

## The Stax Report: Script Review of *Basic Instinct 2*

Stax looks at the script of the newly invigorated *Basic Instinct 2* project...

June 27, 2000 - Stax here with my reaction to the screenplay for *Basic Instinct 2!*

This 117-page draft by Leona Barish and Henry Bean is a second revision dated December 21st, 1998. Since this isn't the most recent draft please look upon this report more as an indication of the direction that the sequel is taking and what its basic plot is rather than as a straightforward critique. I will, however, point out certain story elements I hope will be addressed before cameras finally roll this fall. Stone recently signed to reprise her career-making role as femme fatale Catherine Tramell. She will receive a whopping \$15 million dollars; she was only paid \$750,000 for the first film. The film's original producers, Mario Kassar and Andy Vajna, will produce this sequel under their new C-2 Films banner. The original film's troika of star Michael Douglas, director Paul Verhoeven, and writer Joe Eszterhas will not be involved with this sequel, which MGM will distribute sometime in late 2001 or early 2002.



Sharon Stone's recent signing has reinvigorated this dormant project.

Back in 1998, Sharon Stone commented to the press about how much she liked the first draft by Barish and Bean. Yet in January 1999, only about a month after this second revision is dated, Stone advised EI that she had turned down the sequel: "I don't believe it's time for that now, and I don't want to be Catherine anymore. I had a home run with that movie, but I'm hoping to just be at bat now." Apparently, Stone had issues regarding her salary ("I need to be paid like Michael Douglas was paid for the first one," she told *The Guardian* in 1998). She also had disagreements with the film's (then) producers. *Basic Instinct 2* seemed pretty much dead throughout the following year despite rumors that MGM, who paid \$1.75 million for the sequel rights back in 1998, was considering hiring Ashley Judd to "create our own star with the brand of *Basic Instinct*." MGM even had a new title for the project, *Risk Addiction*, to further disassociate it from the first film.

Then there were rumors in the trades in November 1999 that Demi Moore was being wooed to play Catherine Tramell and that Paul Verhoeven and Michael Douglas were being courted to return in a package deal put together by CAA. Obviously, those plans for *Basic Instinct 2*, if they were ever seriously considered, have not come to pass. According to the most recent trade reports, Leona Barish and Henry Bean, who penned this draft as well as *Desperately Seeking Susan*, are still onboard as the project's screenwriters. A director should be signed shortly.

In many ways, *Basic Instinct 2* follows the same paradigm as the first film but it is now set in New York City rather than San Francisco. Although a few years older than when we last encountered her, Catherine Tramell is still the same risk taking, sexually provocative author. Her best-selling novels bear eerie comparisons with the real-life sex crimes she keeps being connected to. You mean to tell me that no law enforcement agency or District Attorney can ever make charges against her stick? Even if the criminal courts couldn't convict her there are other options. If O.J. Simpson can be acquitted in a criminal trial but found liable in a civil case then surely the estate of one of Catherine's alleged victims could file a wrongful death suit against her? She is a very wealthy celebrity and that wouldn't be too far-fetched for a present-day audience to accept.

Like the first movie, this story does not revolve around Catherine Tramell but rather the man she seduces. In the original film, Catherine got into the mind (and the pants) of shady cop Nick Curran (Michael Douglas); FYI, we do find out in this draft what happened to Nick after the first film ended. This time around Catherine is playing mind-games with the ambitious and arrogant Dr. Andrew Glass, a renowned shrink who is brought in by the police to see if Catherine is fit to stand trial. She has been charged with the apparent murder of her fiancée Larry Houseman. Houseman's sex-related death opens this story just as the Johnny Bozz killing began the first film; Houseman's death, however, could be deemed accidental unlike Johnny's splatter-filled demise. There are

immediate sparks between Glass and Catherine when he first interviews her; this scene recalls the sexual tension between Nick and Catherine in the earlier film's now infamous interrogation scene. But the real sexual chemistry and danger doesn't begin until after the D.A. drops charges against Catherine due to insufficient evidence.

Walking away scott free yet again, Catherine brazenly enters Glass' office and eventually convinces him to take her on as his patient. (This despite his having testified against her at trial, a conflict Glass acknowledges.) Both Catherine and Glass are mirror images of one other so maybe that's why he is named Glass (or is it because he's easily shattered?). Catherine and Andrew, two amoral, selfish, risk-addicted control freaks, are smitten by their mutual sleaziness. To his credit, Glass is just as good at mind-games as the crafty seductress but he still has boundaries he won't allow himself to cross. By story's end, however, Andrew will violate every code he has sworn to uphold and will find his world turned upside down thanks to his torrid sexual affair with Catherine Tramell.

Like Nick Curran, Andrew Glass is drawn into a web of deceit and obsession that makes him a suspect in a string of grisly slayings. All of his dark secrets will be revealed, including his tragic mishandling of a former patient named Cheslav. It is alleged that Andrew knew Cheslav was a danger to his girlfriend and did nothing about it; Cheslav later murdered her. Andrew's reputation and his ambition for a chair at NYU are now on the line. Snooping into the Cheslav matter is Michael Tower, a muckraking investigative reporter with Vanity Fair. Tower is also the lover of Glass' ex-wife Denise. Also following the Tramell-Glass case with great interest is Glass' acquaintance Detective Washburn, a volatile cop with a past. Although proclaiming his innocence, Andrew becomes so unhinged by his relationship with Catherine that he appears guilty.

