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Review of The Beecroft Series screenplays (Parts 1-5)
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Recently, I was hired to evaluate the screenplays for the Beecroft saga and provide feedback. I have a keen interest in mythology, folklore and the supernatural and I'm professionally engaged with promoting thought-provoking and well-crafted media. I'm happy to say that Beecroft satisfies both spheres and is something I think wholeheartedly deserves to see production. Not simply for entertainment, but also because it has an immensely positive message of acceptance, courage and 'doing the right thing' while providing an intelligent approach to difficult subjects. If, for example, a YA viewer can accept the nuance of 'good monsters' and 'bad monsters' then they're a step closer to navigating the wild world of adulthood where we're often asked to make that distinction. If we can do that while teaching them about the perils of being an outcast, of helping the elderly and saying no to bullies, of the rich history of international folklore, then I think this is an immensely positive thing.

I'd like to begin properly with a discussion on tone, presuming you've read the elevator pitch for the series I think this is the most pressing question. How does a series concerning werewolves and vampires and murderous hags navigate a YA audience without seeming 'toothless', and what level of maturity is this aimed at? To my mind, this is somewhat adjustable and is going to depend mostly on 'how scary the monsters are', but to give a rough approximation I'd say it's somewhere between Harry Potter, Stranger Things and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Which is a very good place to be. I personally believe it would be suited for ages 12 and above, but it could be easily toned down to suit an audience as young as 10 if desired. I wouldn't put an upper bracket on audience suitability as it never feels 'dumbed down' and has a broad cast of characters both young and old. I certainly enjoyed it as an adult and I think it shares that quality with the titles I listed above: it's fun for all ages and so adults will be perfectly entertained too. It can be scary, it can be adorable, but it is always thrilling and always well meaning.

As for the narrative itself, I find it to be the perfect balance between procedural, self-contained storytelling and a more serialised longer mystery that unfolds from screenplay to screenplay. We begin in 'The Hag of Beecroft' with a story that pivots around a major twist that has lasting implications for the characters, and by the (current) ending of 'The Fortune Teller of Beecroft' events have spiralled into a much wider reaching mystery that sees more extreme threats emerging. All of that is achieved while keeping the singular stories satisfying and digestible for younger audiences. We watch the characters grow, literally and emotionally, as they come to terms with the threats developing around them, and our main character Sam especially, as he learns about the existence of magic and monsters. There are many moments of comedy, moments of wholesome family life and softer, more emotional moments serving the characters development, but none of this seems to slow down the pace and there is plenty of time left over for action, adventure and thrill-rides from pursuing monsters.

On a personal note, I was deflated when I came to the end of these screenplays. A good deflation, the kind of deflation which demands more of the same, and a continuation of the stories that had me so drawn in. Luckily, and as I touched on already, there is more than enough room for these stories to continue, and it's my belief that as the audience ages up then so too could the material – in a similar manner to the increasing maturity enjoyed by the Harry Potter series and other coming of age sagas.

Moving on to characters and this is where the series truly shines. We have the aforementioned main character 'Sam', a lovable kid with a heart of gold and a bit of a hero complex. He has tragedy in his past and mystery in his future and like all good protagonists we can't help but align with his struggles. But our other main character 'Befany' (see: Befana) truly steals the show. She's a good witch, but she's still a witch – and a powerful one at that. She makes us laugh, she makes our heart break, and in my opinion she has all the characteristics of a 'fan favourite' or cult icon. Put simply, Befany is a badass and she's so much fun to read that I am truly excited at the potential of getting her on screen. She's a character that needs to be realised, a totem for kids that don't have a fulfilling life at home that serves as a promise they can go as far as they desire. A little girl unthreatened by her bullies, courageous in the face of true terror, and determined to have the life she wants to live.

But she's no 'Mary Sue' and she's no angel either, she's a fighter with a hyper-original backstory. If you need a reason to read these screenplays in detail, it's Befany. She suits our new wave of feminism that allows our female characters to be monstrously themselves without facing the persecution of the audience (see Thomasin from *The VVitch*, Sue from *The Substance*, and so on) and doing all that in a way where it's still acceptable for children. She forges her own path, doesn't put up with nonsense and very often the adults follow suit and look to her leadership. I think that's a refreshing icon for little girls to look up to.

As for our side characters, it's an embarrassment of riches. My personal favourite is Ester or 'Ms' Madison. A vampyre that serves as the matron for Beecroft who begins the narrative being middle-aged but who quickly transforms into a more vivacious and youthful character once events have forced her into 'feeding'. She's another badass lady that throws herself into danger and will do anything to keep those she cares for safe. Another standout is Marshall, our journalist with a keen interest in uncovering the supernatural that rapidly comes on board with what's really going on at Beecroft. Rachel, Sam's mum, provides a caring backbone away from that craziness and Ronaldo, a 'Lurch' like helper figure, shows the audience that appearances can be deceiving. The entire supporting cast of characters is a treasure in itself that is full of surprises, keenly structured with how they tie in to the slowly unveiling mysteries of Beecroft.

