

COVERAGE, INK. COVERAGE

TITLE: **Black In The Saddle**
LOCALE: South Bronx, Wyoming
AUTHOR: Samuel James Cobb
PERIOD: Present Day
FORM: Screenplay
GENRE: Comedy/Action
BUDGET: High
DRAFT DATE: Unknown
COVERAGE DATE:
PREPARED BY: GD

LOGLINE:

After he inherits a farm from his estranged father, a black hip-hop drummer from the Bronx, and his band, head out to Wyoming to work the farm and get the money they need to make their record.

SYNOPSIS:

Present Day. South Bronx. Drummer MARCUS "BEAT" HERVEY (20s) plays bottles and plastic tubs for money on the Grand Concourse. His bandmates, CLINT GARRETT (20s) and SILK CROWLEY (20s) stop by to watch Beat. Beat hopes to save money for his dream drumset. BEN JEROME (seems 30s), a record executive, drops a \$20 into Beat's bucket. Beat invites Ben Jerome to see his band at the China Club. Beat stops to see ESTRELLITA (20s) at her job. Beat gives her a blue envelope (love poem.) Estrellita reminds Beat that her boyfriend, Toast, would be upset if he saw Beat talking to her. Beat invites her to the China Club gig. On the way home, Toast and his crew harass Beat. Later, Beat's mother, MA, tells Beat that Eddie Gilmore (EKG) sent her flowers (she saved him from the streets 10 years ago.) A messenger arrives and tells them that Reginald Hervey has died. Ma tells Beat that Reginald was Beat's father, who hasn't been heard from in two decades.

A lawyer tells Beat that he's inherited a farm in Wyoming from his father. Unfortunately, the farm is in debt, but if Beat can harvest the crop this year, then the government won't take the farm. Beat isn't interested. CHINA CLUB. Beat prepares to play with his band - EKG is the MC. Beat sees Estrellita and kisses her briefly. One of Toast's crew sees this. While the band plays, Toast and his crew rewire the stage. Beat receives a large jolt. Paramedics try to take Beat away, but he won't go. Beat sees Estrellita leave with Toast and EKG leave with Ben Jerome. The next day, the band can't find EKG and assume EKG is cutting them out of the deal. Beat, thinking that his life now sucks, decides that they

should go to Wyoming. Beat figures they can make \$20,000 if they harvest the crop and sell the farm. Clint and Silk agree to go along.

Beat, Silk and Clint take off for Wyoming in an old van. They get lost on the way and the van breaks down several times, but they finally arrive at the Hervey Farm, where corn is growing and ostriches and alpacas are in pens. The guys have serious trouble adjusting to farm life. Beat goes into town and meets, TITUS, a friend of Beat's father want to help, but Beat refuses. Meanwhile, Beat's sister, SHANNEL, tells Estrellita that she should read Beat's love poems. She does so and is touched. Estrellita decides to go to Wyoming to help Beat. She convinces Shannel and another of friend, YOLANDA to go as well. However, Estrellita leaves a note for Toast telling her what she's doing. Toast reads it. Angered, he decides to take off with his crew to Wyoming.

Beat and Silk try to harvest corn, but have no idea what they are doing. Titus drives by the farm and advises Beat to use the combine to harvest the corn. The guys take out the combine, but quickly trash it. Meanwhile, a "MAN IN BLACK" follows Toast's crew across the country – throwing various obstacles in their way to slow their progress. Meanwhile, a grain company arrives to pick up the corn. What little corn they've harvested is rotten. The alpacas and ostriches are looking sick. Beat breaks down and asks Titus for help, which he does. Titus tells them he is a musician too – a square dance caller.

Estrellita and the girls arrive and immediately help out on the farm. After getting upset with Beat's power trip, Estrellita kisses Beat. Then, Estrellita tells Beat that Toast probably knows where she went. Beat becomes panicked. Meanwhile, the Man In Black has managed to tie inflatable balloons to the motorcycles of Toast's crew. The bikes sail into the sky. Meanwhile, Titus and the gang work on the farm. Clint hits on Yolanda and Shannel pairs up with Silk. That night, Toast and his crew find the farm and take action. The next morning, Titus wakes up and steps on a trip-wire. An alpaca falls on him. Titus is taken to the hospital. Then Beat realizes that the ostriches have gotten out of their pens. Beat, Clint and Silk go after the Ostriches and manage to round them up. Toast and his crew see this and try to overtake the ostriches again, BUT they are stopped by the Man In Black – who turns out to be EKG.

Beat successfully sells the ostriches, the alpaca hair and the corn. EKG tells everyone that Ben Jerome is giving them \$20,000 to cut a demo. Beat visits Titus in the hospital. Titus asks him to help out with his square dance. At the square dance, Titus turns it over to Beat and his crew. But, Titus and his crew bust into the dance hall. Toast is about to crush Beat, when Beat throws a broken drumstick in the air and pops a balloon on a motorcycle (hovering overhead) and it crashes down on Toast. Later, Titus tells him that Reginald never visited Beat, because of an agreement with Beat's mother.

