



Team USA

Monday, July 15, 2019

Hey Jo,

Nice work.

Let's schedule a Skype meet to answer any Qs.

Sentient USA – 4th Draft review

This review addresses;

- Characters
- Conflict
- Writing style
- Standardized descriptions
- Misconceptions about story
- Page by page review – Where the page is not mentioned, there are no notes.

Notes

This is a summary. Specific references are spread throughout the review.

- **Falling ash – More, much more and graduated to reach max by JJ's tree climb.**
- **We need an alien theorist.** What is an alien theorist? This is the person who sees things and starts to put together a big picture of

what's going on. They don't have to say, 'Hey it's a fricken' alien invasion. Rather, you can see their minds working because they are the audience's eyes drawing us to invasion conclusion. **In Sentient USA, Reese or Lena are both excellent choices.**

- Ensure your characters determine objectives and have an arc for the pilot
- Dead pilots and passengers – Don't come back to life. The Sentient target the living.
- Prison escapees limited to ten.
- Jenny (real name?) must be a teenager, say sixteen.
- Sal must be still capable of breeding so no older than say 50s.
- Get into prisoner story earlier
- Standardized descriptions
 - Hiroshima style ash shadows
 - **Full of stars**
A BEING is emerging from the rushing water. It's black yet translucent. Human-shaped. Hunched over at first, it stands. **Its body is filled with flickering star-like elements**
- No need to reference meteors
- Consider the weight and contrast of your characters.

Style

1. **Shot list** - Start thinking like the director. How would you shoot this? Consider, what would be your shot list?
2. **First person POV** - Consider, **in some cases, describing what's happening as if you are in the scene**, a first-person experience.

A high paced, high stakes scene, may not use full sentences. You can create a strobe or staccato effect by using shorter, sharper bursts of words.

3. **More conflict. Different conflict.** There is a need for both.
4. **About the male characters and their relationships with women -** Relationships look very much like **Star trek's Klingon mating ritual.** The females abuse the males and the males bite back. **This is called, 'love.'**

We need more male bite-back.

Premise, execution and structure

There is a problem with the formula. This is apparent in each of the Writers' works including mine.

The end should be building to a climax. We're not seeing that build.

We need to find a solution.

Page by page

Page 1

As per point 2 in the style comments above. Consider **describing what's happening as if you are in the scene**, not only an observer. Try this as an exercise. If it doesn't work, leave it as is.

Page 2

Kinzua dam will feature big in your story. We need an establishing shot that shows the majesty and the power of that dam. To that end consider a fly over, crane up or some kind of establishment shot that shows the power of this beast before JJ and the crew arrive at the utility entrance.

I am not suggesting you add director's shot notes. You're a writer and a good one. Use your imagination to show the director your vision.

Next, we arrive. JJ and Lindsey are talking. We're missing content that shows;

- Lindsey's role at the dam.
- More of the relationship with JJ.

Re the relationship;

- Is she an uptown girl and JJ a working-class man?
- Is she a college graduate and he a tradesman?

You've got options here. You choose. **Right now, we don't know anything about their relationship or what she actually does at the dam.**

That's a problem because JJ will risk his life getting to her.

Consider this style of scenario.

Show the lads stopping at a security **video** button check-in gate.

Buzz.

No response. They have to keep buzzing and let me tell you **Syd will express his displeasure at this.** (Chance for conflict).

Cut to a **male staff member**, who is looking at that video and has to buzz them in. The male staff member will take his sweet time about it.

He will let Lindsay know, eventually, that her man is here. **He will also use it as an opportunity to white-ant JJ.**

Lindsey will be dealing with an issue to do with the dam that foretells of what might go wrong with a power outage.

Who is the guy? Perhaps a co-worker or a higher-level management sort who is targeting Lindsey and wants to get rid of his competition.

That's a paradigm or an archetype that we see and immediately recognize so without any other further information we see JJ is up against it. We also see Lindsey and the importance of her work.

