



Take Me Instead

Logline

A young doctor gains the unique ability to see Death personified after his father trades his life to save him as a child, leading to a lifelong relationship with Death that shapes his medical career and personal philosophy about mortality.

Genre

Drama, Fantasy, Historical, Philosophical

Top Keywords

death, hospital, baseball, soul, war, father, medical, illness, afterlife, son, dying, supernatural, grief, funeral, sacrifice, doctor, cancer, goodbye, interview, spirit

Location Setting

Eli Bennett Memorial Hospital

Script Score

1. Character Development: 8.0/10

Strong character arcs for Eli, Nate, Nora, and Death/Baba. Clear motivations, distinct personalities, and meaningful growth throughout.

2. Plot Construction: 8.5/10

Well-structured narrative that effectively weaves multiple timelines and storylines together. Strong thematic through-line and logical progression of events.

3. Dialogue: 8.0/10

Natural and meaningful exchanges that reveal character, though occasionally exposition-heavy. Good mix of emotional and lighter moments.

4. Originality: 9.0/10

Fresh take on the "death personified" concept, with unique elements like the medical ethics angle and generational story aspects.

5. Emotional Engagement: 9.0/10

Highly effective at creating emotional resonance through relationships, loss, and ethical dilemmas. Multiple touching moments throughout.

6. Theme and Message: 9.0/10

Strong exploration of mortality, dignity in death, and the balance between prolonging life and quality of life. Clear but not heavy-handed messaging.

Overall Rating: 8.6/10

Based on the Script Score, this screenplay ranks at 99th percentile and received a Recommend

Synopsis

The story follows Dr. Eli Bennett, who as a sick child was saved when his father made a deal with Death (known as Baba) to take his life instead of his son's. This extraordinary event gives Eli the unique ability to see Death, making him the only person in history who can witness Baba collecting souls. Through his life, Eli becomes a successful doctor, falls in love with Nora, and uses his gift to better understand the balance between life and death in medicine. He becomes a pioneer in advance healthcare directives, helping patients die with dignity. Throughout his journey, he maintains an unusual friendship with Death, who through their conversations begins to question his own existence and purpose. The story culminates with Eli's own death, where he passes on his ability to see Death to his grandson Trey, ensuring the legacy of understanding and compassion in medicine continues through generations.

Comprehensive Synopsis

"Life's End" is a profound supernatural drama that spans multiple decades, following the extraordinary story of Dr. Eli Bennett and his unique ability to see Death personified, whom he affectionately calls "Baba."

The story begins in 1962 when 12-year-old Eli Bennett lies dying in a hospital bed. His father, Daniel Bennett, makes an emotional plea: "Take me instead." Death, appearing as a well-dressed man in a black suit, accepts this unusual exchange, marking the first time in millennia that he has granted such a request. This decision allows young Eli to live but creates an unprecedented situation - Eli becomes the only living person who can see Death.

Growing up, Eli struggles with this ability. His mother, Miriam, initially dismisses his claims as hallucinations from trauma, and he learns to keep his gift secret. His only confidant is his best friend Nate Madison, who stands by him despite the strangeness of his claims. Eli finds solace in baseball, becoming an exceptional pitcher despite his earlier health issues.

As Eli enters college, he pursues pre-med while continuing his baseball career. Here, he meets two pivotal characters: his roommate Tommy Tepper and his future wife, Nora Jacobs. Eli makes the difficult choice to pursue medicine over a potential baseball career, driven by his unique understanding of death and his desire to help others.

Throughout his medical career, Eli encounters Baba regularly, and their relationship evolves from awkward encounters to philosophical discussions about life, death, and purpose. These interactions shape Eli's approach to medicine, particularly in his advocacy for advance healthcare directives, allowing patients to choose their end-of-life care.

The story is punctuated by personal losses that test Eli's unique perspective on death. His best friend Nate is killed in Vietnam, but Baba allows them one final game of catch before taking him. His roommate Tommy dies of an overdose after failing out of college. Each loss deepens Eli's understanding of death while strengthening his resolve to improve end-of-life care for his patients.