And that brings me neatly to the mysteries themselves, and the rich folklore the series bases its supernatural logic within. I will say this plainly, I have never seen or read YA work that is so closely concerned with accurately discussing the folklore of these monsters, and giving time to lesser known mythologies and superstitions. It touches on folklore from Jamaica to Ireland and many places in between, and it represents these monsters in a way that feels unique, yet somehow pays more respect to their origins than most other depictions I can call to mind. Of particular note is the concept of the 'Befana', the Italian white-witch figure that provides gifts to children on the Eve of Epiphany. This is where our good-witch gets the name 'Befany' from, and we'll see this kind of careful interweaving throughout the series. It's truly refreshing to see these lesser-known myths realised for an international audience in a modern setting. I could continue, from Rougarous to Boogiemmen, from Hakata to Dririmancy, because this series truly does have it all. But part of the joy is in the discovery, so I shall leave that up to you to uncover. Suffice to say, it's not just impressive, it's created with care and put forward in a way that's both educational and entertaining.

And I think this is something crucial to the genre that I'd like to focus in on, we have a distinct tendency to 'dumb down' folklore, to take from it piecemeal what fits and discard that which doesn't. Here is a series that says 'no way' to that and pays homage to folkloric origins whenever it finds an opportunity to. A prime example of this is Befany's spoken magic, which seems to be both beautiful and terrifying when delivered in Italian. The same can be said of Jamaican patois, of traditions of vampyres as shapeshifting beings, and several others. I think we can see this as a developing trend in current media, one need look no further than Robert Eggers recent hit *Nosferatu*, as evidence. We are becoming more culturally aware of where and how these myths came into being and subsequently more appreciative of them being shown respect on screen. It would seem as though the Beecroft saga is the perfect vehicle to bring those original readings into the view of a younger audience in a responsible and family-friendly way. I can certainly see this franchise being a catalyst for many adolescents becoming interested in these histories and how they've influenced and evolved through art and media for centuries. Because these monsters and legends are culturally pervasive and they deserve to have a proper light shone upon them.

I'd also like to touch briefly on the dialogue and humour of the series, because I think they provide much needed balance to the more terrifying goings-on. There is dry humour, there is disbelief and mockery and all that's needed to ground these fantastical elements into our modern world. Again, Befany shines through for me here, she's a delight to read on the page and I'm certain would be even more of a delight on screen. The scripts are replete with moments where her behaviour made me chuckle out loud, primarily because she's responding to more everyday situations with the high gravitas of a long-lived witch that doesn't suffer fools. She's chaotic, she's got a dark side, but all of this is delivered in a way that will bring a smile to the faces in the audience. Beyond Befany though, there is still a great deal of more grounded comedic relief, and dialogue that doesn't simply justify the goings-on, but also layers hints throughout that more savvy audience members will be able to puzzle through and develop expectations, theories and concerns from. Foreshadowing isn't heavy-handed, especially not for a YA audience, and yet the moments of surprise still feel earned and well thought through. They're fair to an audience of all ages and the scripts remain immersive and engaging enough that it never verges on 'Scooby Doo' territory.

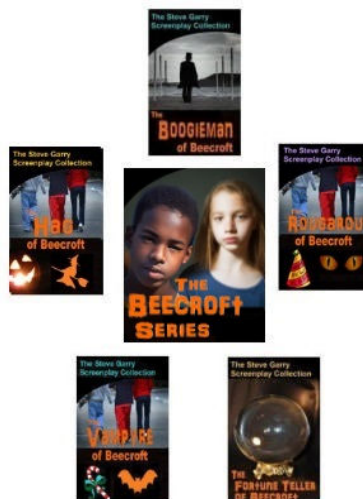
And the last major point I'd like to touch on is the decision to centre the narrative around the Beecroft old peoples home. As I said near the start, this does carry an important message to it regarding the young caring for the old. Characters are certainly acknowledging of that: whereas one of the bullies may make snide comments about it, may see it as a point of mockery, the good-hearted characters all see the children's assistance at Beecroft as an immensely positive thing. So it's presented with nuance, but also with a crystal clear moral compass. However, that is not to say the series doesn't have fun with this location, it is daring, it is sad at times, it is silly at times. Beecroft understands that, and it knows how to make use of the 'creepier' elements of caring for the elderly to its enormous benefit. Empty hallways, rooms with a high turnover rate, side characters that may be 'losing their marbles', it's all very cleverly done without ever feeling exploitative or uncaring. In fact, the depiction of the elderly here is really quite refreshing. They still have the propensity for mischief, for hidden secrets and even action scenes – and all of this serves to temper the expected sterility and quiet decline that usually surrounds these institutions.

What begins as just another titular location quickly transforms into something else entirely. Beecroft isn't just an old people's home, it's a refuge for the well-meaning supernatural, it becomes home to a thrown-together team of monster hunters out to keep each other safe and by the end we realise it's also a newfound locus to the forces of darkness. And despite the majority of the action occurring in or around Beecroft, it never feels as though the series is 'bottled' by it. We frequently find ourselves in other locations, both familiar and unique, but never without losing the keen sense of space and place or where characters are in relation to one another.

I'd also like to congratulate the author on penning a series where multi-culturalism is generally an unspoken and accepted positive to the world, that only still faces criticism from the more maligned among us. It never feels forced, it never feels as though it's preaching an agenda to the audience, it simply is. While the wider world may be a scary and often unforgiving place, the characters that frequent Beecroft Manor and aid our protagonists are unquestioningly inclusive, charitable and kind-hearted and, again, I see this as an extremely positive message for young adults of all backgrounds that provides a subtextual learning experience without ever diminishing entertainment value.

To close out, there are small details that could use some further attention, that I have outlined to the author in a private document. However I do not believe these should be considered 'dealbreakers', more just minor subjective things that would be ironed out during production, or likelier still will be ironed out by the author prior to that.

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