



COVERAGE, INK. COVERAGE

TITLE:
LOCALE: Europe, U.S.A.
AUTHOR:
PERIOD: 1930s/1940s
FORM: Screenplay
GENRE: Thriller
BUDGET: High
DRAFT DATE:
COVERAGE DATE:
PREPARED BY:

LOGLINE:

The scientific community finds itself embroiled in matters of war and peace as the nuclear arms race heats up during World War II.

SYNOPSIS:

Berlin, 1938. Professor Otto Hahn sends a letter to colleague Lise Meitner in Sweden, asking her to check the results of a recent experiment. Lise shares the data with nephew Otto Frisch and it doesn't take long before they realize the atom has been split. In January, Frisch travels to Copenhagen to meet with Professor Niels Bohr. After briefly meeting Bohr's assistant Kristine, Niels gives the scientist the new revelation and before long, Bohr is on his way to America, where he meets with Einstein, Teller and Fermi, with whom he shares the grand information.

April, 1940. The Nazis march across Europe and Bohr and Fermi learn that Hitler is in search of certain materials valuable in the pursuit of atomic energy. As calls go out for Bohr to become more involved in the creation of an atomic weapon, he champions the idea that such a device would be the ultimate deterrent to war, an opinion not shared by everyone.

Kristine and R.A.F. officer Eric Scott flirt as Bohr travels to meet with King Christian, who champions Bohr as a hero to local Jews. At the War Ministry in Berlin, Dr. Hahn meets with Dr. Warner Heisenberg to discuss a massive effort to

ramp up the creation of a pineapple-sized bomb. In London, Frisch and Eric discuss a contact in the Danish underground named “Horatio” but are interrupted by an air raid during the Nazi blitz.

Bohr uses Tom Mix analogies to explain physics to students and is later surprised to find out that Kristine has an impressive knowledge of war and weaponry. Kristine heads out to the county to meet up with a group of resistance fighters as they receive weapons dropped from airplanes above. Heisenberg continues to trumpet Bohr’s importance, despite pushback from those offended by the reliance on a “half-Jew” and Kristine starts up a relationship with the overweight, balding Duckwitz, telling him she practically worships Heisenberg but learning that the Nazis are banning open discussion of science. She shares the info with Bohr, who crusades against secrecy.

Heisenberg’s experiments go awry and an explosion tears through the “virus house.” News of the disaster gets out, along with word that Bohr plans to meet with Heisenberg, prompting Eric to worry that the Gestapo will soon have Bohr and thus the tide will shift in their favor. He sends a message to Horatio in hopes of stopping the Nazis from getting their prize. Duckwitz takes Kristine to meet Heisenberg and afterwards she heads out with the resistance fighters, including teenager Jens. Bohr and wife Margrethe argue about his position as Kristine and the resistance fighters bomb a German freight train.

Heisenberg calls upon Bohr, pleading with him to join the Nazis, if only to slow down their progress.

Kristin heads to Bohr’s place, overhears the conversation with Heisenberg, and burns blueprints in the fireplace. Bohr is incensed by what Heisenberg says to him and he throws him out. Bohr goes to the Royal Theater to see a play. Kristine is there too and she finds a Gestapo agent and informs the resistance fighters, who stop an assassin from killing Bohr, despite Duckwitz’s efforts to put him in the crosshairs. The assassin is killed and is found to have an envelope labeled “Horatio” in his pocket.

German High Commandant Dr. Warner Best informs Duckwitz that Kristine is working with them before sending Kristine to find “Knightsbridge.” He further reveals that the Danish Jews will be rounded up and finished off but that Bohr must appear to have been killed by someone else, lest his death sway public favor.

Kristine calls Bohr’s house to tell him that the Nazis are coming so Bohr makes a daring escape on a bike. He hides out in a shed, then gets help from a baker before meeting with Kristine and Margrethe on Elsinore Beach. They get in a rowboat and try to row to safety, though the waters are choppy and patrol boats threaten to pick them up. They safely make it to a Swedish fishing village, though, where Kristine meets up with Eric, the two proving to be “Horatio” and

“Knightbridge.” They board a train and continue toward freedom and Bohr becomes obsessed with stopping a Jewish holocaust. Eric and Kristine make love on the train and as the Germans round up Jews elsewhere, Bohr and crew make their way to safety inside a Stockholm hotel room.

Bohr meets with King Gustav but is disappointed to find little interest in a direct appeal to Hitler. Bohr sees photos of Kristine in sexual poses with Duckwitz before nearly collapsing and when she tries to spirit him away, he goes on the run again. Kristine gives chase and when Eric questions her, she shoots him. Her pursuit of Bohr continues until teenaged resistance fighter Jens guns her down.