Eli's professional life flourishes alongside his personal life. He marries Nora, who accepts his ability to see Death, and they both become successful oncologists. They have a son, and Eli's mother Miriam moves in with them to help with their grandson. However, tragedy strikes when Nora is killed by a gunshot from a protestor who opposes their work with advance directives.

The story reaches its emotional climax as Eli, now 80, prepares for his own death. He shares his life story with his grandson, Trey, who has followed in his footsteps as a doctor. In his final moments, Eli reveals that he and Baba have theorized how to pass on the ability to see Death - through the same words that started it all: "Take me instead."

The screenplay masterfully weaves together themes of life, death, love, and purpose. It explores how one man's unique gift transforms not only his life but also modern medicine's approach to death. Through Eli's interactions with Baba, the story suggests that death isn't something to be feared but rather a transition to be understood and accepted.

The narrative is enriched by strong supporting characters: Miriam, who evolves from skeptic to believer; Nora, who loves Eli unconditionally despite (or because of) his unusual ability; and Baba himself, who develops from a detached collector of souls to a being capable of friendship and philosophical questioning.

The story concludes with Eli's death, but also with hope, as he passes his gift to Trey, who will continue his grandfather's legacy. In a touching final scene, Trey's girlfriend Dora responds to his revelation about seeing Death with the same acceptance Nora once showed Eli, suggesting that the cycle of understanding and compassion will continue.

Throughout the screenplay, the baseball motif serves as a powerful symbol of life, connection, and legacy, from the cap Eli receives as a child to the one he passes on to his grandson. The story successfully balances supernatural elements with genuine human emotions and relationships, creating a compelling narrative about the intersection of life and death, and the importance of understanding both.

The screenplay's structure, moving between different time periods while maintaining a clear narrative thread, effectively shows how Eli's unique ability shapes both his personal life and his professional mission to change how medicine approaches death. The result is a powerful story about mortality, love, and the profound impact one person can have when they're given a unique perspective on life's greatest mystery.

Plot Assessment and Enhancement

What's Working Well:

1. Strong emotional core centered around the relationship between Death (Baba) and Eli, creating a unique take on the "friendship with Death" concept

2. Multiple compelling relationship threads:

- Eli and his father's sacrifice
 - Eli and Nate's friendship
 - Eli and Nora's love story
 - Eli and his mother's complex dynamic
 - Eli and Baba's evolving friendship
3. Effective use of time periods and historical events to show the scope of Death's work and Eli's journey
 4. Clear thematic exploration of mortality, dignity in death, and the meaning of life through both personal and professional angles
 5. Good balance between intimate character moments and larger ethical/philosophical questions about death and medicine

Areas for Improvement:

1. Structure/Pacing:

- The early historical montage could be shortened
- The middle section with multiple time jumps could be tightened
- Some scenes could be combined to maintain momentum

2. Character Development:

- Baba's character arc could be more clearly defined
- Supporting characters like Tommy could be better integrated into the main narrative
- The antagonist (Harlan) could be introduced earlier to build tension

3. Plot Focus:

- The advance directive storyline and medical ethics debate could be better woven throughout rather than concentrated in later sections
- The final "passing of the torch" to Trey could be set up earlier

4. Stakes:

- The personal cost of Eli's ability to see Death could be heightened
- More conflict between Eli's gift and his medical career early on

Specific Recommendations:

1. Consider restructuring to start with adult Eli and use flashbacks, rather than linear progression
2. Develop a stronger throughline connecting Eli's personal relationships to his medical ethics crusade
3. Create more scenes showing how Eli's ability affects his daily life as a doctor
4. Build more tension around whether Eli's gift is a blessing or curse
5. Add more scenes between Eli and Baba discussing the nature of death and their unique relationship

The core concept and emotional elements are strong - the improvements needed are mainly structural to maximize dramatic impact and thematic resonance.

Character Profiling

Dr. Eli Bennett

Eli begins as a sickly child saved by his father's sacrifice, developing the ability to see Death (Baba). This shapes his medical career, focusing on patient dignity and end-of-life care. He maintains a complex relationship with Baba, exploring mortality and life's meaning.

Archetype: The Sage

Baba/Death

Initially a detached entity collecting souls, Baba is transformed by Eli's questions. He develops curiosity about his existence and the nature of life, evolving from emotionless to pondering philosophical questions about his purpose and potential afterlife.

