

Coverage, Ink.

PROFESSIONAL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS, DEVELOPMENT AND EDITING

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COVERAGE, INK. ANALYSIS

TITLE:	TITLE
LOCALE:	DC, in-flight, assorted global locations
WRITER(S):	
PERIOD:	the present
FORM:	screenplay
GENRE:	action/thriller
BUDGET:	high
PAGES:	113
DRAFT DATE:	n/a
COVERAGE DATE:	
PREPARED BY:	

LOGLINE

As North Korea instigates WWIII with a massive nuclear missile strike on the U.S., a widower Air Marshal joins forces with an aging pilot to land the last surviving plane in the air safely.

SYNOPSIS

Off the coast of Somalia, SOMALI PIRATES raid a foreign oil tanker, populated with NORTH KOREAN CREWMEN. Instead of finding oil, the Pirates discovers nuclear warheads, shortly before hidden NORTH KOREAN SOLDIERS fatally gun down the Somali intruders...

In a Chicago suburb, former Marine CODY WILMOT gives a loving goodbye to daughter CHELSEA (5) and his mother MIA, as he heads out for a three-day work assignment. Elsewhere, LEO CROMWELL (61) attends an addiction-recovery meeting in a church basement. Meanwhile, MOLLY JAMES (28) finds boyfriend BILLY with another woman, and storms off with her guitar case in hand. Waiting at an airport juice bar, Cody notices a TV report, which mentions the breakdown of talks between the U.S. and North Korea...

Cody boards a 737 plane - Clear Skies, flight 533 -- and asks sexy attendant SARA to seat him Coach; he clearly has a professional, as-yet-unspecified relationship with the airline. We soon meet

several passengers (big CAL, Wall Streeter VERNON, worried ELIAZAR, Molly, lovers MILES and TRINA), flight attendants (NEAL and ANITA); and co-pilot LEO and pilot DALE (40s).

At Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado, USAF Technical Sergeant CASSANDRA warns MAJOR UZAROWICZ that the satellites comprising the North Warning System (NWS) are unresponsive. Uzarowicz dismisses the non-responsiveness as mere technical glitches...

Back on Flight 533, now airborne, pilot Dale speaks condescendingly to co-pilot Leo, who apparently is just back to work after a stint in rehab. The flight is destined for Nashville. Cody sits next to Molly, who peppers him with questions about his military background; he suspects her peace-*nik* vibe and remains reticent. The plane soon passes over Cincinnati.

Meanwhile, Tech Sergeant Cassandra notices another NWS satellite go dark, and alerts LT. SILAS KIRKWOOD at the National Security Agency in Maryland. Kirkwood doesn't believe the situation is dire, but acknowledges the massive blind spots in the NWS.

Now in the Pacific Ocean, the North Korean-manned oil tanker prepares its nuclear missiles for launch...

On the 737, Molly playfully chats with Cody, who claims to be a software-tech salesman. Molly reveals that she works in radio sales, and teases him about his military roots. In the cockpit, Dale ignores Leo's suggestion to disengage the autopilot. Suddenly, a North Korean nuclear missile whizzes by the plane and barrels toward Cincinnati. At Peterson, Cassandra and colleague MCHENRY alert Uzarowicz that 58 North Korean missiles are heading toward America, all of them launched from tankers surrounding the U.S. It's a massive sneak attack...

Leo and Dale argue as their plane veers wildly, and Dale finally takes Leo's advice to switch to manual, as passengers panic. Cody sees the missile descending upon Cincinnati, which is incinerated, sending up a mushroom cloud. Everyone on the plane soon realizes that North Korea is the likely culprit, and angry eyes turn upon a young KOREAN FAMILY on the flight. As Leo coaxes Dale to ascend the plane as quickly as possible, Cody reveals himself as an undercover U.S. Air Marshal, and tries to retain order among the distraught passengers. He reassures them that they will land at the nearest available airport.

Realizing that his children died in Cincinnati, Dale begins to melt down, and Leo grows concerned about the pilot's ability to function. As the plane narrowly climbs above the nuclear cloud, passenger Eliazar becomes increasingly distraught, insisting that the plane arrive at Nashville, where his wife is in critical condition. Forced to subdue Eliazar with zip-ties, Cody reveals that his own wife died of leukemia a few years earlier. As things

briefly calm down, Molly describes her recent breakup to Cody, who responds in kind by recounting a haunting suicide mission in Fallujah, which made him abandon his obedient attitude toward military authority.

At Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming, American missiles are launched in a counter-attack...

On the plane, attendant Sara tries to restore calm by serving drinks. Unable to connect with ground communications, Leo urges Dale to head toward Nashville as a possible landing site. Cal tells other passengers that Nashville is too central, that the plane should land at a remote town. At Peterson, Cassandra and McHenry inform Uzarowicz that thousands of planes are down; their job is to help the planes that are airborne to land safely. Cody tells Eliazar that he must be prepared to move on with his life. Cal and Vernon confront Cody, and insist that Nashville is not a safe landing destination due to radiation. Vernon shoves Cody, who eventually subdues both him and big Cal, with Molly's assistance.

As the plane descends toward Nashville, the pilots realize that Nashville has been hit as well. Pandemonium ensues as the plane starts to overheat and plummet. Cody helps Leo and an increasingly untethered Dale to regain control of the plane. Leo activates the standby flight systems, and miraculously pulls the plane out of its power dive, as a nuclear cloud rises from Nashville. Soon, major U.S. cities - Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. - are incinerated. Cody reminds the panicked passengers that they're still alive, and they need to find a safe haven. Cody recalls a remote destination - Chiapas, Mexico - where he honeymooned, and suggests that the pilots head in that direction.

Dale rejects the idea, and dismisses Cody, who sobs in frustration and grief in the lavatory, shocking those who can hear him. Molly gently reminds Cody to face the situation and to move on, even though he knows his daughter is now dead. Cassandra finally makes contact with Dale, who ignores her warning to land beyond U.S. borders if possible. Leo finally unlocks the cockpit, allowing Cody, Vernon, and Cal to storm inside and subdue pilot Dale. Leo becomes the pilot, and Cassandra maps out a route to Chiapas. Soon after, a nuclear missile wipes out Peterson.

Dale breaks free and urges his fellow passengers to allow the plane to crash, since everyone they love is now dead. Dale nearly pulls open the emergency exit door, until Cody talks him down. Dale grabs Cody's gun, however, and shoots himself in the mouth. The bullet cracks a window, pulling air from the cabin. Dale is yanked into the open window, effectively plugging the vacuum. Cody tells the passengers that they're aiming for Mexico, and he quietly tells young girl DAWN that she can keep the toy plane he intended to give to his own daughter.

Leo notices the plane's gas level dropping precipitously, but reassures Cody that everything is going as planned. The plane takes a winding route toward Mexico, avoiding the nuclear clouds of decimated cities. Leo reveals that he became addicted to Vicodin after a shoulder surgery, and accidentally taxied a plane into a luggage truck. Cody commends Leo's comeback and realizes the plane is nearly out of fuel. Leo promises to worry about the landing, if Cody takes care of the passengers.

Cody prepares everyone for a rough landing, and this time, the passengers cooperate fully. Cody sits next to young Dawn, reassuring the scared girl, as the plane descends toward a jagged mountain range in Mexico. Smashing into a peak, the plane loses a wing, lurching the passengers violently. Leo struggles to deploy the landing gear, as the plane careens along a plateau, heading to a waterfall drop-off. Leo finally engages the landing gear, which digs into the ground, pushing the nose of the plane into the ground. The cockpit crushed, Leo dies in a final moment of pride, knowing that he helped saved passengers.

Cody corrals the surviving passengers to exit the cabin, which is filling with flames. Cody shoots the stuck emergency-exit door, allowing an escape route. Everyone escapes, just as the plane explodes and falls over the drop-off. Devastated but alive, the survivors huddle together, and Molly gives Cody a kiss. Molly sings a beautiful rendition of "Amazing Grace" as Cody honors Leo's bravery. Molly and Cody subsequently broach the topic of survival, until an international helicopter rescue team approaches. Though the future of the world remains deeply uncertain, Cody expresses optimism for the future of mankind..

COMMENTS

OVERALL

[title] is a high concept, commercially viable disaster script in need of surgical rewrite to reconcile anomalous plotting, refine character and sharpen dialogue. The project has a solid foundation and is close to working on several levels. A thorough rewrite is need though to address multiple issues, most of which are standard progression requirements to move from one draft to the next. The essential template is in place, so the rewrite should go fast - but the script really ought not be sent out without it.