Choose your own but do choose something that sets up her role, their relationship, the power issue and the reason why their relationship is threatened.

Note; in the communication by text after this, Lindsey is non-committal. Have you considered that she just might be overloaded with a significant problem at the dam but that to JJ it looks like she's leaving him?

Regards the crewman speaking Spanish and Syd's response; **Slap that shit down.** He can afford to be more creative and dominant in putting the boys in their place. It is a moral value/code of his.

About the chat between JJ and Lindsay. **Ramp it up.** I'm not talking a beatdown or a full-scale screaming match but **make it about something.** Something we can relate to. That's why I suggested the third party. It's up to you but I strongly recommend a different approach to this relationship that demonstrates the love.

One thing is for sure, JJ needs to assert himself and for us to have any respect for him. He may go over the top, he may have the wrong idea, but he will at least take it on. Call it a character flaw but call it. **Thou shalt not 'whimp' it.**

Page 4

As per notes above. JJ's dialogue when speaking to Lindsey, is passive. **More testosterone required.**

Page 7

- 'JJ making his way down at an unsafe speed.'
- 'Hey, what's gotten into your boy?'
- The wrench.

The falling wrench is a great scene. Make it better.

Here's some hints to ramp it up.

1. 'JJ making his way down at an unsafe speed.' - **Are you describing a retiree spreading molasses in winter? Ramp up this description.**
2. 'Hey, what's gotten into your boy?' – **More conflict. For example; Have your crew not seeing. Have one of them using the radio to chat to some girl or friend he's got back at base in Spanish. Have Syd spot what's coming and grab that radio out of his hand. You choose but ramp it up.**

P11 and 12

Ash – The ash is a reveal and it's significant. You need to build scale into this reveal.

Save the falling ash until they have spotted the Hiroshima style ash shadows around then **when you reveal the ash, cut between different characters so that they all have the experience at pretty much the same time but each time, the rain of ash is greater.**

So, at first, a few flakes then more then cut to a master / wide that shows the valley, dam, area and it's a deluge of ash.

Here is a practical example; The Amish girl who we call Jenny collects the ash. **(JJ doesn't ask her real name).**

Have Jenny capture the first of the falling ash **in her hand and look up**. This is well before the four horsemen arrive. Grow it from there with other characters including Reese and Lena seeing it. By the time we cycle back to her and the arrival of the four horsemen, it can be full-blown. JJ is on top of a tree. He is looking at the whole dam by now.

The only issue is who gets to do the reveal that **the ash is us**.

Note; the falling ash changes the visual of your world and reinforces the post-apocalyptic genre so the reader knows where we are headed.

Dialogue - Reese

Reese should be distinctly different to JJ.

Look at their choice of verbs/actions.

You have paired Reese with Lena.

Lena is a wise-ass so he should be willing to match that. I don't want to take you too far away from tone but...



When I find myself in a difficult situation, I always ask, 'What would ROCKET from Guardians of the Galaxy do?' ;o)

Here's the point. **Make him very different to JJ and give him a bite to face off against Lena.**

Make verb choices that demonstrate the difference. For example; Lena is ragging on him for some choice, would he;

1. **Berate?**
2. **Condemn?**
3. **Compliment followed by a twist that becomes a put-down?**

You choose but there must be greater conflict.

Verb choices tell a lot about a character.

That's even before you consider conflicting objectives and values.

You have many options.

Ghostly shadows – Let's lock-off the description here for the readers so it is uniform across the works.



Select, **'Hiroshima style human ash shadows.'** Why? We immediately identify to the reader what we mean. * Given the reader is old enough to know when WW2 took place, i.e., before WW3. ;o)

P 13

Dead pilots and passengers – If they died in the crash, they ain't coming back. This isn't a zombie story. The Sentient only take the living and they chose during the storm who that would be. The piles of bodies are not dead. They are in a metamorphic state. What is a metamorphic state? Pennsylvania. ;o)

Discovery

Why run back to the plane?