As with the first film, there is hardly a character Catherine Tramell is not sexually involved with so this makes the list of murder suspects rather lengthy. Like the original, we're unsure if Catherine is the actual killer or not, or if it is really someone else. There are other parallels to the first film beyond just these similarities between the plight of Andrew Glass and the various murders committed. Andrew's former lover Denise causes trouble for him not unlike Jeanne Tripplehorn did for Michael Douglas. There is also the George Dzunda-like grizzled cop, Washburn, who warns the protagonist more than once that his sexual obsession with Catherine is leading him down the road to ruin. And there is a violent ending that claims a few hapless victims just like the finale to the original film. In hindsight, this draft was really a slick repackaging of the first movie's plot. What really troubles me, however, is that I enjoyed this script more than I expected to.

I must grudgingly admit that *Basic Instinct* is one of those "bad movies" that I actually kind of like. It is definitely a trashy flick; you either enjoyed it for what it was, or you loathed it for a wide variety of completely valid reasons. If this draft is any indication of what the future holds, then this sequel will cause a similar reaction in people. Although not nearly as raunchy as the first film, this draft was in many ways just as unapologetic and salacious. Catherine says more sexually explicit things in this draft than she actually does; that will likely change depending who directs it. There are a few steamy bedroom scenes between Catherine and Andrew as well as a menage a trois later on. But Catherine's sexual relationship with Andrew lacked the danger and the psychological underpinnings that marked her affair with Nick Curran.



**Michael Douglas will not be returning.**

There was more at stake for Nick Curran by having a fling with Catherine than there is for Andrew Glass. Nick was a cop having sex with his prime suspect; Andrew is just worried about his career being tarnished. Both Nick and Catherine had violent streaks that electrified their "encounters." Whereas Nick was a genuine risk-taker, Andrew is more smug and sneaky. But like Nick, Andrew finds that his relationship with Catherine has become the basis for her latest novel (titled "The Analyst"). If viewers found Nick Curran tough to like then they should also despise Andrew Glass since he, too, does very little to make himself redeemable. (Catherine even suggests that Michael Douglas could play Andrew in a movie based on her trial; hopefully that joke will be cut since it pulls the reader right out of the story.)

This script begins with its focus on Catherine Tramell but by about page fifteen the story clearly becomes Andrew's. Catherine further recedes from view as the murder-mystery sub-plot kicks into high gear. This could be another reason why Stone did not initially agree to return. Perhaps recent revisions from Barish and Bean have made Catherine more of a presence during the homestretch. As written here, Catherine disappears/reappears from the middle of the story until the climax. The main plot instead became about the collapse of Andrew's world and his increasingly violent obsession with nailing Catherine Tramell (double-meaning intended).

How much the sequel should or should not reveal about Catherine (no leg-crossing jokes!) is debatable. Although she is in more scenes earlier on, they are therapy sessions where she often relates to Andrew exposition about her past. The first half of the script is rather talky but I enjoyed the verbal exchanges between Catherine and Andrew (he is more her intellectual equal than Nick Curran was). Catherine's enigmatic manner is what makes her captivating. She seems like she is lying even when she's telling the truth and vice-versa. The storytellers have to be careful not to try and explain Catherine away. I sensed that they became aware of this so perhaps that's why the story becomes more about Andrew as it progresses. This approach, however, also takes away from Sharon Stone's screen time, which I am sure is an issue for both the actress and the producers shelling out \$15 million for her services. The final script for *Basic Instinct 2* will need to more clearly define whose story this is, Catherine's or Andrew's.

Although it was written a few months before *Analyze This* was even released, this draft for *Basic Instinct 2* nevertheless had the same basic concept: a shrink has his life turned upside down when gets too close to his criminal patient. These similarities made some of the script unintentionally funny. But the film that this draft reminded me of most was *Final Analysis*, which starred Richard Gere as a shrink who has a murderous affair with his alluring patient, Kim Basinger. Ironically, Basinger was an early choice for Tramell in the first *Instinct*, and Richard Gere would actually be a good choice for Andrew. It might be more interesting if the filmmakers cast Glass younger than Sharon Stone, or if they cast someone who is less of a star.



**Ashley Judd as Catherine Tramell?**

Even though it was quite similar to the first film, I found this draft of *Basic Instinct 2* to be a real page-turner and a fairly decent starting point for the sequel. Honestly, I have read and seen sequels that were far worse. Of course, there really is no reason for this movie to be made except to rake in the cash. But I'm no longer convinced that this sequel will be a surefire hit. Sharon Stone hasn't been in a successful feature film for over five years and this movie's subject matter is not as risqué as it was back in 1992. With TV series like *Sex and The City* bringing sexual frankness in entertainment to new (or lower) levels, and with stars openly exploring their bisexuality in public, you have to wonder what shock value a *Basic Instinct* sequel can possibly have. (Stone's interludes with other women don't seem as titillating now. Besides, didn't we see ALL of Sharon Stone the first time around?) Still, I enjoyed the mind-games waged between Catherine Tramell and Andrew Glass and I got caught up in the script's entertaining albeit somewhat routine mystery subplot. — STAX

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