



## **Team Philadelphia USA**

Friday, September 2, 2016

Hey Jo,

Sentient USA – 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft review – Part Two

### Summary

Once again, my compliments on your fine work.

I really like the river of bodies payoff.

This next stage demands you really apply yourself to some of the tough work that must be undertaken.

It will stretch you but I am confident you are up to the challenge.

Formatting errors are easy enough to fix.

Character motivations, conflict and so forth pose greater challenges.

There is also dialogue work to be done.

My advice is to knock over the easy stuff first such as the recommended change to the opening scene (see explanation in act review notes) then to proceed to the tougher challenges to do with conflict, resolve, reveals etc. We can work together, step by step to prepare the work.

## Issues

- Set ups and payoffs – You have a real talent for this but you missed a few. See my explanation in the act reviews especially the Teaser
- The science – Some issues re phones – See explanation in the act reviews
- Love is pain and ambiguity – The text message is, 'true love.' What if it wasn't? What if the cancellation was far more ambiguous? Now the crew really do have something to speculate about
- Speculation + a plan + a resolve – The dominant characters JJ, (the protagonist) and Sal now speculate but no plan evolves and there is little resolve demonstrated – See explanation in act review
- Missing opportunities for conflict – You have lots of them. See explanation in act review
- Vomit – Like Judo it has its place...
- Unique illnesses – Yes, everyone is vomiting but we're not seeing unique illnesses such as deafness, blindness, dementia, loss of memory. These are all temporary but they whack the characters senseless and force them to adopt new survival methods
- Graduating reveals – It's clunky. There is some good work but there is a lot of, 'dump into place' work that is not graduated
- Weighting those reveals – Car crash. Man thrown through window. OK, let's get a pizza. That's comedy. When stuff happens it has a weight. We're not seeing that
- Heroic dialogue, my ass – 'Don't wait for me.' More like seeing his pals leaving him and, 'You have got to be shitting me!' He's not scrambling down that pole to see them leave him there. He wants out too
- Proportionate dialogue – See act reviews
- Dialogue exposition – Like reveals, there is a way of doing this. Exposition where characters, 'talk it' is used a lot but it's clunky. You may get away with it but in some cases you don't have to explain it. Create speculation and leave a gap for the audience to impress themselves with how clever they are
- Dialogue – Less is more. For example, see my review notes for Act Five and the Captain
- That mixed culture thing – You sure let me know about that, 'AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN.' LMAO! OK, let's chat about that

## Repeats

Some of the review notes are repeated in the Act reviews for spot reference.

## How close is it to the Sentient story?

Closer than the first draft.

## Format

- a. Title page – Credit the franchise – PGE – All good
- b. Teaser – Centre Teaser - All good
- c. End each act with a page break starting the new act on the new page - All good
- d. Act / Page count
  - Teaser - ends page 9 (9 pages – all good)
  - Act One ends page 28 (18 pages – 3 pages long)
  - Act Two ends page 34 (5 pages – 1 page short)
  - Act Three ends page 46 (11 pages – all good)
  - Act Four ends P56 (9 pages – all good)
  - Act Five ends P64 (7 pages – all good)

Re the page count - Let's remain mindful of this but we will work on fixing it later after we have dealt with the story.

- e. Flashback P19 – error
  - Missing – RETURN TO PRESENT
  - For example:

**FLASHBACK TO:**

**SLUG LINE**

Action

Dialogue

**RETURN TO PRESENT**

Then the next scene

## Review – Act by Act

### ○ Teaser Act

- ☒ We do not introduce a central conflict or most significant nemesis until the last act but let that slide for now as this style of formula may work much better for the US pilot
- ☒ Great opening scene but it can be better
  - The storm, describe it
  - Dialogue, use it. 'Give me your hand'. End that opening scene with the reach. Don't show the disintegration
  - Save the disintegration, which is a reveal, for the end of the teaser act
- ☒ Like the set up re 'mounting the brunette.' Syd is an excellent set of eyes on JJ for the audience
- ☒ The text between LINDSAY and JJ is flat.