It wasn't pretty at the plane wreck site.

It's not pretty in the terminal.

What's his motivation?

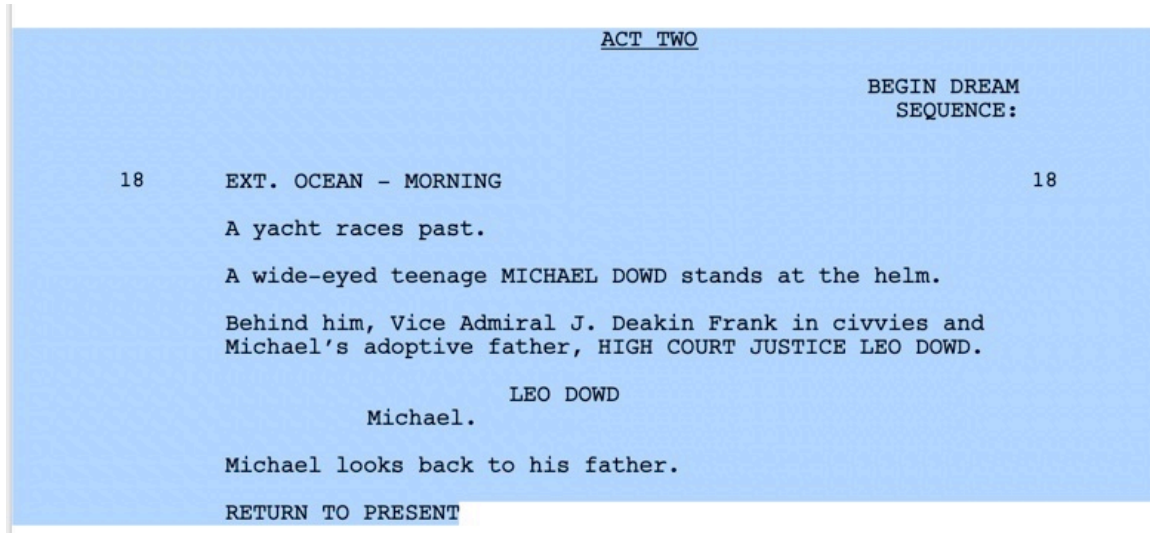
This scene should be about discovery and reveals. You can take your time here and let Reese be your explorer. He may not see everything, but the audience will.

He finds;

- Carnage
- Scattered baggage
- Phones, not just one but dropped phones everywhere all glowing and humming like a Tibetan singing bowl. Put yourself there. The lights are out, the phones represent the light inside and they all glow and resonate together. Spooky dude.
- The Hiroshima style of human ash shadows. At first, he may walk past them, and the ash may take flight, but at some point, either he or the audience are going to see them. Lots of them.
- Finally, a terminal houses a lot of people. Some of those will have been selected. A terminal has doors. If he arrives at the doors to see a pile of bodies stacked to the roof, their phones glowing and humming in sync, now we are in the twilight zone and in a good way.

If, he ever gets back to the terminal, which doesn't look likely in the current plot, he would find the bodies gone.

The DREAMSCAPE – Formatting



P 14

Description – **JJ wakes amidst terror? JJ wakes terrified?**

HE BEGINS TO CRY.

Hell no, he does not!

When his enemies are forcing him to set Jenny or Lindsey or both on fire and throw their barbecued arms and legs to savage dogs, then, he might, just might think about crying.

Right now, his ass has been knocked senseless. He lost his friend and he just had a weird vision of his girl. That's not to mention Philly is toast and God knows who or what has done that.

He's having a bad day but he's going to focus on getting the hell out of dodge and back to his girl.

Cry? Hell, no! Of course, it's the author's choice.

Ash – The ash begins to fall. See my notes about your P 11/12 re how to introduce the ash.

