

TITLE: THE TRUMAN SHOW
AUTHOR: Andrew Niccol
SUBMITTED TO: (Producer)

ANALYST:
DATE: 11/21/96
CIRCA: Present
LOCALE: Hollywood and Queens, NY
GENRE: Drama

Logline: As a man uncovers inconsistencies in his past and struggles to define his identity, he realizes he has unwittingly been made the subject of a life-long television documentary.

TRUMAN BURANK, 34, leads a mundane, nondescript existence as an insurance salesman in Queens, married to MERYL, a court stenographer. He is socially inept and possesses few friends except for MARLON. Fascinated by explorers, Truman would love nothing more than to leave his monotonous life behind and escape to Australia where he believes his high school sweetheart lives. However, Truman is haunted by the memory of his father KIRK'S drowning which occurred when Truman was only seven years old, and thus he is paralyzed by physical violence. When Truman sees a homeless man strongly resembling his father, a chase ensues. As the man manages to elude him by jumping onto a bus, it seems that the bystanders are purposely trying to prevent Truman from catching him. Kirk is later seen removing homeless make-up, and when Truman searches for the bus, he fails to notice that someone has recently painted over the identification number on it.

Truman's memories appear on T.V. screens, and appear to be watched primarily by CHRISTOF, a man in his late sixties, and his attractive young companion, CHLOE. Gradually it becomes obvious that they are not merely observers, but that they are orchestrators. The result of an unwanted pregnancy, Truman was chosen at birth to participate in a life-long documentary project entitled "Truman – Total Record of a Human Life" in which every moment of Truman's life is televised. Christof is worried that Kirk may have jeopardized the secret, but is sure that Truman is not wise or brave enough to confront the truth. Although Christof can control the physical aspects of Truman's world, he has no control over Truman's memories... in particular that of SYLVIA. With the help of a hooker, Truman continually re-enacts a scene from his teenage years. The hooker pretends to be "LAUREN," the girl he loved in high school. She urges Truman to trust the little boy of his past and look around him. A menacing man claiming to be her father tells Truman they are moving to Australia. Thus starts a lifelong quest to find Sylvia.

In his attempt to get to Australia, Truman observes more anomalies in his life. Sensing some sort of conspiracy, he notices "things that don't fit." He recognizes the same people appearing in different circumstances, and discovers buildings that are merely facades. As his frustration mounts, he confronts Meryl and threatens to kill her in a bluff to reveal the truth. After she refuses to renew her contract, Christof tries to engineer an affair with "VIVIEN" so that Truman can have a child, a move that Christof feels would not only boost ratings, but would be a culmination to his creative life's work. Truman cleverly tricks the camera and manages to escape the watchful eye of Christof's crew. A massive manhunt follows and chaos ensues for both viewers as well as Christof and his crew as they frantically search for Truman. He makes his way to New York harbor and boards a replica of Christopher Columbus' Santa Maria in a desperate effort to get to Sylvia. He is intercepted by helicopters and a counterfeit storm. Unexpectedly, the storm ceases and Truman is shocked by what is revealed. He is inside a massive soundstage, surrounded by studio visitors on a tram-ride and souvenirs of himself. Chased by Christof, Truman manages to get outside for the first time in his life. On the verge of hurling Christof from the building, Truman relents at the last minute. Finally free, he goes to Sylvia and they subsequently have a daughter.

COMMENTS:

THE TRUMAN SHOW presents a totally original concept in an unconventional manner as a man obliviously conducts his life on television. Despite a slow beginning and a few too many characters (Simeon, Moses, Roman), this story alternates between cryptic and compelling. Reminiscent of George Orwell's admonition in 1984 that "Big Brother is watching," the audience is lulled into the supposition that this may be a spy thriller of some sort. As the action unfolds, it is revealed to be a macabre version of MTV's "The Real World," questioning not only the state of films today, but the movie-going public as well. It also ponders more ambiguous questions regarding the human condition and fate vs. free will. However, it does not do so in a pretentious way, as it masterfully weaves in the symbolism of exploration and discovery, peppered with subtleties (such as the dictionary entry of "Trumanesque.")

The script seems a bit dense at times, but this is only because so much exposition is needed. In essence, this is a potent character study, detailing Truman's frustration as it builds to a frenzied paranoia when he becomes distrustful of everyone and everything surrounding him. Whereas the climactic final scene is a bit clichéd in terms of action, it is gravely emotional as Truman's humanity dominates. Truman is slightly suggestive of a "Forrest Gump" type character, and while it is tempting to ask if he could escape Christof's watchful cameras with such ease, the scenario is nonetheless believable as Truman evolves from a passive state into a man of action. It is also debatable as to why it took so long for him to discover the truth, but Truman's apathetic personality justifies it, and the series of near misses keeps the story suspenseful. The writer infuses comic elements into the story through dialogue, although it could use a few more funny moments to prevent the situation from getting too desperate. More could be added with regard to how Truman was selected for the project and his early life, and the story involving Australia seems to die out halfway through.

Part of the allure of the story is the "hook" that Truman's life being televised is not revealed until well into the story. Although this may be difficult to conceal from audiences in light of advance publicity, this aspect coupled with the potential for some interesting production values shows much promise. While the status of THE TRUMAN SHOW as a blockbuster hit would be contingent upon the right casting choices, it should appeal to the discerning viewer and win the favor of a more sophisticated crowd.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
CONCEPT	X			
STORYLINE		X		
CHARACTERS		X		
DIALOGUE			X	

RECOMMENDATION: CONSIDER