

PROFESSIONAL EVALUATION

Zero Sum

SUBMISSION	SA-26-97TLU6
WRITER	Kevin Hollands
CATEGORY	Film
FORMAT	Feature screenplay
EVALUATION STANDARD	SA-EVAL-1.2

Evaluation Scores

Premise	8.0
Plot	7.0
Character	7.0
Dialogue	7.0
Structure	7.0

OVERALL

7.0 / 10

Full Evaluation

SCRIPTACCESS EVALUATION

Title: Zero Sum Writer: Keven Hollands Genre: Political thriller / political drama Pages: 124 Format: Feature screenplay Evaluation Standard: SA-EVAL-1.2 Submission ID: SA-26-97TLU6

LOGLINE

As an insurgent British MP builds a cross-party movement during a national fuel emergency, he discovers that successive governments have assembled a secret system capable of classifying citizens by their perceived contribution-and must resist using the efficient, undemocratic machinery that embodies his own political arguments.

SCORES

Premise: 8/10 Plot: 7/10 Character: 7/10 Dialogue: 7/10 Structure: 7/10 Overall: 7/10 Raw Overall: $(8 \cdot 0.15) + (7 \cdot 0.25) + (7 \cdot 0.25) + (7 \cdot 0.15) + (7 \cdot 0.20) = 1.20 + 1.75 + 1.75 + 1.05 + 1.40 = 7.15$. Rounded Overall: 7/10. No limiter applies.

WHAT WORKS

The central proposition is strong and unusually productive. The screenplay does not merely oppose an idealistic politician to a corrupt conspiracy. It makes the threatening machinery an efficient expression of Jack Stone's own rhetoric about contribution, responsibility and entitlement. The decisive question is therefore not whether the system works, but who is entitled to define what "working" means. That idea is developed from the Amie Carter safeguarding failure through Clause Seventeen, the Continuity and Contribution Protocol, Jack's one-hour use of the allocation engine, and his confrontation with Stephen Ward. The progression continually complicates the premise rather than simply repeating that government is untrustworthy.

Jack is an active, dramatically useful protagonist. His public accusation of Eleanor Vale creates a genuine moral test when Danny discovers she supported Patricia Wells rather than overruling her. Jack first delays, then issues the correction with the same prominence as the accusation. The correction unexpectedly increases his support, establishing both his appeal and the political rewards that can arise from apparent integrity. His later decisions are harder because the Protocol can achieve outcomes he wants. His admission to Ward that he liked the feeling of the system obeying is the character's most important moment: it prevents his final rejection of the machinery from becoming easy self-righteousness.

Several relationships effectively test different parts of Jack. Danny moves from impressed researcher to an internal accountability mechanism, challenging the attempted delay over Vale and insisting that Jack's one-hour allocation decision be published. Priya establishes her boundary early-she will leave the first time the group excuses an abuse as necessary "just this once"-and follows through when Jack uses the Protocol. Stratton develops from political opponent into a credible governing counterpart. Their basement investigation and later cooperation work because neither man becomes the other's convert; they recognise that they are facing the same institutional problem while retaining different responsibilities.

The screenplay also handles its systemic antagonist intelligently. Harcourt and Vale both explain that the Protocol did not require a single cabal: separate departments made individually defensible decisions until their systems became interoperable. Ward is responsible for activation, but he did not create every component. That distinction supports the theme that locating one guilty operator cannot substitute for examining the authorised decisions that built the machinery. The closing action reinforces this: the classifications are greyed out rather than magically erased, operational allocation continues, and a clean separation will take weeks.

WHAT NEEDS WORK

The principal Plot weakness is a recurring concentration of convenient discoveries in the latter half. The anonymous 2026 Protocol reaches Danny immediately before the Prime Minister declares the precise emergency that activates it. Vale is hospitalised and therefore demonstrably unable to use her credentials, but remains able to explain the 2017 objection, identify the private vault and provide its key. The recovered documents then connect

Vale's compromised credentials to Ward, preserve her decisive email exchange, and contain a handwritten note explaining Harcourt's plan to get the current version to Jack. Each element has an internal explanation, but their rapid accumulation means the investigation increasingly advances because the next document supplies exactly the next answer required.

Ward compounds this issue by becoming a speaking character only when the evidence has already identified him. He is found at his workstation, admits using Vale's credentials and acknowledges activating the Protocol. The resulting debate is thematically strong, but the thriller conflict has little remaining uncertainty: the culprit confesses and then explains the operational dilemma. Earlier dramatic contact with Ward-or stronger evidence of his influence before his identification-would allow the climax to pay off an established source of pressure rather than introducing its primary human opponent at the point of arrest. This would not require turning him into a conventional mastermind; in fact, establishing him earlier as a competent, apparently legitimate official could strengthen the screenplay's argument that the danger grew inside normal administrative practice.

The first third is intelligent but proportionally long relative to the central Protocol story. The safeguarding case, Vale correction, Amie encounter and creation of Jack's bloc all matter: they establish Jack's methods, his capacity to cause harm, and the institutional habit of recording objections without acting on them. However, the main fuel-and-classification thriller does not activate until Harcourt's warning and the Gulf disruption. The transition can feel like the screenplay exchanging one political story for another. Earlier traces of the resilience architecture, Ward's work or the coming energy problem would make the first movement feel more causally embedded in the eventual plot rather than primarily thematic preparation.