You have the chance here to create some 'true love' or 'love distress' in JJ.

The distress version can be achieved by providing a drier more ambiguous text from Lindsay. This creates speculation or gives the chance for the guys to create speculation.

The true love version is by increasing the stakes to fiancée or about to get married.

Your choice.

- ⌘ The arrival of the storm raises the hair on the back of my neck. The mix of visual and audio reference is terrifying. Nice work
- ⌘ Dialogue - 'Hey, boss, what do you make of that?' I'm thinking it is more a grab the shoulder and point and WTF scene as right after that, they bolt
- ⌘ 'Don't wait for me'. Yes, very heroic but the hero's reaction to watching his workmates truck drive off is worth more, 'You have to be shitting me!'
- ⌘ Syd stays. Very good. Salt of the earth
- ⌘ The cave – Now show the disintegration. That's the payoff to the teaser
- ⌘ Summary - It's a great teaser. The dialogue is a little cluttered and the choices can be enhanced
- ⌘ Ends P9

#### ○ Act One

- ⌘ **There is still no driving force behind the characters, especially JJ.** Yep, he has his gal Lindsey and that is a motivation but he is not overly wrought about this and has no job or other motivation pushing him. In fact, he is easily diverted from that priority with a the shooting party
- ⌘ REESE does not call for any help whilst he's hanging upside down. Yes, he does later but...when would you call for help?
- ⌘ The body count - There is a chance that viewers will not be able to determine there is a difference between the plane crash victims and the those absorbed by the storm.

It depends on how the Hiroshima ash shadows are introduced and then the floaters. If these all turn up together we have made some big steps very quickly and it may be too much to take.

It pays to take pause and let the shock of each discovery hold its weight.

Each character can discover the same body count but from a different perspective or a different element such as one finding the ash shadows, another a small group of floating bodies then another a major group of bodies.

You feature a wonderful scene at the end with the Captain and the river of bodies but I am thinking JJ should be the one to see that, even if he is searching for the Amish girl or battling the escaped convict

- ⌘ Discovery of the phone, once again we discover it but it's not weighted. Especially when everyone's phone will be doing the same. Bodies all over and everyone's phone glowing and humming creates an audio and visual mystery.
- ⌘ REESE SUMMARY – All the elements were included but in such a condense way they were not sufficiently weighted
- ⌘ JJ's condition – I see you have damaged him. Good, but each character should have a unique damage. For example, hearing, blindness, dementia, even psychosis. For example, See my notes re Sal below
- ⌘ JJ needs to wake up in that cave. Add his phone humming. Add disorientation then add the red rain
- ⌘ P13 – JJ doesn't have a humming phone in an earlier scene. If he's carrying a phone, it would already be humming, glowing and hot. The field around it so intense he cannot touch it. The time to introduce this is when he wakes up in the cave. He has to discard it
- ⌘ P15 the speculation – This is an improvement. SAL expresses a view but not an attitude. Neither of them do. **There is no resolve to do something when the enemy comes or for JJ to get to his girl.** There is no prediction of when they will come or what they will do. **There is no imperative to act. No ticking clock.** Sal has settled into a task. JJ points this out and questions it but he doesn't take a course of action himself.

If Sal were to speculate that the enemy would seize all the main infrastructure, like say, the dam... They'd take prisoners where they could etc.

If he is to stay for the shoot, there has to be a reason. At least 'We do this, then we go get your girl.' That shouldn't dissuade JJ. He wants to go.

Sal needs to get a little scary at that point. Perhaps he is enjoying himself a little too much. You have him offering the pistol. Consider not doing that.

**SAL is not SYD. Syd is true salt of the earth. Sal is Syd gone wrong. That difference provides contrast and it also tells us the new world is very different to the old.**

JJ has to have a reason why he is not pursuing a goal ASAP. Currently, Sal is salt of the earth but there is less conflict that way. What if he was salt of the earth plus a little scary?