Page 16

Consider intro of the escaped prisoners and the threat they represent here. This is the key decision that will change the structure.

Prisoner numbers - Keep it down to ten escapees.

So, there isn't a mass breakout. That said, Sal will have a list and he will be picking them off.

He will also know the history of each man and his crimes and be able to recite them as he picks over their dead bodies. The ones he's shot.

He may ask, don't suppose you've seen a (describe the look of Dallas)? Describe a horrendous crime perpetrated on a couple. 'He's on my list.'

That's a set up for Dallas and the take down in the last scenes.

Consider, perhaps JJ should encounter two of them, menacing sorts who look to deal out some real pain to JJ. Have Sal shoot them both with the one shot. JJ can't see Sal until he drops.

Why? We can get straight to the prison shot from there and do food and all other conversation along the way. That way, we know exactly what Sal is doing and why and yeah, he may be extreme, but the audience will get him.

Dialogue can be shorter sharper.

For example;

SAL

Relax. I saw, and heard...you coming a long time ago. If I wanted you dead I would have picked you off a hundred yards away/ back.

You can exit the scene earlier in fact right there and we walk them up to the prison and JJ asks, **'What are you doing out here?'**

'My job.' **This is the kind of line he would deliver whilst kicking a dead body and telling JJ about what this particular mother did.** **Demonstrate he is invested in the outcome. Sees himself as an avenger of the wronged. Perhaps its about his own revenge. Maybe he had a daughter killed by one of them, perhaps it was Dallas.**

Then we see the prison and Sal explains just how dangerous the rest of these animals are. Remember, there has not been a mass break-out. There are not enough survivors.

Survivors only survive because the storm interrogates them and determines their DNA / genetics are compatible for breeding.

Page 17

For your consideration...

Let me tell you a secret about SAL.

Sal doesn't like people who disagree with him. He takes it personally. Not to mention, he probably thinks you're a, 'slack-jaw liberal faggot' if you don't think what he thinks.

How do you this scene into an, 'on the edge of your seat' thriller?

Ramp up SAL so that he has a very clear picture of what has happened.

Previously, I recommended discussion about what has happened. There is a greater opportunity for conflict if Sal TELLS JJ, the way it is.

Where JJ may laugh off something, SAL is very serious about the topic.

This is a great opportunity for conflict between the two and at some point, JJ will no longer willing to laugh it off.

What will Sal do now?

The character is dangerous. He could do anything. He could burst into laughter then go the opposite. Anything is possible.

The storm hasn't turned Sal this way. He is this way.

He claims to have been a former prison guard. OK, perhaps he didn't share why he is NO LONGER a guard. May be he was made redundant for a reason.

Get this right and we can take him to the next level.

Regardless, SAL will come to the conclusion that JJ is a sincere young man.

He does after all, save the day.

He may not like slack-jaw liberal faggots, but he dislikes prison escapees more and perhaps, **JJ and his new friends make for great BAIT** for Sal's main preoccupation.

You really don't know with this guy. That's what makes him so dangerous.

Now, we have a character the audience will want to watch.

For your consideration.

Page 18

We can reduce dialogue.

Just have him apply the sap. Don't ask.

Have JJ just watch him doing it then get to the business that we are really interested in which is SAL asking JJ, **'Do you have family/ Who do you have waitin' on you?'**

That's when we get to the talk about his girl and her job at the Dam.

Important note; anything JJ reveals to Sal, Sal may choose to use against JJ in Ep 2 and beyond. After all, he saves JJ and the other's lives. They owe him, at least in his mind.

Consider, Sal is not asking to be polite. He trades in this kind of information and uses it when it works for him.

In the current draft, JJ is the one to reveal, he believes Kinzua will burst. Consider this. **Sal may be the one.**

Sal may be the kind of guy who enjoys one-upmanship / being in control.

If so, Sal should be the one to ASK THE HARD QUESTION, **'What happens to the girlee's dam now the power's quit... Mr. Linesman?'**

'What happens to your girlee now?'

