

## **COVERAGE, INK. COVERAGE**

**TITLE:**  
**LOCALE:** Washington DC, Seattle, etc.  
**AUTHOR:**  
**PERIOD:** present/near future  
**FORM:** Screenplay  
**GENRE:** Action Thriller  
**BUDGET:** large  
**DRAFT DATE:** None  
**COVERAGE DATE:**  
**PREPARED BY:** Jim Cirile

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### **LOGLINE:**

A man whose cancer-stricken daughter gets kidnapped works with the Secret Service to locate her along with other kidnapped children of corrupt politicians.

### **SYNOPSIS:**

In Pennsylvania, an Escalade hits a deer. A boy kidnap victim, LANE JEFFERSON, escapes from the Escalade to a nearby convenience store where he is found by a BLUE-HAIRED STONER. Flashback one hour and we see the plan roll out. NATHANIEL, well-dressed Halliburton rep, is picked up by a trio of Escalades, and we meet BENDER (20s), driver and KIMBLE (blonde female hacker). Nathaniel contacts shadowy hitman THE GHOST who stakes out the Jefferson townhouse. Lane leaves for school, and he's accompanied by SECRET SERVICE AGENTS. At a warehouse, conspirators BISHOP and COOPER talk Green Lantern as they tune up an EMP pulse weapon hidden within a garbage truck. Nathaniel insists there be no fatalities, and Cooper reassures him. The garbage truck rumbles up outside the Jefferson home. Cooper fires the EMP, and Nathaniel kidnaps Lane. At the White House, VP BOXER and PRESIDENT JEFFERSON discuss the kidnappings and send for computer programmer NICK SILVER, whom the kidnappers have listed as the only man they'll talk to. We realize Lane is the president's son. At the Smithsonian, NICK SILVER (age?) and his cancer-stricken daughter EMMA browse. Nick is intercepted by SS AGENT KEEGAN and is told the President wants him. They haul Nick off, and Emma gets kidnapped. Keegan tells Nick Emma is one of 20 kidnapped kids. meanwhile, DC police chase one of the Escalades. Keegan takes charge of the pursuit while Nick tags along. Keegan rescues the kidnapped girl inside just as the Escalade blows up. In another Escalade, Nathaniel is pissed, but then Ghost calls with news he's grabbed Emma. Nick and Keegan find the room the Ghost was in opposite the Jefferson house. Nathaniel talks to Nick and reveals the plan: he wants 20 US gov't figures to stop down in 48 hours. Nathaniel says the men are guilty of something and

reveals he has Emma. Nathaniel and Kimble are friendly to Lane, their other captive. Suddenly—car crash! Lane escapes with Nathaniel's briefcase. Kimble, Bender and Nathaniel track Lane and come upon the blue-haired boy JOEL and ask his help. Joel sends them to the hospital. Nick and Keegan meet with the Prez then take off in a chopper to go get Lane. Keegan makes Nick a temporary Secret Service officer. Nathaniel arrives at St. Christopher's just before Nick and Keegan. Nathaniel and Lane escape in an ambulance; Nick commandeers a car and gives chase. Bender dies in a supermarket shoot-out; Lane and Nathaniel get away in Kimble's trunk. Keegan identifies Kimble as a hacker he knows. Joel leads Nick and Keegan to the wrecked Escalade while Nathaniel boards a military transport bound for Seattle. Nathaniel arranges a meeting with Nick in Seattle. Nick steals a cop car and takes off. On the way to the airport, he stops at a church for guidance, then flies to Seattle. Nathaniel keeps the kids happy with an impromptu party. Nick and Nathaniel meet at the B of A Tower. Nathaniel tells Nick he knows about Emma's cancer and tells him a cancer cure exists but was suppressed by the government for money reasons. The ghost shoots Nick's gun and tells Nathaniel that the place is surrounded by cops. Nathaniel knocks Nick out and escapes to the next building on a zip cord. Nick now no longer trusts Keegan and seems to be going renegade. We find out in the briefcase was a video of the President murdering missing industrialist Steve Ford. Nathaniel posts the video online and explains the conspiracy to the nation. But the website crashes from the volume. Nathaniel takes the kids into the Space Needle restaurant and holes up there with a bomb. Nick asks Keegan to let him try to talk Nathaniel down. Nathaniel confesses the bomb is a fake. Nathaniel gives Nick the cancer cure, but a sharpshooter takes Nathaniel out. The President is arrested. We reveal that it was actually FORD in a President Jefferson mask in the video—the conspiracy continues...