What if his fascination with killing the prisoners was a little too much? What if the prisoners we see him shoot are all black?

What if JJ starts to realize he has to escape Sal?

Sal's position is valid but is tainted by all the prisoners being black. He doesn't say anything about them being black. We just don't see any white prisoners. Now we have some more speculation as to his motivation.

Now we have a situation where JJ becomes genuinely scared for his own safety. That doesn't mean that Sal isn't right. The payoff for this set up comes at the end of the pilot with the escaped convict who is white OR you know what, he could be black too.

I mentioned before that everyone has to have some kind of damage associated with the event. Sal may have been on meds. Now, he may not want to take them. Perhaps he had a psychosis. Now he doesn't care to control it anymore.

The point is, you have written his salt of the earth like Syd. He has a valid point but something needs to be wrong with this guy. Something has to be scary. Something has to stop JJ going after his girl and he wants to get to his girl

- ☞ The phone and the photo of Lindsay. JJ would still reach for his phone. That would be automatic. It won't be there. Ditched in the cave. That would prompt Sal to comment on the phone thing and what happened to his OR he could say, 'Never use em'
- ☞ LENA'S phone is another opportunity to explore the humming and glowing but you can probably cover this in Reese's scene and JJ's cave scene
- ☞ P 19 FLASHBACK incorrectly formatted  
For example:

SLUG LINE

FLASHBACK TO:

Action  
Dialogue

### RETURN TO PRESENT

- ⌘ Lena meets Reese
- ⌘ Format – Check your V.O. has parenthesis around them (V.O)
- ⌘ When Sal and JJ go out in the woods today – JJ has not expressed or pursued a course of action. There is no request made or permission for the shooting party. It's OK for the convict shoot to be a revelation when they are doing it BUT why isn't JJ going after Lindsay? What is driving him to stay? There is merit in making Sal, Syd gone wrong
- ⌘ P 28 Intro of the Sentient. Yeah that works. I'd like to chat more about that
- ⌘ Summary – Give everyone an illness but make them each unique. Sort the phones issue. Separate the elements such as the dead plane victims, the Hiroshima style ash shadows, the floating bodies and weight each discovery.

You can use different characters.

Enhance Sal to remain, salt of the earth but something is very wrong now, consider killing just the black convicts. Make Sal's charming disposition grow scary. Ensure he speculates on what is coming.

Ensure JJ has a plan and acts on it to get to his gal. Perhaps JJ sneaks away and steals the pistol. Perhaps Sal has him in his sights and lets him go

- ⌘ Ends P 28

### ○ Act Two

- ⌘ P 34 Sal starts to speculate on what is coming but he'd be stronger if he were the kind of character that imparted news to create panic. This kind of person amplifies problems, imparts panic, makes it coming your way soon.

For example, 'They'll take the main infrastructure first, gas, phones, the dam. They'll want prisoners. You can imagine what their intelligence people will do to them', or, 'This isn't an occupation, it's an extermination. I wouldn't want to think what they'll do to the women they capture.'