Bohr is picked up by the British and flown away in a bomber, which ends up in a fire fight as Bohr passes out from lack of oxygen.

New Mexico, 1945. Bohr, very much alive, oversees the first atomic detonation test alongside Oppenheimer, Fermi, and Teller. Meitner writes a letter, praising Bohr’s efforts, which have helped the Danish Jews return from Sweden. She also speaks of Bohr’s assurances from FDR that atomic bombs would be used only as deterrents, even as newspaper reports announce the bombing of Japan.

COMMENTS:

OVERALL – (TITLE) is a compelling script with interesting characters, good subject matter, and strong visuals. About the atomic arms race during World War II, this script deals with make-or-break issues that literally shaped our world. While the writers have done a great job of infusing this with verisimilitude, giving us detailed, layered characters, and dialogue that rings true, there is also a structural concern here, as the story takes quite a while to progress, struggles to offer a clear protagonist, and doesn't make full use of its set pieces. We spend a lot of time with characters of minor importance and don't really develop a rooting interest in a single character until the Third Act. The dialogue, while brimming with good moments, is burdened with too much of this script's heavy lifting, with the thoughts of scientists dominating much of the first half and a visually static conversation between two men taking up over ten pages at the midpoint. The fact is that all of the individual details of this script are good – good characters, good dialogue, good set pieces – but they need to be balanced in a way that makes better use of them. We need to know our protagonist much sooner, know what to root for much sooner, and see the story through suspense, action, and set pieces, as opposed to less visually compelling dialogue scenes. There's a ton of great stuff here and the writers' talents are certainly on display, but in order to really make (TITLE) a viable spec, another pass appears to be in order.

STRUCTURE/PLOT – All of the pieces of this script are in place. The characters, the setting, the relationships, the dialogue... it's all there. Now it's time to re-think the structure, to streamline the story a bit and feature the suspenseful and action-packed moments rather than washing past them for the sake of dialogue. A smart exercise would be to use a structural template (the one provided in Blake Snyder's "Save the Cat" is a very good one but there are plenty of others that can do the same thing) and plug the beats in. In doing so, the writers will find that this script is slow to develop in the beginning and lacks a clear protagonist. By hitting the key structural beats, though, and delivering at least one big, sharp action/suspense set piece in each act, they can re-shape what is currently an unfocused look at interesting people in an interesting time into a sharp, cutting, fast-paced espionage thriller of the first order. Let's look at some of the plot points in need or adjustment...

FOCUS – (TITLE) is about something very interesting at its core but the story utilized to speak to this subject matter is rather unfocused. It's important to have a protagonist on a definable journey, as that is where rooting interest comes from. But who is the protagonist in (TITLE)? And what is their goal? Is it Bohr, determined to keep scientific discovery public? Or to survive? Or to stop a holocaust? Is it Kristine, working with the resistance? Or for the other side? Is it Frisch? Or Eric? It's very hard to tell, largely because the script opens with the travel of information from one character to another and even once it's found its destination, the use of that information has no clear direction moving forward.

Once the information finally makes its way to Bohr, there is a sense that the story belongs to Kristine, who seems to be the one character with a mission and visual actions. We see her plotting, making contacts, working with the resistance. This seems to be the focus of the script in the Second Act. But in the Third Act, it's all about Bohr, who outruns his pursuers in the climax and is the featured player in the resolution. While he was always a part of this story prior to that, most of what he did was talk. Screenplays are driven by action and audiences respond to action more than anything else, which is why the natural tendency is to follow Kristine and even root for her, which makes it a bit unsettling when she doesn't turn out to be the most important character in the climax. Identifying the protagonist and giving them a clearer, more active goal is crucial. This is not to say there can't be a lot of moving parts or a complicated narrative. This is not to say twists and turns revealing people to be something other than what we thought are a bad thing. But rooting interest is probably the most valuable element in a screenplay because it is what keeps the audience engaged from "Fade In" to "Fade Out." If the story is too unfocused to have that rooting interest, then there's a problem. That's the issue here. Clarify the hero and their goals and the audience will follow whatever path they may find themselves on.