Archetype: The Sage

Nora Bennett

Eli's college love interest, later his wife and medical partner. She supports Eli's views and helps develop his medical philosophy. Her tragic death by a protester is pivotal for Eli, but their love transcends death.

Archetype: The Lover

Miriam Bennett

Initially skeptical of Eli's claims about seeing Death, Miriam transforms into a supportive parent. She battles cancer, uses an advance directive, and comes to trust Eli's perspective, characterized by tough love and pushing him to be his

best self.

Archetype: The Caregiver

Trey Bennett

A disconnected grandson who learns about Eli's life in his final moments. Through storytelling and inheriting the ability to see Death, Trey becomes the inheritor of Eli's legacy, potentially becoming a doctor like Eli.

Archetype: The Innocent

Main Character Casting

Death

- Ben Whishaw: Ben Whishaw's ethereal presence and ability to convey deep emotion with subtlety make him an excellent choice for the timeless and mysterious character of Death. His roles in 'Cloud Atlas' and 'The Lobster' showcase his range in both fantasy and philosophical narratives.
- Tom Hiddleston: Tom Hiddleston's experience in playing complex, enigmatic characters, such as Loki in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, aligns well with the role of Death. His ability to balance charm and detachment is ideal for this character.
- Cillian Murphy: Cillian Murphy's intense gaze and ability to portray characters with a haunting presence make him a strong candidate for Death. His work in 'Peaky Blinders' and 'Inception' demonstrates his skill in drama and fantasy genres.
- Rami Malek: Rami Malek's unique look and his portrayal of introspective and complex characters, such as in 'Mr. Robot,' make him a fitting choice for the role of Death. His ability to convey curiosity and detachment would serve the character well.
- Jared Leto: Jared Leto's transformative acting style and experience in roles that explore philosophical themes, such as in 'Mr. Nobody,' make him a suitable choice for Death. His ability to embody otherworldly characters is well-suited for this role.
- Benedict Cumberbatch: Benedict Cumberbatch's commanding presence and experience in playing intellectual and mysterious characters, such as Sherlock Holmes, make him an excellent fit for Death. His work in 'Doctor Strange' also highlights his capability in fantasy settings.
- Oscar Isaac: Oscar Isaac's versatility and depth in roles across various genres, including drama and fantasy, make him a strong candidate for Death. His performance in 'Ex Machina' showcases his ability to portray enigmatic and thought-provoking characters.
- Michael Fassbender: Michael Fassbender's ability to portray intense and complex characters, as seen in 'Steve Jobs' and 'Prometheus,' aligns well with the role of Death. His presence and acting range make him a compelling choice for this timeless character.
- Idris Elba: Idris Elba's commanding presence and experience in roles that require a balance of strength and introspection, such as in 'Luther,' make him a suitable choice for Death. His ability to convey authority and curiosity would enhance the character.
- Gael Garcia Bernal: Gael Garcia Bernal's experience in diverse roles and his ability to convey deep emotion and

curiosity, as seen in 'The Motorcycle Diaries,' make him a fitting choice for Death. His work in both drama and philosophical narratives aligns with the character's essence.

Eli Bennett

- Tom Hanks: Tom Hanks is renowned for his ability to portray compassionate and intelligent characters, making him an ideal fit for Eli Bennett. His experience in roles that blend drama and philosophical themes, such as in 'Forrest Gump' and 'The Green Mile,' aligns well with Eli's character.

- Bryan Cranston: Bryan Cranston's versatility and depth in dramatic roles, as seen in 'Breaking Bad,' make him a strong candidate for Eli Bennett. His ability to convey complex emotions and philosophical introspection would enhance Eli's character.

- Jeff Bridges: Jeff Bridges' experience in portraying wise and introspective characters, such as in 'The Big Lebowski' and 'Crazy Heart,' suits the role of Eli Bennett. His age and demeanor align well with the character's compassionate and philosophical nature.

- Ethan Hawke: Ethan Hawke's history of playing thoughtful and introspective roles, such as in 'Before Sunrise' and 'Dead Poets Society,' makes him a fitting choice for Eli Bennett. His ability to convey curiosity and intelligence would bring depth to the character.