That kind of conflict leads to the question, **'So, what are you going to do about that?'** **'Maybe you can't do anything about it. Maybe you're not that guy.'**

JJ may try to recruit Sal.

'Come with me.'

'No.'

Sal is going to decline that offer because what he really likes to do is hunt and there's plenty of his, 'righteous kills' out there to make.

'What if the dam bursts?'

'All of my/our sins are washed away.'

Page 20

Don't talk about the ham. Just use it. Get it operational with a hand winder.

Have JJ wake up to hearing Sal listening in on it.

I know you've written in, that this is this is his son in Iceland.

I don't know if you want to go anywhere with that in the long term.

Nor, that it adds to the story. Sal may be better off without a family. It doesn't have to be a son. It can be anyone talking and in Iceland.

They can be speaking in Icelandic.

JJ can take over and ask,

'Hello, do you speak English?'

'Where are you?'

'Keflavik air station'

They both hear the message that it's a global event.

Sal – **'Fuck the dam.'** / **'We're all damned now.'**

He'd probably think it's funny.

For Sal, there is some primal joy in knowing he is free to do whatever he wants now. He likes this life.

For JJ, not so and he cares deeply about saving his girl.

Page 24

Reese meets Lena.

What do they want from each other? I mean right then and there, what do they want from each other and how would that change the scene?

P25

Streak in the sky meteor reference – **Remove or replace.**

Page 26

JJ may still ask Sal to come with him.

Sal might come at it this way, **'You can't stop what's coming.'**

JJ's decision to leave could be abrupt.

Have Sal stop him with the pistol.

'Hey'

'You'll need this.'

Page 27 – I like, 'salvi' carved into the handle.

As mentioned previously, the time to intro the prisoners and Sal's mission is much earlier.

Page 29 - 33**Lena and Reese**

They seem light. The event, unexplained and devastating is talked about and there is exposition about background, but there is no weight. For you to create that you will need to get to know those characters better, give them a background, in other words create a character profile for them and perhaps ghosts. This plus an objective. You don't have to write that as exposition. Just know it and it will come out in their choices, objectives, values etc. Right now, they strike me as too light.

You might argue, they are lighter so that we can create contrast and show JJ and Sal as darker but right now you haven't achieved that. **Consider the weight and contrast of your characters.**

Page 40

Character Lena states, 'I'm driving.' Why concede?

Perhaps there is a problem with the males being passive. Whilst the passive you're missing opportunities for conflict. Find the conflict.

And make the conflict about other things, values they like each other but they can't say it.

Page 41

This exposition reads like watching paint dry. Find the conflict.

Page 42

The decision to release the animals should be controversial and hard-fought. Here it seems like a **fait accompli**.

Conflict gives a learning opportunity to get to know the characters.

It should demonstrate the characters' values, tone and objectives.

How can you address the release of the animals and introduce conflict?

Also, what kind of conflict?

Is this management V employee?

Is this co-worker conflict?

Is this relationship conflict?

Is this man versus woman or race versus race?

How about tone?

- Aggressive
- Cynical
- Procedural

Page 45

I gather the issue regarding not wishing to go and see the plane is about Reese dealing with his pain regarding the crash. **If so, force him to go back to the airport.** It's an opportunity for conflict. He can also find the bodies gone.

For example; he will say to Lena, 'You don't want to go there' (to that area), but she does and then they discover there are no bodies. Reese says nothing.

If the page count will blow, then consider not using it but generally it is a good idea to use and reuse everything, especially if we already have the set built. ;o)

Page 46

The scene heading - EXT. MAKESHIFT **SHELETR** – NIGHT
Spelling of shelter.

Re the threat of the animals, Shelter can become helter-skelter if you want to take this somewhere.

I appreciate you are setting it up perhaps for future eps and I like that.