NEW YORK CITY. Beat divvies up the money from the farm profits. Beat then decides to give Titus the farm. Beat also packs up his crew (and the women) and heads for Wyoming. They set up a studio there to record their demo. Beat has his dream drums. And his dream girl.

COMMENTS:

OVERALL – An entertaining and funny story about hip-hop/rap band from the Bronx that winds up working a farm in Wyoming. The mood and atmosphere of the story are wonderful. The writer has a fresh voice and good writing style. It was an enjoyable read. The premise is solid and has commercial potential. The main character is somewhat engaging, but he needs more development. The supporting characters all need more development. Some of the characters are too stereotypical. Also, the author could eliminate some characters in this story. The tone of the story fluctuates a little bit between action/comedy and broad comedy. The structure starts out good but then becomes weak in the second and third acts. The second act feels episodic. External conflict is good in the story, but the conflict between the characters could be stronger. Dramatic tension needs to be focused throughout the story. The narrative tension becomes weak in the second and third acts. Stakes feel low in the story. There are some believability issues. The ending is satisfying, but the journey along the way is not. If the author developed the characters, tightened the structure and smoothed out the tone, the story could be a real winner.

THE TITLE – “Black in The Saddle” is an excellent title, though it makes one think of Blazing Saddles. This is a different kind of story. Also, there are not many horses in this story, so the horse reference in the title doesn’t feel quite right. Perhaps the author can think of a better title that plays off the Beat’s “farm” or “corn” or perhaps even “ostriches.”

BEAT - This is a solid character. The author does a wonderful job of describing this character and the status quo of his life. The audience has a clear picture of what he looks like and what he does, BUT the audience needs to know more about who he is. Why did he become a drummer? What does drumming mean to him on a spiritual/emotional level? The author needs to let us see more of the relationship with his mother. We learn that MA took EKG off the streets, but how does she feel about her son? What does she think about his drumming? Also, the moment when Ma and Beat learn that Reginald has died needs to be bigger. They don’t react realistically. Is this the first time that Beat learns that Reginald is his father? If so, why doesn’t he confront his mother about it? If this is NOT the first time that he heard about Reginald, the author should set up in the first act WHY Beat has not had contact with his father previously.

It is clear that Beat’s life is his music, his drumming. He WANTS a drum set and he wants a record deal for his band. Those are good external wants that help propel the story, but what does Beat NEED in the story. How does he change in the story? He seems like the same person at the end that he was in the beginning. What did he learn about himself during the course of the story? Is it simply that he likes farm life? Is it that he gains confidence in himself as man? Is it that he overcomes the pain of not having a real father in his life? This needs to be thought out more carefully. Make Beat more personal. Dig deeper into his

character and the audience will enjoy the story more. Yes, this is a broad comedy at times, but if the character is more developed then the audience will be on board and enjoy the ride.

ANTAGONIST – The antagonist in the story is clearly Toast. But, Toast needs much more development. He feels stereotypical and clichéd. Also, he speaks in a pirate-type dialect that seems strange (particularly at the end.) Toast's motivations are suspect throughout the story and his crew is so screwball that it is hard to take Toast seriously as a threat. Why MUST Toast go after Estrellita? He seems like he can get plenty of women. Why is Estrellita so important? Why does he seem to have such a vendetta against Beat? Does he really think that Beat is a threat to him? Make this character real. Make his motivations believable.

THE INCITING INCIDENT – The author needs to sell this moment better. This is when Ma and Beat find out that Reginald has died. This scene feel odd and does not feel completely believable. First of all, WHY is Reginald in Wyoming? It seems that Reginald would probably is a Bronx guy as well. Why on earth would he go to Wyoming? Is it because Ma sent him away? Why Wyoming? Why not Nebraska? Or Iowa? Also, who got the address of Ma and Beat and sent them a messenger? Why doesn't Ma want to take control of the farm (or at least the sale of it?) The author needs also sell the end of act one – when Beat decides to go to Wyoming. It feel convenient right now. Why is going to Wyoming Beat's ONLY just left? Why would Beat possibly think that he could work a farm? Does he really think that he can turn a profit at a farm he has never seen in a state he's never been too? We need to see more of a big decision here.

THE STAKES – They feel low in the story. What if Beat does NOT succeed with the farm? Well, it seems like he will just go back to New York and do what he had been doing. There's no urgency to the story. This has to be a SEMINAL moment in the life of the character. Make it bigger. If Beat does not succeed with the farm, his life may be ruined. He will not only NOT get his drum set, but he will be in debt and perhaps he will lose Estrellita forever. Put the pressure on Beat. It has to be a do or die kind of situation.

THE TONE – The humor is broad and consistent for most of the story. This is difficult to achieve and the author has done a good job. BUT, there are parts of the story that waver in tone. The killings and bombs blowing up and extreme violence doesn't work. Yes, it is done in a humorous way, but it still doesn't seem to fit in this story. These parts should be cut from the story.