## COMMENTS:

Wow! A lot of potential here. Strong action writing and potential in this script. Writer has a good, descriptive visual style and has created several excellent action set-pieces. The car crash on page 38 is a phenomenal twist. Story about US government secretly putting the kibosh on a successful cancer drug is also very good. Pacing is generally effective.

But things come a bit unglued in the areas of characterization and plot logic. Our hero Nick needs a lot more depth, as does Nathaniel and especially Keegan. And several things in the story don't quite make sense, or else seem like they're there simply because they'd be cool action scenes, not for character or plot logic reasons. So let's look at some of the things we can do to make this piece as good as it can be.

## CHARACTER

This script's single biggest weakness is its protagonist's paper-thin depth. It's 17 pages until we even meet Nick, and then when we finally do, we get little in the way of character development. This is death.

We should always meet our lead in the very first scene. This scene should always show the hero doing whatever it is that he does best. For example, if your hero is a hostage negotiator, then the opening scene shows his skill in a hostage negotiation. This meet-the-hero scene serves the mythic purpose of establishing the character in his known world. It also generally gives us a glimpse into the character's PROBLEM (also known as dramatic flaw)—for example, let's say his flaw is that he's cocky and not a team player. By the end, he needs to arc, and become a team player, in order to finally conquer the crisis. So we depict this in the first scene by showing the guy's a bit full of himself (but still charming; this is a movie star we're talking about here) and then having other characters comment (can be done just through a look) as to what a stuck-up asshole he is. Or he could be fearful, nervous (as in *FINDING NEMO*) and thus have to learn to take risks. However you decide to do it, your character must start out flawed and then move towards center as he interacts with other characters in the story that help him change (this is generally prompted by the second fiddle or love interest.)

Now that we know what the character does, we usually have a quick home life scene that shows a bit more of the hero's personality, back story, hobbies, quirks, etc. A great example of this is *THE ROCK*, where we go home with Nic Cage and meet his pregnant wife and learn he's a old records freak. In a few short scenes, we paint a very clear picture of this guy—his dreams, his fears, his strengths and weaknesses. Feel free to use this as a paradigm.

All we really know about Nick is he has a sick daughter that he cares about, and he's a programmer and security analyst. That's not nearly enough. And much later—too late—we find out he employed Felix Kimble (terrible name for a female character—change to Felicia or something else, please) as a hacker, and that he has a wife, or an ex- or something.

I'm still wondering exactly how or why *Nick*, specifically, figures into this story. The story always needs to be personal to the protagonist, and it *is* to Nick because his daughter gets kidnapped, but after reading the script twice I'm still not sure WHY Nick's daughter gets grabbed. It might make a bit more sense if, for example, Nick's ex-wife was/is one of the 20 senators on the list. So Nick's daughter gets involved because of his *ex-wife's* involvement. That would open up a can of worms regarding what happened with their relationship (which is a good thing, as this creates inter-character drama.) For example, perhaps their marriage fell apart because the ex- was consumed by the backbiting and vehemence of politics, and Nick finally had enough. He watched the woman he married transform from a caring public servant to a shrew on the take. Suddenly the back-story begins to support the action.

To further make Nick a logical choice to drive this investigation, it would help if he had some sort of background in such. He has a computer security background, yet that skill is never important to the story (unfortunately.) Nick currently assumes the mantle of action hero well—saying and doing all the right things in the script—but it's not *based* on anything other than that's what we expect from an action guy in an action movie. Nick's actions don't evolve out of character or logic, but rather but action movie convention. Figure out a way to use Nick's experience in solving this case. And find a reason WHY Nathaniel will only talk to Nick. This is critical. Give them some back story.

What you really need to do is make Nick a high-level government security analyst—maybe he's NSA or DIA, for example. That would give him government access and thus make it logical for Nathaniel to contact him. But also in the back story, we reveal that Nick and Nathaniel perhaps had a business relationship, and maybe they were both on the same side of an ethical fence, but Nathaniel was simply too radical for Nick although they share the same beliefs. For example, Nick could be a concerned progressive who works *WITHIN* the system; but Nathaniel is the type of guy who actually tries to sabotage nuclear submarines in the name of environmental conservatism. Thus it becomes logical that Nick is the *ONLY* person Nathaniel can trust and talk to, because Nate desperately hopes that he can sway Nick over to his side. Aside: for an excellent thriller dealing with high-level NSA computer analysts, read Dan Brown's "Digital Fortress." That could give you some ideas for ways to handle Nick.