TONE – Another area for confusion comes from the tone of this script. From the absent-minded bumbling and Tom Mix hat-wearing antics of Professor Bohr to the visuals of key characters traveling through forts on skis, the First Act of this script has a bit of a goofball, comedic tone. But the subsequent two acts are far more serious, becoming violent and even action-packed in the end. Escalating the tension level over the course of a script is a good thing but as drastic a tonal shift as this is can be jarring for the audience. Since the serious subject matter that dominates the Second and Third Acts is more important than the flippant portrayals of the First Act, a wise choice would be to employ the more serious tone from the outset. This is not to say that comic relief won't work, just that it shouldn't work against the overall tone of the story. A modification of the First Act to match the overall tone of the script will have a positive ripple effect throughout.

BOOKENDS – This script is bookended by letters, the first from Dr. Otto Hahn to Lise Meitner, the second from Meitner to Hahn. There is great symmetry in this device and from a structural standpoint, the writer is to be commended for utilizing it. That said, there is also a troubling issue with these letters, in that they are to and from characters who don't really matter. Though Hahn appears briefly in the First Act, we don't ever see him after page 24. Meitner appears even less in the First Act and then pops up briefly in the resolution as she's writing the letter. These aren't even really secondary characters but tertiary characters. They are a generation removed from the story itself, really just serving as expository devices. Since it's tough to catch hold of a protagonist from the outset, it's best not to muddle things by starting and ending the script with two characters that won't fact into the rest of the story. The bookends are a good

device but unless they feature characters the movie is actually about, they don't merit keeping.

ACTION AND SUSPENSE – This script plays best when the suspense is strong and when there is action to be seen. Air raids, trains being attacked, snipers putting key characters in the crosshairs... these are the good moments in this script. They work particularly well with the WWII setting, giving the script an espionage thriller vibe. Unfortunately a great deal of this script steers away from such things, particularly in the first two acts, as dialogue tends to dominate the early parts of the script. But the musings of scientists can only carry the story so far before the audience will want action, suspense, and visuals. The more the debate can be seen in the forefront of action, the better. What about opening with the bombing raid rather than letters? Or the attack on the train? What about showing that Bohr is being followed early in the script to establish tension? His talking about scientific principles will only engage the audience so long as they know that his thoughts are dangerous to the enemy, thus meaning they have a vested interest in shutting him up. Get to the tension in a hurry and keep the action coming. That's the best way to keep the audience on-board for the discussions.

BOHR AND HEISENBERG – Heisenberg shows up to speak with Bohr on page 54. The conversation, while intercut briefly with a shot of Kristine eavesdropping, runs on until page 65. That's a long, long conversation. And while the subject matter may be important, the reality is that audiences just aren't going to want to sit through this much dialogue without more action. Even at half its current length, this conversation would feel a bit long. This is a major bumping point halfway through the script, right where things need to turn a corner and start amping up. While the script does get moving in a hurry about ten pages later, the reality is that this lengthy dialogue scene just past the midpoint is a problem, making it hard to keep the audience's interest until the Third Act kicks in. Trim it down considerably and keep the action coming.

SET PIECES – Spy thrillers need set pieces and (TITLE) has a couple of them in the train explosion halfway through the script and the Royal Theatre assassination attempt near the end of the Second Act. But while the assassination attempt is drawn out a little bit more than the train attack, the fact is that both are a bit smaller than they could be. These are moments the audience will remember. These are moments of suspense and action, the things that keep audience members on the edge of their seats. But in order to really command attention they should be drawn out a bit more, hitting the suspense beats and the actions beats as sequences rather than short scenes. The assassination attempt does this to a degree but could be expanded a bit more for impact. The train attack scene is far too brief to be anything more than a surprise, where suspense and action would be more useful. Expand it and get the full effect of a useful set piece. Since the script starts a bit slowly, it also

might be wise to consider moving the train sequence forward in order to give the audience needed suspense and action earlier.

THE THIRD ACT – The Third Act stands out in stark contrast to the first two acts, thanks to the fact that Bohr’s escape attempt gives it action and suspense. It is powerful stuff, no longer dominated by scientific theory but now utilizing the tools of cinema (movement and visuals) to drive the story forward. Great stuff here. Even this could be expanded a bit, though. The bicycle escape is nice but brief. From there, it’s on to cars, boats, and trains, but in each case, the moments are a bit too short. Expand each of them by 50 percent, really use them for the sake of suspense, and the Third Act, which is already pretty strong, will become amazing.

CHARACTERS – The main characters in this script are individually strong, although used a bit unevenly in the story. While Bohr and Kristine are both sharply written, layered personalities, it’s hard to know who to root for, with no clear protagonist emerging for a long time. The secondary characters also ring true but again, are ill-fitting into the narrative. Mostly it’s the oversized cast of scientists that get in the way, as Hahn, Meitner, Einstein, Fermi, and Teller collectively take up a lot of space but are really not who the story is about.

