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Development Worksheet: Domestic Script



Project: Feature Film

Genre: Suspense Thriller

Comparison: *X-Files: I Want to Believe* meets
Silence of the Lambs

Script: Deborah Hewett-Elson - Available upon request

Logline: A psychopathic doctor is killing patients to record their crossing-over into the afterlife. A game of “catch me if you can” is on to stop the voyeuristic killer from opening heaven's door.

Plot Summary: To prove the existence of Heaven, the genius of Dr. Timothy Ames has found a way to tap into the subconscious mind of his dying victims. This discovery allows Ames to visually document the crossing-over into the afterlife. Ames is consumed by his diabolical experiments and sends more and more unknowing patients to an early grave. Dr. Ames makes a fateful mistake when he kills the wife and unborn child of FBI Agent Ben Alden. Driven by grief and questioning his own beliefs in the afterlife, Alden races against time to stop the elusive killer before he sends another victim across the threshold of heaven's door.

Synopsis: TIMOTHY AMES is a genius doctor with a brilliant mind who has invented a diabolical machine—part electroencephalogram (EEG), part laptop computer—that enables him to see the images in his patients' subconscious minds. The machine decodes brain waves by translating electronic neurological impulses much like a television set receives a signal and converts it to pictures on the screen.

Fueled by the fascination of the afterlife and mourning the death of his mother, Ames surreptitiously sends victims to an early grave and uses his invention to record their visions as they “cross-over.” As a neurologist at a Phoenix, Arizona hospital, Dr. Ames has access to critically ill patients on whom he can test this ingenious device while his crimes of murder go undetected.

BEN ALDEN is a federal agent assigned to the Phoenix branch of the FBI. STEPHANIE ALDEN, his vibrant young wife who is three months pregnant, has a car accident that lands her in the hospital. She is in stable condition, but is held overnight for observation. Ames cannot resist another opportunity to further his experiment. Stephanie becomes his next victim.

A young nurse, FAY HOLLERSON, catches Ames in the act of tidying up after he kills Stephanie. She startles him, and he drops a glass syringe that breaks on the floor. A code team tries to revive Stephanie, but it is too late. Stephanie's doctor, DR. KIM, tells Ben that he believes she died of an aneurysm and unlike the nurses, he trusts Dr. Ames. Fay approaches Ben, and tells him of the doctor's suspicious behavior. She provides him with a piece of the broken syringe as evidence.

Ben, emotionally charged after his wife's funeral, is eager to pursue Ames. However, the investigation is a local matter outside the jurisdiction of the FBI. Ben enlists the aid of his veteran partner, COLE MITCHELL. Cole reluctantly agrees to help his grief stricken partner and friend. When evidence surfaces linking Ames to several inexplicable patient deaths (including Stephanie's), the hospital suspends the doctor's privileges.



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As the investigation closes in on Ames, he flees, becoming a fugitive from the law. Months pass with no leads when a fellow agent provides Ben with an FBI bulletin about a possible serial killer in the Los Angeles, California area. Ben knows immediately from the description that it is Ames. The FBI wastes no time sending Ben and Cole to LA to link up with Agent, AUDRA HARRIS, a specialist on serial killers. The hunt is on to find Dr. Timothy Ames before he kills again.

Another parallel story begins with JILL JACOBS, a chorus line girl traveling with a touring theater company on the West coast, who has experienced a tremendous emotional upheaval over the past two years. Unable to cope with a miscarriage (that may have been caused by her unwillingness to stop traveling and performing), she and her husband have grown apart and are now in the midst of a divorce. Jill is quiet and sad as she halfheartedly goes through the motions of life. A close friend and co-performer named CASSIE MC CLURE tries to help Jill get past this rough time.

Ames uses his superior intelligence and master of disguise to continue his diabolical research on the afterlife while working as an EEG technician in hospitals around the Los Angeles area. In addition to killing random patients, he also rents a run-down old place from an elderly woman, MRS. MULLINS. The old woman reminds Ames of his own mother and Mrs. Mullins keeps absent-mindedly thinking Ames is her deceased son.

Ames converts an old cellar in Mrs. Mullins rental into a makeshift laboratory to continue his crossing-over experiments without interference. He kidnaps victims off the streets, and when he is through with them, he dumps their bodies at random locations. They all have the telltale burn marks on their temples from his EEG machine.