And let's find some way Nick's skills can be important to tracking down the bad guys. We set up what should become a cat and mouse between Kimble and Nick, the hacker and the security analyst—but again, this is not capitalized on. In

fact, Kimble completely disappears and is not used to her logical dramatic potential. Remember, they both know each other. There needs to be one of those classic cinema scenes where the student tries to outthink the master.

Nick's fear of heights does not pay off. It's set up, but this should be something Nick has to confront in Act 3. And let's also remember to resolve whatever character flaw you assign him around that time. Mythically, the protagonist must solve his internal crisis BEFORE he can achieve the wisdom that allows him to solve his external crisis (the story.) Show how Nick changes for the better during the course of the story. I think his broken marriage might be useful to examine here. Something about his attitude needs to change—for example, maybe he needs to learn compassion and forgiveness, and once he does that, he can forgive his wife from straying (which was his own fault because he was distant) and thus repair his family. This would also give him the insight to understand exactly how to defeat Nathaniel—because he realizes Nathaniel CANNOT hurt anyone—it's a big bluff. Nick bets it all on that fact and comes up a winner. And it should be Keegan that helps him realize what he needs to realize about himself in order to grow.

As for Nathaniel, I like how he's painted in shades of grey and is extremely friendly towards the kids. This also reminds of the bad guy in THE ROCK, who never truly intended to launch the nerve gas missiles. That's all good. But again, a little more personal back-story between him and Nick would really make this character shine. Also, let's give Nathaniel perhaps a quirk or a tic or something—after all, this is a man under enormous stress. Show how it's getting to him. Give the actor something to play. Give him some history, some dimension, and make him richly detailed. An action movie is only as good as its bad guy.

Lastly, Keegan is a complete failure as a character. There is nothing here—he's an absolute cipher. Do SOMETHING to make this guy into a human being. Make him a Black philosophy PhD who plays jazz vibraphone or an ex-All-American football star with a quiet gambling problem or an intellectual muscle car freak who's a weekend biker and Scrabble champ... Paint your characters vividly. Show how Keegan helps Nick change from X to Y. Give them some real conversations and have each learn from the other so that they become better people.

## STRUCTURE

The 3-act structure here is basically sound but for a few missteps:

There are a few things that need to be trimmed and restructured to make the story flow better. The first is, the long intro sequence needs to go. We really don't need all the back and forth with Joel and his grandma. Keep the focus squarely on your lead and cut away from him only to show scenes important to the story.

As for Lane, we only need to see the grab, not all the prep for it. Way too much bad guys in the first 17 pages.

Also, the Steve Ford plot thread is introduced far too late into the story (page 47.) We need to start dropping clues in Act 1.

## PLOT ELEMENTS

There are a few elements in the script that need some finessing:

THE EMP weapon is a great device, but it's a sci-fi element in an otherwise realistic script. So what happens then is that we think the whole script is going to be about this neat new weapon. Of course, EMP devices are standard issue in first-person shooter computer games and sci-fi novels, but they have had minimal depiction in films. Thus we keep waiting for this technology to come into play in some significant way story-wise, but it never does. So you need to use it better or lose it. The weapon itself is unimportant to the kidnapping of Lane, really. So you can just cut it--or else you need to explain away that its development was part and parcel with the cancer vaccine—a non-lethal weapon whose funding was cut, despite its enormous potential, by Pentagon hawks. And *then* you need to use the device at its maximum dramatic height—have Nathaniel whip it out in Act 3 and bring Seattle to a halt to facilitate an escape. Oh, and we don't buy the "anyone can assemble one at Radio Shack" explanation. Cut it.

And speaking of the Lane kidnap, there's too much going on here. Do we really need the Ghost, the garbage truck, the Escalades, the syringe AND the EMP weapon? In fact, let's cut the Ghost entirely. This character does nothing dramatically important. The kidnapping could be very, very simple: some guys in Escalades roar up, take the SS agents by storm and kidnap the kid.

It's probably not a good idea to mention Barbara Boxer by name. Give the character a similar name like Barbara Baxter or something.

