versions to have some significant twists on the original story. Aside from giving the Huntsman a bigger role, the script is mostly a traditional re-telling. Stories like "Shrek" and "Wicked" were fresh takes on the fantasy genre. They achieved their success by subverting audience expectation. An easy way to do that seems to be telling the story from a different perspective. In the case of "Wicked," it was "The Wizard of Oz" from the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West. I don't know that you'd want to go to the effort of re-writing your script this way. But I'd at least suggest looking back at the original Snow White tale and pick two or three plot points that you can turn on their heads. Audiences usually appreciate familiar stories that are told in a way they haven't seen before.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES:

Page 5: When the mirror tells Ravenna that another will soon become the fairest one of all, not sure I understand why Ravenna waits till this moment to kill off the king and his loyal guards. Wouldn't she have cleaned house right after the marriage?

Page 15: I liked the reveal of the queen having the Huntsman's wife killed, because she was the fairest one of all before Snow White.

Pages 20 and 91: Typo pours/pores. Rain pours, but you pore over a map.

Page 73: Found out Finn was the wolf all along. Didn't expect it to be a werewolf, so that was a nice surprise.

Page 75: Dialogue is starting to drift into cheesy 80s action movie territory: (The difference between you and me is) I'm alive. You're dead.

Page 78: Hard to support Snow White's outrage at the Huntsman. It's obvious the queen must be defeated for the good of the kingdom. It's silly for Snow White to think the Huntsman has been using her only to get revenge on the queen. Sure, that's part of it. But again, there's more to the situation than the Huntsman's personal vendetta.

Page 86: Genuinely laughed when the dwarves find a horse for Eric to ride, and it turns out to be a miniature pony. Would be great to see more light moments like this in future drafts.

Page 90: I like Snow White's line to the Prince: I don't need your protection. I need your love.

Page 92: I like the scene where the Huntsman comes face to face with the women he captured for the queen. Kinda hope the story goes somewhere with this.

Page 93: It's mentioned that there are no young beautiful women attending Ravenna's wedding. What about girls? It's hard to get a handle on the rules of this world. Can the queen steal the youth from girls younger than 18?

Page 95: Cool! The Huntsman and the kidnapped women band together to fight the queen's forces. Good story choice.

Page 100: In the age of the Twilight movies, I'm kind of impressed that this script avoids a love triangle between Snow White, Prince Charmant, and the Huntsman.

Page 105: The queen pulls a curved dagger from a "hidden holster" on her thigh. Holster should be scabbard.

Page 109: So the Huntsman dies in the end. Somehow feels appropriate. Snow White has learned to take care of herself, so she doesn't need the huntsman's protection anymore.

IN SUMMARY:

Overall, Snow White and the Huntsman was put together pretty well. You made decent use of some iconic characters, and the story structure is solid. I also thought you made some good observations about what it's like to be a woman, in a world dominated by men. There are a lot of strong elements in this draft. My suggestions are only meant to build on the sturdy foundation that's already there. Here's a recap of the main points:

- Keep the queen active, mobile, and close to our heroes, especially in the second act. That would help make her a more intense adversary.
- The rules of the world should be more clearly defined.
- Consider cutting King Bloodaxe and the wedding and focus more on a showdown between Snow White and the Queen
- Some of the snarky modern dialogue could probably be replaced
- A few more unexpected story choices would help refresh the familiar

It was a pleasure reading your take on one of the most beloved fairy tales. You have the writing chops and business savvy to have successful career in Hollywood.