Emboldened by his success, Ames takes a step up from combing the streets for victims. He kidnaps Jill and Cassie from a LA hotel lounge where the touring theatre company is staying. He makes short work of Cassie, but keeps Jill for several days so he can toy with her. Ames brings her to the brink of death repeatedly so he can watch her life review, her dreams and her struggles.

Meanwhile, the FBI and local police are racing against the clock to save Jill. Ames is playing a game of “catch me if you can.” New victims surface thus providing new clues. Those hunting Ames begin to close in on him. Still, there are false leads, and Ben is beyond frustration. Taunted by dreams of Stephanie calling out to him for help from the “other side,” he is unable to sleep. Once antagonistic toward religion, but remembering Stephanie’s strong faith, Ben enters a church searching for answers if only in his own mind. The next day, Ben uncovers the final clue he needs to locate Ames.

Exhausted, desperate and convinced that her baby awaits her on the other side, Jill now desires to “cross-over” and end her torment. Just as Ames is giving her a fatal injection, Ben busts in to the basement laboratory and interrupts the process. He was supposed to wait for backup, but is too impatient. During the confrontation, Ben is forced to shoot Ames when he lunges toward him with a hypodermic needle. Both the bullet and the needle find their marks. Ames falls wounded to the cellar floor while Ben rushes to revive Jill. Ben pulls the syringe from his neck and moves quickly to save Jill but the drug works faster and Ben falls unconscious. A badly wounded Ames manages to escape. Ben’s colleagues arrive later and congratulate him on saving the girl, but Ben is vexed that he was unable to capture Ames.

Agents Cole and Harris drive a dejected Ben back to his hotel. Ben is exhausted and looks forward to the solace of his room. When he turns on the light, he notices Ames sitting in an armchair near the desk. Ames has wires taped to his forehead, a syringe in hand and his laptop in front of him. His bullet wound is bleeding heavily and he is very weak. Ben, now alert, slowly reaches for his gun.

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Ames empties the syringe into his own arm. A blissful smile erupts across his face. Ben edges closer to the desk and lowers the gun. Ames turns the laptop screen to face Ben. Ben is transfixed and he cannot take his eyes off the monitor.

We see a beautiful fall day. Stephanie Alden is driving her car with Dr. Ames in the passenger seat. His gunshot wound has healed and he is wearing a clean white shirt. Ames' window is down and his arm is resting out the window. Air rushes across his face. He leans forward and turns on the car radio. The song he always whistles is playing. Ames turns up the radio and relaxes back into the seat. Stephanie reaches for the radio turning it off. She proceeds to tell Ames what he is doing is wrong and that she has brought someone with her gesturing to the rear passenger seat. MRS. AMES (Ames mother) is sitting in the backseat looking out the side passenger window. Ames exudes excitement at the sight of his mother. He demands the car pull over. Stephanie complies edging the car to a stop on the side of the road. Ames exits the car and opens the rear passenger door. Mrs. Ames turns to look at him. Day turns to night. It is not his mother, but a demon with a gruesome rotting face and piercing eyes. The demon grabs him by the throat. From the woods, other shadowy figures emerge-- more demons in dark robes. They move at breakneck speed and are immediately on top of Ames attacking him. He emits a blood-curdling scream as he disappears. On the computer screen there is only static.

Ben sits on the edge of the bed, mouth agape. Ames is dead. The sound of a cell phone ringing becomes evident. Ben awakens abruptly. He has been dreaming. It is Cole on the phone, months have passed and the two FBI agents are back in Phoenix. Cole is calling to let Ben know there is a break in the case they have been working. Ben prepares to leave hastily.

Ben, Cole and two other FBI agents surround a singlewide trailer. The agents crouch behind rotting vehicles and junk heaps, poised with weapons drawn and aimed at the trailer, ready to fire if necessary. They wear bulletproof vests. The situation is tense.

SHOTS fire from within the trailer. A battle ensues. Bullets fly, hitting the sheet metal clad walls of the trailer and the old cars. Ben gets hit in the shoulder and reels from the impact.

The gunfire stops; there is a dead calm. Cole examines Ben's wound. Agents rush the trailer and burst in. There is a scuffle. Seconds later, the agents emerge with two grungy men in handcuffs.