The kidnapping of Emma is confusing and a bit clunky—why is Emma's kidnap off-camera? It's also way too coincidental that it happens simultaneously with Nick being picked up by the SS--and yet no one tries to stop it? And why would the SS strand the kid—who they know has cancer—alone without her father? Rewrite this sequence. Make it clear what's going on: SS tries to get Nick to go with them. He declines. Right then, kidnap. Gunfight/SS versus kidnappers. The kidnappers didn't count on the SS being there. Kidnappers get away with Emma. Nick is forced to play ball. Also a logic question: why would the kidnappers send for Nick BEFORE kidnapping his daughter? The timing of these events might need to be tweaked a bit.

Why exactly does Lane live away from the White House? Is his mother divorced from the President? This needs to be clarified.

One thing I really didn't buy is how friendly all the kids are towards the kidnappers—despite stuff that should scare the shit out of kids like gunfire, being held captive, etc. Cordial kidnappers are fine, but the kids should be a little less blithely accepting of their circumstances—especially the President's son, who should have a serious attitude against these guys!

It's also kind of stretching it for Nick to suggest to the President that he give in to the kidnapper's demands. I know it's his daughter, but unless you show this is coming from a place of deep, desperate grief, that request is illogical.

On page 51, Nick charges through the hospital, leading the quest to find Lane. WHY? I have a big problem with this. Same note for Nick commandeering the vehicle a little later and roaring off in a car chase (and not getting in any hot water for it.) See, Lane is not Nick's son. Why does Nick give a shit about Lane? We don't buy it. No, it should be EMMA that escapes from the car accident, EMMA in the hospital, etc. This gives Nick a real reason for being so gung-ho. It's too much to extrapolate that he's pursuing Lane because this will lead him to his own daughter. In fact, there's not nearly enough angst on Nick's part over what's happening to Emma. This should be tearing him apart. If anything like this ever happened to my daughter, I'd be a raving madman, and any parent would relate to Nick's plight. We'll go along with him acting like Rambo if it's to save his daughter.

The SWAT Team's forced entry into Joel's crib is unnecessary. A knock would do. Joel is not a suspect, and they do not have a warrant.

How exactly can Nathaniel get on a military transport plane? Is he really a Major? Again, we need a lot more details into his background. Does he really work for Halliburton? If so, why do we never see any interaction between him and anyone else in the company? Also, you will need to fictionalize that company name, too.

Nick's stopping at the church on page 74 also stops the action dead. We have not described Nick as a pious or spiritual man or even vaguely religious until this point, and so this jaunt seems inorganic. Also, what is Nick wrestling with here? The decision seems pretty clear-cut—he has to play ball to get his daughter back. Cut the stop at the church.

Kimble's invention that simulates all the parents' voices—cut this entire sequence. Again it stops the action cold and also introduces yet another piece of tech that is off-topic and not used in any plotty way, just like the EMP. This software, if it existed, should be the MacGuffin for the whole movie, because everyone would be scrambling to get it.

Once we see video of the President shooting Ford, the script feels over—like we need a wrap-up action scene and then an epilogue with Nick and Emma and the

wife. That's it. But script drags on for another 20 pages. All of the space needle stuff... don't need it. The final twist isn't bad, although it's farfetched to believe the President was Ford in a mask when the computer analysis matched the facial features earlier on. Also, the protagonist does nothing to uncover this twist; it's simply revealed to us, which is bad storytelling. Either have Nick uncover the REAL truth, or simply cut it. Honestly, I don't think we need it; it feels a bit gimmicky.

## TITLE

The title is an appropriate action/thriller title--it sounds very Ludlum--but I'm scratching my head trying to see how it applies to this story. Either make the title make sense in terms of the story or else try to find a more organic title.

## CONCLUSION

So what we have here is an enormously talented writer with a script with great potential that isn't quite there yet, but is perhaps only few drafts away. Nail down that character development and solve the plot logic problems, and this script will kick abutt. Study successful, well-written action movies like THE ROCK, BOURNE SUPREMACY, ALIENS, TRUE LIES, and DIE HARD and pay careful attention to their structures, particularly in Act 1. Break down similar movies scene by scene. What happens when, and why? Apply those lessons to your own script. Every movie has a basic paradigm by genre. Syd Field's books are also a great resource for more on structure and for figuring out what has to happen and where in your script.

And edit mercilessly. Any scene, paragraph or word which does not directly advance the action should get trimmed. I've cut a few scenes here and there in the draft to be returned to you. You've got something here. 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-----	-----X
Minor Characters				X	
Dialogue			X		
Visual Elements	X				
Title					X