Let's take flight...

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STORY

The spine of the story rests on assumptions that should be strengthened to win audience confidence. Breaking it down:

1. North Korea decides to attack the US with nuclear missiles launched from empty oil 'tankers' positioned strategically but undetected around the world.
2. A lone female tech Sergeant at NORAD voices her fears that missile tracking devices are not functioning properly - she is ignored.
3. All early warning missile attack and response technology fails (globally) and thousands of missiles fly through the sky to hit every major metropolitan target in the US.
4. One lone commuter flight dodges the missiles and surges over the nuclear fallout seeking to survive and escape to Mexico.

This is the story of the people on that flight.

If we are to believe #4 (the functioning, emotional, action and character driven body of this screenplay,) then we must be plausibly convinced of 1 to 3.

At this point, story setup could be brainstormed for

improvement. The essential facts of the premise in its current form raises countless "but what about x, y & z" questions (e.g., How can you launch missiles from tankers/how did the missiles go undetected and if the US systems were hacked, what about Russia's/Europe's, etc. Even non missile-related North Korean movements are being tracked by satellites, so why does that infrastructure not trigger alerts...etc. etc.)

STRUCTURE

Except for the flaw in setup logic mentioned above, structure works well for the rest of the script - although Cody's (over)reaction at the end of Act Two seems out of character for him and should be revisited.

CHARACTERS

All characters - except Sara/Neal/Dawn and Asian Businesswoman - need some calibration - subtly - to add dimension, most notably Dale, Vernon, Cal, Molly, Eliazar and Cody. Suggestions would include a slight change in backstory for the two principals, and general dialogue revisions.

For example:

MOLLY AND CODY - Molly seems a little aggressive, even predatory and fickle - she's just walked out on her boyfriend (their fight seemed shallow, not clearly seeing the payoff of this intro for her character development) - Within hours she's zooming in on Cody - knowing he's married with a daughter.

If Cody were a single Dad maybe - whose Mom cares for Chelsea while he travels - it would increase sympathy and jeopardy for his character (when the bomb drops) and slightly purify Molly's (and Sara's) interest in him. Both are made less sympathetic by their willingness to be home-wreckers - showing, even in moments of life and death, that they've no qualms about infidelity or betraying their own gender (Mia).

If Mia were Cody's Mom - the opening sequence would play out more or less as is - then Sara's exchange with Neal (about the wife always winning) could be revised to provide the reveal (making Cody a widower possibly).

Molly's character is undermined by many issues (IMHO) - she's

supposed to be feisty, opinionated, ambitious for her career, outgoing etc. And she is on the page - but she is also irritating - her anti-establishment dialogue could be alienating instead of endearing (and she sounds a little bit silly). It seems at moments that even Cody doesn't want to get stuck sitting beside her on the plane. Little traits, like Molly play punching Cody - she does it twice, those are not very sweet touches. So generally, her speeches and backstory might be reconsidered. What would make the audience be invested in her A, surviving the disaster and B, being Cody's future in this tragic new world. Right now, this jury's out on both.

Cody is a strong character - but again, I wonder if it might be wise to reconsider his emotional breakdown at the end of Act Two? Especially his confessional speech which really contradicts everything we've known about him - or need to know to make it to the other side of the disaster. It is fresh and somewhat original for the genre - but Die Hard and Bond and all the other hero driven action adventure stories are beloved because they stay within the rules of the game. It would be hard to imagine Bruce Willis breaking down (in front of all the people he's charged to save) in the middle of the movie (unless it were a plot device to fake out the bad guy). So while Cody is entitled to tender moments of vulnerability alone - that's not the same as the public, I am not worthy, confessional forum given to him here.

LEO

Leo and his backstory work well - but the details of it - and the manner of the reveal seem a little clunky. We buy that Cody and he are friends, and so Cody is a good candidate to explain (the terrible thing that Leo did) but it feels expositional, like a lost opportunity - Leo should have his 'confessional' moment for himself perhaps - *he* gets to tell someone what he actually did - even if it's Cody.