Never the less, if you introduce it, you'll need a face off. Otherwise, just segue between Damian's wolf howls and the howls of the wolves in the wild to let JJ and the audience know they are, 'no longer in Kansas.'

Page 47

The introduction of the Amish girl and the four Horsemen from the mine.

JJ climbs the tree. Sees the dam, the smoking helicopter and lots of bodies in the water.

Here's the structure.

1. We need to see the Amish girl alone in the forest. She can be the first to see the ash.
2. Proceed from here to have all or many of the characters see more and more of the ash then culminate it with JJ in the tree seeing the bigger picture of the dam, the floating bodies and the deluge of ash.

The youngest you can go for the Amish girl is a teenager. Sixteen at least.

Note re the miners – For Ep 2, the fact that they have survived by being in the mine doesn't mean that the Sentient will allow them to continue to live later on.

Only those genetically capable of breeding with the sentient are allowed to survive.

For example; In the Australian season one, a submarine crew encounter a group of the Sentient. They use a female alpha to lure them then kill them all of them except one. We don't explain why but leave it as a gap for the audience to fill in. The one was spared because he has the genetic code they want.

Page 48 - conflict with the miners.

Regarding the miners' reaction and their choice to check out the girl, **not sold on this.**

They really don't know what's going on yet and they will want to know what's going on. They may be angry about that. They may be suspicious of JJ.

Those men will have families so they will be thinking about that.

I don't buy that they're all going to be willing to rape Jenny.

Perhaps one, may say something inappropriate that gives us an indication there is a problem with this one but for all of them to have become an armed gang overnight, no, that won't work. For the prisoners yes. Not these guys. They'd need to evolve or de-evolve.

'The measure of a man is what he would do if he knew he couldn't be caught.'

These guys don't know, it's the end of everything, yet.

Whatever inappropriate move the miner makes, JJ will have to put him back in his place.

What do they want from each other? That's where your conflict lies. Maybe the miners want answers and they think JJ might know. Maybe they might challenge him and say, 'She's not your daughter. She had better come with us.'

Maybe they try to make out he is the predator.

The foundations of the scene and the characters needs work to ring true.

The line regarding, 'odd folk running around', **it's not working.**

They need a specific objective and it must be personal and true. They need to act on that.

JJ may use diplomacy but at some point, he should step up. The moment he pulls the gun, I think he weakens his position and we lose the tension.

It is the unresolved tension and the thought that there is a threat coming that is the stronger sell.

Page 49

The bearded guy the miners are now talking about government plot.

Whilst we are here, let's also address Sal's theory.

Previously, I had advised, 'There needs to be speculation about what has happened.' Let's take that one step further.

It should be graduated.

Propose the sum $2 + 2$ but don't tell the audience the answer is 4.

This isn't formula. This is specific to your work because it suits your characters more to demonstrate paranoia but if they use that as an opportunity to go into a monologue, we'll lose the audience. Let the audience leap into that gap and fill it in with their own paranoia about government and conspiracy.

Maybe they need to ask JJ tough questions that propose their theories and then accuse JJ of something.

We also get the idea that people are taking things into their own hands. There's that line about until the lights come back on.

Page 51

It comes to a climax with the with JJ pulling the gun.

See my notes P48.

Page 57

Jenny bolts fearing danger.

Not sold on this choice.

Find a better reason.

The character of SAM from the Australian script is drawn to the Sentient.

Perhaps she who is called Jenny becomes aware of their presence and goes to the riverside. Let's discuss.

Page 59

Captain Dwyer only needs to ask one question, **'Who let the animals out?'**

Page 61 -Stand-off between Dallas and JJ

Sal shoots Dallas and saves the day. Now, this scene works a lot better if we know Sal's motivation and that he has been tracking JJ as bait.

Page 62

Full of stars – See standardized descriptions

Conclusion

Well done.

We're going to take this work to the next level in prep for our trip to market.

Your work is very important to the franchise. It must be beyond excellent and it will be.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David" in a cursive, flowing script.

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