BELIEVABILITY – Since, the story is a broad comedy the audience will generally suspend disbelief. BUT, some parts of the story push the plausibility envelope and will make the audience lose interest. First of all: character motivations. Why doesn't Estrellita EVER read Beat's poems? Can a woman like Estrellita keep

herself from reading these poems for so long? Why does Toast dislike Beat? Beat seems like a cool dude. Why would Toast feel compelled to pick on him? Why is EKG following Toast? Why doesn't EKG just go right to the farm and help Beat and the gang defend the farm against Toast? Why go through all the cloak-and-dagger kind of stuff? It's entertaining, but it makes no sense. Why wouldn't EKG tell his bandmates RIGHT AWAY that Jerome wants to make a deal with them? The reason: because it would end the movie, Beat wouldn't go to Wyoming. There needs to be a better reason that EKG is not around. A big motivation issue: Why doesn't Beat ask Titus for help sooner? What does Beat have against Titus? It would seem that if Beat were so focused on getting the money and getting out of Wyoming, why wouldn't he try to enlist as much help as he can? It would be better if Beat tried to get help in town, but NOBODY will help him EXCEPT Titus.

Also some of the action scenes with Toast and EKG seem a bit farfetched (and are also expensive to shoot.) The inflatable balloons on the motorcycles is funny, but the fact that the motorcycles are drifting in the air for a long period of time is a bit over-the-top.

STRUCTURE - There are three identifiable acts, but the second and third acts are a bit soft. The first act is a good on-ramp. Beat finds out he inherited land, his gig goes poorly, so he decides to go to Wyoming to get money so they can record their music. This moment needs to be much stronger, but the structure works. The narrative question of the second act seems to be clear: "will Beat harvest the corn and sell the ostriches in time?" The tension is not very strong in this act because there are not many obstacles to Beat achieving his goal. The primary obstacle is the fact that they know NOTHING about farming. But, that becomes old and repetitive. The antagonist isn't in the act until the end. SO, the guys are their own antagonists' for most of the second act. Try to get Toast on the scene sooner, or perhaps Estrellita. List the four or five obstacles that keep Beat from achieving his goal. Only one of those obstacles is the fact that he doesn't know what he's doing. The end of the second act should be a "big gloom." This seems to occur when Toast sabotages the farm and Titus ends up in the hospital. There should be a new dramatic tension for the third act. The question seems to be "will Beat defeat Toast?" BUT Beat and Toast don't confront each other enough in the act and EKG actually gets in the way. EKG is a savior character. It is better if Beat is the hero throughout the story. Having EKG show up and save the day is too convenient.

Let's take a quick look at each act...

FIRST ACT - Again, Beat needs to be set up stronger. What are his hopes? His dreams? AND WHY? The Ma/Beat relationship needs development. Probably best to cut Beat's siblings from the story. What do they add? Also, who is the father of these other children? Shannel can simply be Estrellita's friend. Keep it simple. Cut Justin. He is a minor character who has no impact on the story.

Lawyer scene does not feel real. Need to sell the end of the act and Beat should have to work hard to convince his bandmates to go along with him. Make things harder for the protagonist – everywhere. The Silk/Estrellita back story (that they were lovers) is not necessary. Cut it.

SECOND ACT – Preacher scene is funny but not necessary. The whole “satellite listening post from Chechen tangos” runner should be cut as well. Feels corny. Why would Estrellita tell Toast where she was going? Is that really dumb? And why does Toast feel that he MUST go after Beat? What does Toast think he will do to Beat? Why doesn’t Toast just go after Estrellita and bring her back home? Why does he care so much about Beat? The electric shock, spontaneous fire stuff is funny but may be a tad too broad for this story. Why is Beat so stubborn when it comes to Titus? This doesn’t seem to make sense? EKG as a “MAN IN BLACK” doesn’t work. Why does EKG do this? Sure, it probably has something to do with the CIA or whatever, but it just feels too out there. You lose the audience in these scenes. (by the way, I thought the Man in Black was going to turn out to be Reginald – who faked his death so he could bond with his son.) Why do the girls immediately start helping out Beat? Why did they come? Why do they want to help him? Why couldn’t they just wait for Beat and the guys to return home? There are too many members of Toast’s posse. Eliminate a few. There needs to be a bigger moment when Beat and Estrellita finally kiss. Why not another poem from Beat at some point?

THIRD ACT – Do not have EKG save the day? The third act should be about the hero stepping into their greatness. Let Beat be the hero. Hildy is an extraneous character – you can probably cut her from the script. Why does Toast speak like a pirate in act three? The drumstick to the balloon, crashing the motorcycle is clever, but not believable – at all. The ending is satisfying, but it does not feel earned.

GENERAL – The writer is very good – great style, great voice. The story needs work, however. Structure needs to be tightened. Tone needs to be smooth out – make it a little more of a character-driven piece and a little less of a broad comedy. Characters need more development. The script has a great deal of potential. Good luck!



	<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:

WEAK CONSIDER
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