DALE

Dale's emotional temperature goes up and down - and the spine of his character goes in and out of focus. One minute he's super confident Captain putting down an older, clearly more experienced Vet Pilot - the next minute he's crying. Then he pulls it together again to stand up to Cody, then he's crying again. Generally, it would help to go through his dialogue with Leo for both character and plotting details - because

even with two reads of those sequences, the clarity was missing - especially given the fact that Dale loses all control, shows his cowardice and almost kills everyone. He's supposed to be the Captain. That's a very steep character fall which needs to be handled more carefully. And if he does believe they're all going to die, what's his hurry anyway? (His actual death scene played out well - but the consequences got resolved sort of magically fast. And raised the question, wouldn't passengers get sickened by the nuclear pollution in the air?)

VERNON and CAL

Both had very obvious - on the nose dialogue - and their challenge to, and conflict with Cody felt manufactured. It would be a good idea to go back through each of their speeches and see if there aren't more subtle ways to convey the character conceit intended. For example, Cal asks if there's any news on a blackberry, seconds after the explosion hits - seems out of context and weakens the scene. If the point is that he is that pesky guy, then capitalize on the conflict and have someone tell him not to ask stupid questions.

SARA vs MOLLY

Sara's character worked very well - except to say that she kicked Molly's ass on the likability scale and left us wondering why Cody would not fall for her. So Sara is a barometer for the work that remains to be done on Molly.

ELIAZAR

Even though he has a small part, his character is crucial for conflict and tension early in Act Two and should work better. When he does enter the scene, he kind of springs out of nowhere and his motives are bewildering. Everybody on the plane is traumatized and wants to get to their family - so he needs another, more plausible reason to behave as he does and make sense. It would help to introduce him earlier in pre-boarding - to give him a justifiable jeopardy so that the audience accepts that the stakes are higher for him in the moment he loses it. Maybe we first see him sweating it on the phone - his child/wife has been in an accident - he's trying to make it back to Nashville to get to the ER - he's already in the grips of life and death - so his freak-out is sincere, not just organic to crisis context.

PLOT LOGIC -

We've looked at problems with story setup in general - and page 21 starts the specifics of the issue. It's plausible that Cassandra gets the brushoff from her Commander - but then to see Missile Defense Shields at 34% capacity because of across the board system failure - those are metrics overseen by thousands of eyes in countries all over the world - NORAD would be at Def Con 1 at a far lower % failure. So a better reasoning/logic needs to be set up by this point.

Also, didn't Cody - a lowly air Marshall get a Charlie warning before he boarded the plane? What was it, and how did it relate to the Norad alerts? If warnings like that were sent out - why were any flights allowed airborne?

p 26 - The missile flies past the cockpit - it's okay that the passengers/crew would have no idea how missiles could get so far into US air space without shields going up - but not okay for the audience ultimately to not really understand how.

The next issues rest with plot logic in actual sequences (not general story) -

The sequence onboard between the time everyone saw the missile to the time it exploded feels stretched - and the tail spin effect on the actual aircraft itself seems to have left people able to move about and do things that seem unlikely - it might help to revisit this and other similar sequences to tighten them all up.

When Leo realizes this version of the 18 year old plane was built with an emergency back-up system, he needs to shout that out - it's a major plot point for the sequence that's left in action description now.

Later, also in the cockpit when the fuel gauge goes from half to zero - we need more clarity on what actually happened.

TONE - Very good generally. Nice roller coaster action terror ride. Occasional lapses in dialogue which need to be looked at - see Molly, Cal & Vernon. And further little tonal lapses such as when Neal grabs the gin - might be nice touch elsewhere, but jarring in this exact moment of high

crisis.

MARKETABILITY

Script could have real legs after the next draft.

MISCELLANEOUS

Opening - "Ripping through space, past galaxies **and** swirling nebulae **and** planets **and** finally a gorgeous blue-green world lit by a brilliant yellow sun, **and** we CONTINUE zooming through the skies until we find..."

Note: too many "ands" here.

Leaders' dialogue p 2. - a tad too expositional/on the nose

LEADER

Don't worry. They know better than to fight back. We will treat them well until the ransom is paid for their cargo. It is all a business transaction.

Likewise the NK General p 4:

NORTH KOREAN GENERAL

Dump the bodies. Continue our course. The Supreme Leader's greatest moment is in sight.

Description p 4. "It goes down flatulently" - rethink descriptions like this.

Chelsea's dialogue "seriously" (She is 4, so make the joke a little more subtle).

Then Cody's statement - she is four - it didn't have a question mark, but the point was confusing. Is he suggesting he didn't know how old she was? Is Mia suggesting that?