BOHR – In the end, this character basically becomes the protagonist. But it takes a long time for him to emerge. For the first half of the script really, the audience is left without a sense of who to root for. There are so many scientists and so many people around them, all of whom have their own little stories going, that it’s only when Bohr goes on the run in the end that we realize it is his story. As a character, he is a very interesting and likeable one. But the good he does for the narrative is buried beneath the weight of all the other scientists. Even though a “scientific community” is a part of the world here, the reality is that we only need a representative of that community in order to tell the story. Get the others out of the way, introduce Bohr as the protagonist early on, and the story will take shape.

KRISTINE – For much of the script, it seems like Kristine is the protagonist. The information we are given about her early on makes her seem like a prime candidate. She’s young, works with resistance fighters, has a desire to affect things in the world. As the story progresses, Kristine proves to be something different than we originally think which would not be a bad thing if she were more of a secondary character but since she takes up the space of the protagonist for so much of the script, it’s a jarring shift when it ends up being Bohr we are rooting for in the end. Again, a sharply written, interesting character but one that needs to be used a bit more cleanly in the narrative.

FRISCH – Long before Bohr becomes the protagonist, and even before Kristine starts looking like she’s the one to follow, the first character that feels like our hero is Frisch. He is in the opening sequence and travels to spread information.

He is an active participation in what is going on and we get a feel for his personality more than others until... page 25. Then, he's gone. After the First Act, he never appears in the movie again. It's not necessarily a bad thing to dispense with a character this early in the script, if they're clearly a secondary character. But in this script that lacks a focus on a protagonist, this misdirection is a problem. It throws the audience off, but not in a good way. If Frisch is going to disappear this quickly, then we shouldn't know him as the protagonist first. He should feel like a secondary character and not be allowed to overshadow the protagonist.

ERIC – This is the character that is used most appropriately. He has exactly the right amount of screen time for his importance to the story, he's interesting and likeable, and his demise in the end is a powerful moment. Every scene he's in is better for his presence and even when he dies, it is a good beat, storywise. Great work with this character!

HEISENBERG – This is an interesting character. His fit in the scientific community is compelling, as is his relationship with Bohr. But like so many characters in this script, his screen time is in need of adjustment. He appears prominently in the first two acts of the script, even dominating the Second Act with the lengthy dialogue he has with Bohr, but after that moment, he's gone, never to be heard from again. It really feels like we need one more beat from Heisenberg, a moment in the Third Act to pay him off. Otherwise, it seems strange to have him play so prominently in what comes before.

DIALOGUE – The dialogue in (TITLE) has a good feel to it. The scientific details seem to ring true and the relationships between characters is often illuminated thanks to their conversations. There is a good layer of subtext, the dialogue always offering a sense that there's more going on than what is being spoken of literally. While the tone of the dialogue is strong, though, the fact is that this particular element of the script is overused. Dialogue scenes run on for longer than they should, with a bit too much information being given through conversation when visuals would be more powerful. The musings of scientists don't tend to carry thrillers as much as people on the run, so the more the conversations can be used in conjunction with action, as opposed to instead of action, the better off the script will be. Again, the dialogue itself is good. But it needs the right balance in order to work as well as it could.

TITLE – (TITLE) is a title that should probably be re-thought. It is obviously appropriate for the subject matter but it doesn't really fit the tone or the genre. This is a dark, WWII thriller about atomic bomb-making. But who would know that from the title? It needs a title that keys potential producers in on what the movie is about or at least what genre it fits into.

SUMMARY – There is some really great stuff in (TITLE). The characters are interesting, the subject matter compelling, the setting strong. The dialogue has a

good feel to it and the visual elements are impressive. But for all the good that comes from these strong ingredients, the fact is that this script is a bit looser in a structural sense than a movie of this type can really be. It needs a tighter, more defined narrative with a clear protagonist and a stated goal. It needs set pieces that last more than a couple of pages and dialogue scenes that don't last eleven pages. The fact is that the characters and the story are here. They're just hard to find at times. A renewed look at the structure of this story will hopefully yield a new draft that takes the same characters, subject and setting and puts them in a more thriller and more marketable light. The writers' skillset is good. No question about that. Now it's a matter of fine-tuning to make (TITLE) the winning WWII spy thriller it could and should be.



	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Very Good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>So-So</u>	<u>Not Good</u>
Artistically			X		
Commercial				X	
Premise			X		
Story				X	
Main Characters			X		
Minor Characters				X	
Dialogue			X		
Visual Elements		X			
Title				X	

SCRIPT:
WRITER:

PASS
CONSIDER