Supporting-character use is inconsistent. Helena has a commanding entrance and a clear strategic intelligence, but after assembling Jack's operation she is often positioned at the edge of scenes to interpret polling or political consequences. Richard, Sandra and Bill help establish the original cross-party group but largely disappear once it begins growing. Cole and Marsh create an expectation of a more concrete security threat, yet their function remains mostly transport and atmosphere. Jack's photograph of his dead friend's daughter provides a personal explanation for his protectiveness but remains largely symbolic. These elements are not individually damaging, but together they create a recurring sense that characters are introduced with more dramatic weight than their later function supports.

Dialogue is consistently intelligent and economical, but it is also consistently polished in the same way. Politicians, civil servants and advisers frequently answer with clipped reversals, exact distinctions and aphoristic formulations. Variations on "not this, that," "everybody and nobody," and "especially me" become a shared rhetorical method. Amie's plain refusal to be reduced to a file gives her a more distinct cadence, and Marsh has a drier voice, but many principal characters sound equally prepared to deliver the screenplay's argument. Ward's final exchange with Jack is compelling, yet it sometimes resembles two fully articulated positions in a formal debate rather than speech produced under arrest and national pressure. This is a recurring Dialogue limitation, not an isolated line-level issue.

Finally, Jack's use of the Protocol creates the right moral complication but its practical cost is not fully carried forward. The hospital markers turn green while an ambulance network falls to amber, and Priya leaves as promised. After that, however, the allocation succeeds and the screenplay moves quickly toward disabling classification. Following the displaced ambulance capacity, the political loss caused by Priya's departure, or Danny's changed trust in Jack would make the decision's cost as tangible as its benefit. At present, the screenplay states the danger of emergency exceptions more forcefully than it dramatises the lasting damage from Jack's own exception.

THE REWRITE

- Rebuild the investigative reveal chain. Seed Ward, the 2026 revision and the compromised-credential problem before the anonymous Protocol arrives. Let Jack, Danny and Stratton assemble the truth from evidence that is partial, contradictory or institutionally resisted rather than finding a sequence of documents that progressively confirms the entire explanation. Preserve the "everybody built it" premise by making Ward the operator who exploited an authorised structure, not the convenient answer to every mystery.
- Integrate the safeguarding movement more tightly with the central thriller. Retain Jack's false accusation, correction and encounter with Amie; these are essential to his moral arc. Tighten repeated political recruitment and media beats, however, and use the recovered safeguarding material to expose an early trace of the same contribution or data-integration architecture. The objective is not to reach the fuel crisis faster at any cost, but to make the first movement feel like the first stage of the Protocol plot rather than a separate demonstration of Jack's politics.
- Give Jack's exception a continuing consequence. Carry the ambulance network's downgrade into a later scene, make Priya's departure materially affect the bloc, or allow Danny's confidence in Jack to alter the final decision-making process. Jack should still be able to conclude that the one-hour activation was necessary, but necessity should not erase accountability. A specific cost would deepen both his character and the screenplay's central claim that consequential decisions must have identifiable owners.
- Consolidate and deepen the supporting ensemble. Decide which characters remain structurally necessary after Jack's rise begins. Helena could confront the conflict between protecting the movement and publishing Jack's culpability; Priya could have a stronger role before and after walking; one of the original MPs could embody the political cost of Jack's choices. If Cole, Marsh and the family photograph remain, connect them more directly to the pressure on Jack or reduce their prominence.
- Vary the dialogue's rhetorical temperature. Preserve the sharp political intelligence, but reduce the frequency of perfectly completed antitheses and slogan-ready exchanges. Allow some characters to evade, ramble, interrupt, misunderstand or speak through procedural language. Ward in particular can remain intellectually formidable while sounding less like the fully prepared embodiment of the screenplay's opposing thesis. Greater variation would increase naturalism and make the best concise lines land harder.

MARKET PERSPECTIVE

Zero Sum is positioned as a serious British political thriller for an adult audience interested in institutional power, emergency government and technology-mediated public policy. Its principal commercial asset is that the political argument generates suspense rather than sitting beside it: the Protocol is both a thriller mechanism and a concrete expression of the protagonist's ideological temptation. The material also offers substantial roles for established performers playing Jack, Stratton, Vale, Harcourt, Helena and Ward.

The production is more demanding than its dialogue-led form initially suggests. It requires convincing versions of the Commons chamber, Downing Street, Cabinet Office spaces, television studios, a hospital, the digital resilience centre, public and press crowds, vehicles and multiple UK locations. Much can be achieved through controlled interiors and screen-based crisis imagery, with little need for action spectacle or extensive visual effects, but Westminster scale and authenticity will affect the budget.

Commercial obstacles include dense procedural exposition, a specifically British political setting and a morally contentious contribution-versus-entitlement debate that resists a simple partisan reading. Those qualities narrow the broad-audience pitch but support prestige positioning. The current craft scores are based solely on the screenplay and are not altered by these market considerations.

BOTTOM LINE

This is a strong political thriller with an excellent central premise: a politician discovers that the efficient machinery capable of implementing his beliefs is dangerous precisely because it removes the friction of democratic authority. Jack's temptation, the Vale correction, Priya's departure and the Ward confrontation give that proposition real dramatic form.

The screenplay is not yet at an excellent professional level across the remaining categories. Its late investigation relies too heavily on conveniently timed documents and admissions, Ward arrives too late as a dramatic presence, several supporting characters lose function, and the dialogue's uniformly sharpened rhetoric reduces voice differentiation. The next draft should prioritise the reveal architecture and the consequences of Jack's one-hour exception. Those changes would materially strengthen Plot, Character and Structure without diluting the screenplay's political complexity.