- Paul Giamatti: Paul Giamatti's talent for portraying complex, intelligent characters, as seen in 'Sideways' and 'John Adams,' makes him a strong contender for Eli Bennett. His ability to balance drama and philosophical themes aligns with the character's essence.

- Edward Norton: Edward Norton's skill in playing multifaceted characters, demonstrated in films like 'Fight Club' and 'American History X,' makes him a great fit for Eli Bennett. His ability to convey intelligence and depth would enhance the character's narrative.

- Richard Jenkins: Richard Jenkins' experience in portraying wise and compassionate characters, such as in 'The Visitor' and 'The Shape of Water,' aligns well with Eli Bennett's character. His age and demeanor suit the role's requirements.

- Sam Rockwell: Sam Rockwell's versatility and ability to portray complex characters, as seen in 'Moon' and 'Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri,' make him a suitable choice for Eli Bennett. His talent for blending drama and introspection would enrich the character.

- Mark Ruffalo: Mark Ruffalo's history of playing thoughtful and compassionate roles, such as in 'Spotlight' and 'The Kids Are All Right,' makes him a fitting choice for Eli Bennett. His ability to convey intelligence and empathy aligns with the character's essence.

- John C. Reilly: John C. Reilly's experience in portraying complex and introspective characters, as seen in 'Magnolia' and 'The Sisters Brothers,' makes him a strong candidate for Eli Bennett. His ability to balance drama and philosophical themes suits the role well.

Trey Bennett

- Timothee Chalamet: Timothee Chalamet has a strong track record in dramatic roles and a youthful appearance that fits the character's age. His ability to convey curiosity and depth would align well with Trey's journey of discovery.

- Lucas Hedges: Lucas Hedges is known for his nuanced performances in drama and has a relatable, everyman quality that would suit Treys character. His experience in roles that explore complex family dynamics makes him a great fit.

- Ansel Elgort: Ansel Elgort has the right age and look for Trey, and his performances often capture a blend of vulnerability and determination, which is essential for portraying a character curious about his grandfather's life.
- Tye Sheridan: Tye Sheridan has experience in both dramatic and fantasy genres, making him a versatile choice for Trey. His ability to portray introspective characters would enhance Trey's philosophical journey.
- Dylan Minnette: Dylan Minnette's work in drama and his youthful appearance make him a strong candidate for Trey. He has a talent for portraying characters dealing with complex emotions and personal growth.
- Nick Robinson: Nick Robinson has a compelling screen presence and has played roles that require a deep emotional range, which would be beneficial for Trey's character arc.
- Logan Lerman: Logan Lerman's experience in historical and dramatic films, along with his ability to convey a thoughtful and introspective demeanor, aligns well with Trey's character.
- Joe Keery: Joe Keery's charm and ability to portray characters with a mix of humor and depth would bring a unique perspective to Trey, especially in scenes requiring philosophical reflection.
- Finn Wolfhard: Finn Wolfhard, though slightly younger, has shown maturity in his roles and a knack for handling complex narratives, making him a potential fit for a slightly younger interpretation of Trey.
- Noah Centineo: Noah Centineo's charisma and experience in roles that blend drama and light-heartedness could offer a fresh take on Trey, especially in scenes exploring family and personal discovery.

Main Character Casting Limited Budget

Death

- Ben Whishaw: Ben Whishaw's ethereal presence and ability to convey depth and mystery make him an ideal choice for the role of Death. His performances in 'Cloud Atlas' and 'The Lobster' showcase his range in philosophical and fantastical narratives.
- Tom Hiddleston: Tom Hiddleston's experience in playing complex, enigmatic characters, such as Loki in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, aligns well with the role of Death. His ability to balance charm and menace is perfect for this character.
- Cillian Murphy: Cillian Murphy's intense gaze and ability to portray introspective and mysterious characters, as seen in 'Peaky Blinders' and 'Inception,' make him a strong candidate for Death.
- Rami Malek: Rami Malek's unique screen presence and his portrayal of complex characters in 'Mr. Robot' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody' make him a compelling choice for the role of Death.
- Andrew Scott: Andrew Scott's ability to convey both warmth and detachment, as demonstrated in 'Fleabag' and 'His Dark Materials,' suits the character of Death, who is both clinical and curious.
- David Tennant: David Tennant's versatility and experience in fantasy and drama, such as in 'Doctor Who' and 'Good Omens,' make him a fitting choice for the role of Death.
- Oscar Isaac: Oscar Isaac's depth and ability to portray nuanced characters, as seen in 'Ex Machina' and 'Inside Llewyn Davis,' align well with the philosophical aspects of Death.
- Jared Harris: Jared Harris's experience in historical and dramatic roles, such as in 'Chernobyl' and 'The Crown,' makes him a strong candidate for the timeless and ageless character of Death.

