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FIRST READ REPORT

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ANALYST: Julie Saint-Anne

LOGLINE: A young street magician is chosen to succeed a dying sorcerer in the continuing battle between good and evil. He must learn to use the magic within him, and sacrifice the life he knows, to save the lost souls of the street.

BRIEF: A promising premise and terrific cgi battle scenes are marred by heavy-handed exposition and backstory, and a trite storyline.

SCREENPLAY: PASS
WRITER: PASS

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

SYNOPSIS: Thousand-year-old sorcerer SIMON and his assistant KILEY must find the magician with the power to continue to wage Simon's battle against evil REGINA and her minion SHROUD. Their first apprentice, JASON, fails. Then they find MICHAEL, a street urchin and magician whose sole concern is caring for his young sister ELLY. But first they must convince him to choose his destiny. REGINA, who is also the local district attorney, intercedes by arresting Michael's sister.

Michael cheats at cards to raise bail money for Elly, but when he goes to pay it, he's arrested on the same charges - performing without a permit. Regina comes to see him. She tells him she wants him to help her clean up this dirty town by uncovering the drug-dealing pastor at the local church. In exchange, she'll release his sister.

Simon and Kiley try to warn Michael about Regina. But he's not ready to assert his destiny. He sneaks into the church - hoisting himself in Houdini-style. He unlocks the metal box that hides a cache of cocaine. Delivers it to Regina, who seduces him. Just as he's about to be consumed by her sexual baptism, he sees the venal fire in her eyes, and escapes. Regina reports to her higher power STACKER that Michael is "the one," and that he's "seen" her and must be destroyed. An arrest warrant is issued for his church theft. Michael realizes Simon is his only hope. Just as they're about to be picked off by a police cruiser, Michael and Elly are sucked through the wall of a rundown tenement as if it were made of water. They're in Simon's airy, beautiful home.

Simon explains who he is, and that Michael has been chosen to replace him. He explains that the Illuminati have one purpose: saving souls in the war between good and evil. Their weapon is magic. Simon demonstrates. Michael is fascinated by his craft. Simon sends Elly off with Kiley so he can begin Michael's training, teaching him to use the powers of nature in supernatural ways.

Simon and Michael train hard and long, throwing magic and each other in mock battle as Simon teaches him about the nature of good and evil, fear and belief. Meanwhile, another battle of magic between Kiley and Shroud. Kiley is defeated. Shroud snatches Elly. Delivers her to Regina. Regina tells Elly that everything Simon said is a lie.

Kiley returns. Michael is dissuaded from going after Elly. Meanwhile, Regina stares deep into Elly's eyes, offers her wealth and power. Elly is under her spell. Simon takes Michael to the fallen priest. Turning him is Michael's test. Michael shows the priest his magic. The priest is beginning to see the error of his sins when Shroud and Regina burst in. A defining battle between the powers. Kiley drags Michael through a portal just as Regina reduces Simon to dust.

Michael has saved the priest, but losing his sister and Simon weighs heavily on his soul. He decides he has to retrieve Elly. Simon appears to him, and warns that he'll regret it. Tells him he needs Kiley's help in anything he does. Michael returns to Kiley. They kiss -- it's magic. Though it may be a trap, they go after Elly. Elly, now a hooker/dealer, walks the promenade in search of buyers. They follow her to Regina's apartment. Regina vs. Michael, Kiley vs. Shroud. Finally, Regina hangs Elly over the balcony, flings her into the stratosphere. Into the stars. "You want her, find her." Michael runs Regina through with a laser. She combusts and turns to ashes.

Michael watches the lost souls through the portals in Simon's warehouse. He'll find Elly if it takes a millenium. Simon reappears. He wants to bring Michael to the Iluminati. Michael isn't interested. Simon shows him all the suffering in the world. Suffering he alone can end. Michael knows he can't turn away. He's seeing a destiny he can't deny.

COMMENTS: The concept, a "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" knock-off, might have succeeded if the author had focused more on the story than the light show.

The biggest problem is structure. The battle scenes, though vivid and compelling, don't build in intensity or propel the structure. On the contrary, the biggest battle, with the most arresting effects, occurs in the opening sequences, leaving nowhere to go but down. The romantic subplot between Kiley and Michael is set up in such a way that their first kiss comes right after Michael is told that he won't find Elly without Kiley's help. It looks like he's only using her affections, though that's clearly not the author's intention because there's no reversal. Disappointing: the lead villain, Stacker, referred to several times, never shows up -- even for the grand finale. He's built up as the core of evil by Regina and Shroud, and even by Simon and Kiley - but the expected confrontation never occurs. Most disappointing: the weak tag, in which the hero readily relinquishes his driving quest to save his sister for the battle to defy evil throughout the world. We're left wondering how, why, where, what ...

Stylistically, the author creates vivid, though one-dimensional, characters. (Regina is a hip combination of Cruella DeVille and Snow White's evil queen.) The dialog, often witty, urbane, and ironic, is weighed down by interminably heavy-handed, front-loaded exposition and backstory, laughable melodrama, and preachy discussions of good and evil. Better structure would have allowed us to discover the information we needed as we needed it, rather than listening to repetitious diatribes about sorcery throughout the ages. Speaking of repetition, every character, and much of the dialog and action, were described as "edgy." Granted, edgy is trendy, but better to show us what makes it so edgy than to repeatedly tell us that it is. He reincorporates without effect. For instance, there is much ado about characters chewing gum. Nothing comes of it. The fallen priest, a pawn for both sides, is easily swayed with a simple show of magic. And nothing comes of his renewal.

The author's exotic, visual imagination is his strength. Though bringing Simon back from the dead - twice - weakened the plotline, bringing him back as a figure carved out of the cigar smoke he loved was a treat. Though I couldn't figure out why Michael had to hoist himself into the church with a complicated pulley, it was imaginative and clever.

Bottom line: too many hackneyed characters, images, and dialog, and few unexpected plot twists take all the life out of an age-old story.