Ben is lying on a hospital bed in a private room. He is wearing a gown and there are gauze bandages over his shoulder wound. A female nurse is finishing up. Ben looks pale, but he is resting quietly. Stephanie's silver cross is visible around his neck on a thicker chain.

The nurse exits the room.

As she walks down the hall, she passes a DOCTOR in a white lab coat. He is carrying a black bag and is softly whistling the tune Ames always whistles. He reaches for the door handle to Ben's room and quietly enters, closing the door behind him.

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Character Descriptions:

DR. TIMOTHY AMES: Dr. Ames is a brilliant psychopath. He is in his late forties, neat and trim appearance, stiff posture, crisp pronunciation of words, a definite sense of superiority. After being linked to several murders and FBI Agent Ben Alden on his tail, he leaves Arizona and hides from authorities in Los Angeles. A master of disguise, he stays ahead of the law by changing his hair, facial hair, clothing, weight—he really looks different from one scene to the next. We are often left to wonder if it's really him.

Dr. Ames is a social misfit, he has never been attached to anyone but his mother, so he does not understand the emotional bonds between people—a true sociopath. He seems larger than life, invincible, unstoppable, because he is so demented and convinced of his rightness to kill people for his experiment. He has one younger brother, GORDON AMES, who lives in Orange County, California with his wife.

BEN ALDEN: Ben is the junior agent at the Flagstaff FBI office. He is confident and competent at work. He is thirty, ruggedly handsome and he has a pretty wife (STEPHANIE ALDEN) who is pregnant with their first child. When tragedy strikes and Stephanie falls victim to Ames, Ben's world falls apart. He is consumed by vengeance, a desire to set things right and the miserable feeling that he failed to protect her. Ben acknowledges Stephanie's faith and enters a church to ask God for assistance catching Ames (Ben makes a full arc from lack of faith to believing).

JILL JACOBS: Jill is a chorus line girl traveling with a touring theater company. She is a beautiful, statuesque blond, in her late twenties, with a quiet and sad demeanor. She has been married for five years, but due to her miscarriage, the last two years have put a strain on the marriage. She and her husband are in the process of getting a divorce. Jill and her best friend Cassie are kidnapped by Ames while on tour. For days, Ames puts Jill through hell, watching her life review as he brings her to the brink of death repeatedly, forcing her to relive the trials and tribulations of her broken marriage. During this ordeal, she experiences a full range of emotions—first defiance, as she fights for her life, then finally a quiet acceptance of her fate and a willingness to die to be with her unborn child.

CASSIE: Jill's best friend. Cassie is a petite redhead, single, late twenties, who performs as a chorus line girl. She is a real firecracker, opinionated, wild, loud and a risk-taker. Cassie has a very active social and sex life. She has an aura of intensity about her that draws people to her. Funny as hell, always out for a good time and always has an audience. Not very professional at work-- e.g. always late-- but very caring toward those she is close to emotionally. She is kidnapped and killed by Ames.

TAMARA: Chorus line girl, black, mid-thirties, divorced. She is the “third musketeer,” often hanging out with Jill and Cassie. She has a strong personality, very independent, savvy, stylish and self-assured. She is the only one of the chorus girls who does not fall victim to Ames.

COLE: Flagstaff FBI agent. Mid-thirties, a little sloppy, a jeans and cowboy boots wearing "good old boy" who chews tobacco and deer hunts. He is a more seasoned agent and is Ben's best friend - they work cases together and hang out in their off time. Unlike Ben, he is a confirmed bachelor, tied to the job. He is also a cocky ladies' man who knows when to turn on the country boy charm.

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Character Descriptions (continued):

HARRIS: Audra Harris is a LA FBI agent. City girl, in her thirties, sleek, attractive and professional. Single by choice, she feels that she has something to prove-- going the extra mile all the time to show that she is just as good, if not better, than her male counterparts. She dresses ultra hip, but a little masculine-- pretty face, short hair.

RONNI: Newscaster, late twenties, bright and beautiful, always perfectly made up, impeccably dressed and well-coiffed. She is on top of her game, often carrying the news by herself, a star in her own right. Loved by viewers and despised by cops (and people in the news) for her aggressive pursuit of a story and her relentless nosiness and pushiness. Very confident, she will stop at nothing to get what she wants-- often uses her looks (flirtation) to con information out of people.

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