- Michael Fassbender: Michael Fassbender's commanding presence and ability to portray complex, morally ambiguous characters, as seen in 'Steve Jobs' and 'X-Men,' make him a suitable choice for Death.

- Benedict Cumberbatch: Benedict Cumberbatch's experience in playing intellectual and enigmatic characters, such as in 'Sherlock' and 'Doctor Strange,' makes him a fitting choice for the role of Death.

Eli Bennett

- Paul Dano: Paul Dano's ability to portray complex, introspective characters makes him an excellent fit for Eli Bennett. His experience in films like 'There Will Be Blood' and 'Little Miss Sunshine' showcases his range and depth, aligning well with Eli's intelligent and compassionate nature.

- Lucas Hedges: Lucas Hedges has a strong track record in dramatic roles, such as in 'Manchester by the Sea' and 'Boy Erased.' His youthful appearance and ability to convey vulnerability and curiosity make him a great choice for a younger Eli.

- Ethan Hawke: Ethan Hawke's extensive experience in philosophical and dramatic films, like 'Before Sunrise' and 'First Reformed,' aligns with Eli's introspective and compassionate character. His age range allows him to portray Eli at different stages of life.

- Jake Gyllenhaal: Jake Gyllenhaal's versatility and intensity in roles such as 'Nightcrawler' and 'Brokeback Mountain' make him a strong candidate for Eli. His ability to convey complex emotions suits the character's philosophical and compassionate nature.

- Timothee Chalamet: Timothee Chalamet's talent for portraying sensitive and intelligent characters, as seen in 'Call Me by Your Name' and 'Beautiful Boy,' makes him a fitting choice for a younger Eli. His youthful energy and depth align with Eli's character.

- Oscar Isaac: Oscar Isaac's experience in both dramatic and philosophical roles, such as in 'Ex Machina' and 'Inside Llewyn Davis,' makes him a compelling choice for Eli. His ability to convey intelligence and compassion aligns with the character's essence.

- Jesse Plemons: Jesse Plemons' nuanced performances in films like 'The Master' and 'I'm Thinking of Ending Things' demonstrate his ability to portray complex, introspective characters, making him a strong fit for Eli Bennett.

- Rami Malek: Rami Malek's unique presence and ability to portray introspective and intelligent characters, as seen in 'Mr. Robot' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' make him a suitable choice for Eli. His distinct style aligns with the character's depth.

- Logan Lerman: Logan Lerman's experience in roles that require sensitivity and intelligence, such as in 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower,' makes him a good fit for a younger Eli. His ability to convey curiosity and compassion aligns with the character.

- John Krasinski: John Krasinski's range in both dramatic and philosophical roles, such as in 'A Quiet Place' and 'The Office,' makes him a versatile choice for Eli. His ability to balance humor and depth suits the character's multifaceted nature.

Trey Bennett

- Lucas Hedges: Lucas Hedges is a talented young actor known for his roles in 'Manchester by the Sea' and 'Boy Erased.' His ability to portray complex emotions and his experience in dramatic roles make him a great fit for the character of Trey Bennett. At 25, he matches the character's age and is American, aligning with the character's background.

- Timothe Chalamet: Timothe Chalamet has proven his dramatic chops in films like 'Call Me by Your Name' and 'Beautiful Boy.' His ability to convey depth and curiosity aligns well with Trey's character. As a 27-year-old American actor, he fits the age and nationality requirements.