Cody's cell phone plays "Limelight" by Rush. Better not to i.d. the ringtone.

p 10, Neil is misspelled. Elsewhere = Neal.

A note here about character descriptions in general. Maybe

take another look at all of them - We're told Cody is a Texan (maybe belongs under his first speech to give us accent reveal since it's not a character description, well, maybe it is).

Miles is introduced/described as a "teaching assistant" - find a visual cue to suggest character not occupation. Likewise with Dale - "charming but a bit of a dick" - we will get to know him through his actions but it's a cheat here.

Note on further minor dialogue issues. Some dialogue happens as asides by the character to self - :

Cody

p 8 "I'll bring you back an airplane."

p 10 "Jesus Christ, what the..."

Molly

p 16 - gives herself a pep talk in the mirror - maybe it could just be put in the lyrics she belts out to herself instead

p 22 "Oh man, what the fuck is going on."

Asides in dialogue dip the level accomplished elsewhere in the script - and add nothing.

Error on p 59 Says "Dale takes the Captain's chair" should be Leo.

p 72 "She strides forward." Should be 'he'?

p 74 says its a Chinese Missile - but isn't it North Korean?

p 76 Sara backs off because Eliazar looks at her - why would his interest affect her struggle for Cody with Molly?

CONCLUSION

[title] has commercial potential. It has a great title. The story of a lone commuter flight trapped airborne in the middle of a nuclear attack is fresh, original, and highly saleable. The script needs a very careful reworking for story, dialogue, character and plotting - but all the vital ingredients are there. Would recommend looking at scripts for Flight of the Phoenix, original and remake; Top Gun; Passenger 57; Air Force One etc. - especially to study timing and plotting of action sequences in blocks to reconcile some

pacing and logic issues as the action unfolds. Good luck
with the next draft - make it fly!



CRITERIA	YOU BET!	YES	KINDA-SORTA	NOT SO MUCH	N/A
Strong PREMISE?		X			
Is the material ORIGINAL?		X	X		
Is the script COMMERCIAL? (mainstream or indie)		X			
Is the PROTAGONIST dimensional, well-developed?			X		
Does the story have a clear ANTAGONIST or ANTAGONISTIC FORCE?			X		
Are the SECONDARY CHARACTERS well-developed and believable?			X		
Is the STORYLINE believable and effective?			X		
Does the FOCUS remain clearly on the protagonist and not get lost in secondary characters' subplots?			X		
Are the STAKES high? If the protagonist fails in his/her quest, are the consequences of failure dire?	X				
Does the story have a strong STRUCTURE, 3-Act or other?		X			
Do the first ten pages set the TONE for the rest of the story?	X				
Is the TONE consistent throughout?	X				
Is the story mythology/world-building well-developed and effective?		X			
Does the script have solid PACING?		X			
Does each scene move the story forward?		X			
Does the CONFLICT rise effectively?		X			
Does character DIALOGUE sound natural?			X		
Does the DIALOGUE contain sufficient subtext?			X		

Is the plot conveyed clearly, with enough direct exposition?		X			
Does the writer's STYLE reflect professional quality and ability?		X			
Is the writing tight and punchy, with a minimum of bloat?	X				
Length appropriate for genre?		X			
Format/Mechanics/Spelling/Grammar?		X			
Is the TITLE a grabber? Does it reflect the material's genre or tone?	X				
Does the script have a clear THEME or THEMES?			X		
Does the story have a clear target audience, and does the tone of the script reflect that audience from start to finish?		X			

SCRIPT: PASS
WRITER: CONSIDER WITH RESERVATIONS

(Ratings scale: Recommend, Strong Consider, Consider, Consider with Reservations, Pass. The vast majority of screenplays submitted are a "pass." It generally takes a lot of drafts and elbow grease to get a "consider.")

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Thanks for submitting your screenplay to Coverage Ink! We hope the analysis gives you the info you need to make the script as good as it can be. Here are some resources you may find helpful:

<http://www.coverageink.blogspot.com>

Our blog! Chock full of news, events, tips, columns and intel.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTVSfzynE68>

Our free video "Surviving Coverage." This is how we deal with getting feedback on our own projects.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGZSwh242PQ>

Our free video "Writer, Edit Thyself." Invaluable tips on figuring out what to trim and making your script as lean and mean as can be.

<http://www.coverageink.com/services/specguide.html>

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