- ⌘ P34 is the end of Act Two

- **Act Three**

- ⌘ We need to get JJ tracking with speed to his destination the dam
- ⌘ No escalation of the conflict
- ⌘ No ticking clock
- ⌘ P36 Reese comments on the K9 dog in reference to the animals. If Reese had been focused on just the K9 dog discovery in Act One, we may have seen the K9 dog, plus a cop car, door open and an ash shadow against the wall that raised a question, still unanswered. We could show the floating bodies in this act somewhere. My point is, **we need to weight each discovery, sequence them and grow them to be bigger and bigger reveals**
- ⌘ Reese and Lena begin to speculate about a comet. Speculation is good. Do they know about the comet? Reese was in a plane. Lena was trapped in a basement. Maybe they don't know about that but they could speculate about the EMP
- ⌘ Re speculation – Some of the dialogue is exposition. Well, you can use it but it is better to create gaps and let the audience work it out. They like to think they are clever. Give them the opportunity
- ⌘ Saying Joey is epileptic tells the audience that you're going to use it. You can just do it and people will know or they can Damian and Carolyn can announce it then. A soldier showing a photo of his girl lets us know what is coming next. Always be one step ahead of them, preferably three
- ⌘ Finding the Amish parents as Ash shadows, that works
- ⌘ The relationship between JJ and the Amish girl lack conflict
- ⌘ The AMISH GIRL's reaction – Consider, she's seen it all happen. She just lost her parents. She would be in shock. Frozen. Scared and she does not like interaction with non-Amish. How do we manifest that?
- ⌘ Why does JJ invest to help her? I'm not saying he wouldn't but why does he?
- ⌘ Here is an idea that allows you to do a reveal and to shorten the script:
  - Find the Amish cart
  - Find the shadows
  - Don't find the girl
  - Go up a tree to get a look-see / Or not
  - See the Amish girl alone on the road
  - See the coalminers coming. When they arrive, they surround her. See that girl the way predators do
  - Let JJ intercept and claim the child as JJ's daughter
  - Now, you have some dangerous sorts wanting the girl for themselves and JJ putting himself on the line to protect her
- ⌘ P45 the AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN – That must be our key to racial diversity ;o) Observed yes. Let's not see who by. YES, I know



I SAID add racial diversity BUT... Let's talk about this. In fact, we may even be able to remove this scene

- ⌘ Reese's objection to going to the crash site. I gather this is a set up
- ⌘ Damian's howl and the wolves' howl, I like it
- ⌘ End of act around P46

#### ○ Act Four

- ⌘ P47 The pulsating wave of light... The sentient scan with T-lux waves creating audio resonance. Will there be light? Look, you can leave it in but it is the audio signature we need to introduce
- ⌘ If we keep this scene - The first meeting between the Amish girl and the Sentient character is too advanced. We need to hold back on revelation and create some more fear and mystery. I know we are looking to create racial diversity and a special relationship between the Amish girl and the Sentient character but this trust is given too fast
- ⌘ A lot of the dialogue between the Amish girl and JJ here is exposition. If the introduction is done right we will know something scared her and that she is terrified etc. We really don't need to cover this in dialogue
- ⌘ The tree and the exchange between the two is not working. No conflict. No issue. Traffic. Seeing the girl on one side then seeing the rough guys coming on the other side to a point of intersection gives us an opportunity for potential threat and conflict. Yes, he can survey the surrounds and see stuff but the conflict will lie in the miners' arrival and he being way up the tree and having to come down again fast
- ⌘ I wrote about this in the prior act review -Imagine a scene with that girl on the road and the coalminers approach, stop and walk up to her. Make the scene all about the men and that girl. Have JJ have to get her away as fast as possible. Have them not know what has happened. Not about her being one of the strange people. About them seeing potential pray on the road and him realizing the danger. He may claim yeah she's my daughter, 'Can't see the resemblance'
- ⌘ End of Act Four around P 56

#### ○ Act Five

- ⌘ I concur that the protagonist should have a specific view of what has happened on Day One. That view ought to shape his decision process. It hasn't. The Chinese strike reference is not seated right because it does not result in action

- ☞ In the last review, I stated I was unhappy with the arrogance of the Army Captain and his choice of dialogue. I argued he turned up because he wanted something. To get what he wanted he may use charm first before the stick. Now, I see a better path in saying less. Having him turn up, see Joey die before them and then simply say, 'Whose idea was it to release the animals?', says it all. You just introduced the big dog nemesis
- ☞ The river of bodies - Gold
- ☞ The dam – Gold
- ☞ Added – The Sentient presence in the city. Good but this can be enhanced with a look down / fly over the city

### Conclusion

I like this work a lot. There is much to be done. More than I originally envisaged but it can be done. Let's schedule a Skype on the weekend or next week to review the review.

Kind regards,



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C.E.O.

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