- Tye Sheridan: Tye Sheridan, known for his roles in 'Ready Player One' and 'Mud,' brings a youthful yet mature presence to his characters. His experience in both drama and fantasy genres makes him a suitable choice for Trey. At 26, he fits the age and is American.

- Ansel Elgort: Ansel Elgort has shown his range in films like 'The Fault in Our Stars' and 'Baby Driver.' His ability to portray introspective and thoughtful characters makes him a good match for Trey. At 29, he is slightly older but still fits the character's profile as an American actor.

- Dylan Minnette: Dylan Minnette, known for '13 Reasons Why' and 'Prisoners,' has a strong presence in dramatic roles. His ability to convey vulnerability and curiosity aligns with Trey's character. At 26, he matches the age and is American.

- Nick Robinson: Nick Robinson has demonstrated his acting skills in films like 'Love, Simon' and 'The Kings of Summer.' His ability to portray complex emotions and his experience in drama make him a good fit for Trey. At 28, he is slightly older but still suitable as an American actor.

- Logan Lerman: Logan Lerman, known for 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' and 'Fury,' has a strong background in drama and fantasy. His ability to portray introspective characters makes him a suitable choice for Trey. At 31, he is older but can convincingly play a younger character.

- Joe Keery: Joe Keery, famous for his role in 'Stranger Things,' brings a unique charm and depth to his characters. His experience in both drama and fantasy genres makes him a good fit for Trey. At 31, he is older but has the youthful appearance needed for the role.

- Finn Wolfhard: Finn Wolfhard, known for 'Stranger Things' and 'It,' has shown his ability to handle dramatic and fantastical elements. Although younger at 21, his experience and talent make him a potential fit for Trey, especially in a slightly younger portrayal.

- Noah Centineo: Noah Centineo, known for 'To All the Boys I've Loved Before,' has a charismatic presence and has shown potential in dramatic roles. At 27, he fits the age and is American, making him a viable option for Trey.

Comparative Film Analysis

This screenplay can be described as a mash-up of the following movies:

1. **"Meet Joe Black" (1998)**

- **Reason:** The film explores the personification of Death and its interaction with humans, similar to the character of Baba in the screenplay.

- **Box Office:** \$142.9 million

2. **"The Sixth Sense" (1999)**

- **Reason:** The theme of a young boy who can see and communicate with the dead parallels Eli's ability to see Baba.

- **Box Office:** \$672.8 million

3. **"A Beautiful Mind" (2001)**

- **Reason:** The screenplay's exploration of a brilliant mind grappling with extraordinary experiences and perceptions mirrors the journey of John Nash.

- **Box Office:** \$316.8 million

4. **"The Green Mile" (1999)**

- **Reason:** The film's exploration of life, death, and the supernatural aligns with the screenplay's themes of mortality and the afterlife.

- **Box Office:** \$286.8 million

5. **"Field of Dreams" (1989)**

- **Reason:** The connection between baseball and the supernatural, as well as themes of redemption and reconciliation, are present in both the screenplay and the film.

- **Box Office:** \$84.4 million

6. **"The Lovely Bones" (2009)**

- **Reason:** The narrative of a young girl observing the world after her death and the exploration of the afterlife resonate with the screenplay's themes.

- **Box Office:** \$93.6 million

7. **"Ghost" (1990)**

- **Reason:** The interaction between the living and the dead, and the exploration of love and loss, are central to both the screenplay and the film.

- **Box Office:** \$505.7 million

8. **"Big Fish" (2003)**

- **Reason:** The film's blend of fantastical storytelling and the exploration of life and death parallels the narrative style of the screenplay.

- **Box Office:** \$122.9 million

9. **"The Others" (2001)**

- **Reason:** The film's atmospheric exploration of the supernatural and the afterlife aligns with the screenplay's themes of death and mystery.

- **Box Office:** \$209.9 million

10. **"Dead Poets Society" (1989)**

- **Reason:** The film's focus on the impact of a mentor figure and the exploration of life, death, and legacy resonate with the screenplay's narrative.

- **Box Office:** \$235.9 million

These films collectively capture the screenplay's blend of supernatural elements, philosophical exploration of life and death, and the emotional depth of human relationships.