

COVERAGE, INK. COVERAGE

TITLE:
LOCALE: Plymouth, Massachusetts
AUTHOR:
PERIOD: 1675
FORM: screenplay
GENRE: historical drama
BUDGET: large
DRAFT DATE: none
COVERAGE DATE:
PREPARED BY: Jim Cirile

LOGLINE:

Army lieutenant BEN CHURCH finds himself caught in the middle between the colonists and the native Americans, due to his relationship with an Indian woman, as war looms.

SYNOPSIS:

Plymouth, Mass, 1675. LT. BENJAMIN CHURCH (40) and his teen acolyte JACOB arrive by boat and are greeted by GOVERNOR WINSLOW. They watch a hanging procession—three pirates are sent to the courthouse while three Indians are sent to hang. They witness the men being sentenced for the murder of a praying tribesman named SASSAMON. The Indians' leader MANNUMAH breaks free from the hanging, and Jacob translates that Manumamah didn't do it, his father and uncle did (the two who died hanging.) Church unlocks Manumamah. Meanwhile CAPTAIN MOSELY recruits the 3 pirates to serve him. At the courthouse it is revealed that Manumamah is the son of the princess AWASHONKS. Church signs him out, and he and Jacob take him back to the MITCHELL HOME where they are fed by Jacob's parents. Manumamah tells Church his mother has had no husband since him—Church and Awashonks had a relationship. Church realizes he must go to the tribes to prevent an uprising. He must see Awashonks—although it's been 15 years. Meanwhile at the tribal camp, chief METACOMET is urged by young warrior TOTOSON to drive the English into the sea. Church and FULLER ride to Fort Dartmouth with 25 rangers. Metacomet will not meet with Church, but ANNAWON (Totoson's father) will. Manumamah visits Church bringing his son PETER AWASHONKS (15) —the son Church never knew of. The men are alarmed that Metacomet's dancing, which is apparently a war dance meant to rally all the tribes together. Church sends Jacob to tell Fuller that Totoson lies in wait. Church visits the Awashonks camp where he talks to HONEST GEORGE. Church greets his old lover Awashonks (50) and discovers Totoson carries shot. Metacomet has asked Awashonks to dance, and if she refuses, he will cross her river and attack the English, thus

making the English attack her. Church begs her to let him try to maintain the peace. We learn that Awashonks left him when she knew she was with child 15 years before out of fear of what the English would do to him if they learned he'd been a traitor (slept with a native American? unclear) Church still has feelings for her it seems and vows to return. Totoson burns down Fort Dartmouth. At a meeting of the Governors, Winslow calls for a wall to be erected along the river. Church advises hunting Metacomet with friendly tribes joining the effort. Mosely kidnaps Peter. Honest George brings he news to Church. Church sets off on the ride to Metacomet's camp. They ride into ambush and barely survive. At the garrison, Winslow appoints Mosely to lead a troop of volunteers. They arrive at Metacomet's camp and find him gone. Church and party head back to Awashonks. Awashonks is torn. Church tells her the Governor will protect her—if Manummah, who sides with Metacomet—consents. Church sets off to see SACHEM WEETAMOO but is greeted by gunfire and 50 WARRIORS. Church and Jacob escape after the battle in a rescue boat. Weetamoo's men are allied with Metacomet now. Peter watches Mosely and the pirates torture a prisoner while the English army is encamped in the snowy ruined garrison. Mosely tells Winslow he's learned where Metacomet's fort is. Mosely storms the Narragansett fort where Metacomet and Totoson are. Peter rushes Awashonks to safety. She leaves a candlestick behind for Church. Church's rangers join Mosely's pirates. Fuller gets killed. Mosely kills the Narragansett chief. Church pursues Metacomet. Kingman accidentally shoots Manummah, killing him. Church is also shot, three times, and then hospitalized. Peter and Church sail for Awashonks' bluffs where they are greeted by Honest George. Awashonks wishes to make peace with the English. Church sees Winslow, who is startled he is still alive, and begs him to end the slavery. Church joins Awashonks to hunt Metacomet. Winslow marries Jacob, Thomas and SAMUEL. Church gets word Annawon and Totoson are leading an attack and are armed by the French. Church joins Awashonks for a dance. Church learns from an elderly WOMAN that metacomet has gone to Sconticut foraging for food. Honest George and the SERGEANT capture 63 prisoners. Church survives a point-black shot to the chest courtesy of a misfire. Peter shoots, scaring off Totoson and rescuing Church. Church hears from a warrior named ALDERMAN that Metacomet is miserable thanks to Church's efforts. Church heads to Mount Hope to battle Metacomet. They chase him through the woods. He's brought down by Alderman. Church and the English army surround Annawon. Annawon tells Church Totoson is dead. Church makes peace with the humble Annawon. Annawon brings Church alms. Metacomet's head and hands are mounted on pikes in town. Church takes possession of Awashonks and Peter. He gives up his plantation to buy the freedom of 461 prisoners from Winslow. Awashonks and her tribe are allowed to return to their ceremonial lands.

COMMENTS:

(title) is a fabulously well-written, detailed and researched script. It is also a bit of a tough read. There are several factors that combine to make it so: first, the period and the setting, and the meticulous period dialogue (more on that in a moment) are exquisitely well-rendered but are alien to the average reader. Secondly, the forbidding length makes reading the whole script seem at times like an exercise. Thirdly, we're sort of thrown right into the story without a net, and the first 20 pages in particular are somewhat confusing—there's a lot to keep straight, a LOT of characters and a lot of strange names in a strange world. We have an Act 3 that goes off the rails and needs to be a lot simpler and shorter. And last, we never really become all that invested in Church's story. If he was a truly compelling protagonist, we'd be solidly along for the ride with him regardless of any other factors. But we never really get all that interested in Church, and thus what happens is it feels like we're watching Church go through the motions in scene after scene in which not much really happens story-wise. Now of course PLENTY is actually happening, but without a compelling protagonist to drive the story, script starts to get a bit leaden..

So let's take a look at what we can do to turn this script into the best and most accessible it can be.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First the good stuff. There's a lot to like here. It's clear by page 3 that we're in the hands of a good writer. This buys a lot of goodwill right off the bat. The setting is fascinating, and the script gives us a nice peek into what really was going on with the native Americans and the colonists. The detail and authenticity here are noteworthy. Again, kudos for the writer.

Script also gives us a solid lead in Church. He is clearly the protagonist, and he does effectively drive the story. The premise of his past relationship with Awashonks is gold—although it could be explored in a bit more depth, as I'll get into below.

But when we start out, we are thrown right into the water without a life preserver. We desperately need an introductory sequence of some sort to tell us the backstory, the setting, etc. This can be anything from a "Star Wars" style crawl or an opening narration to a montage or pre-credits sequence. I think you also should consider SHOWING Sassamon's murder. This is, after all, the hook, the thing that gets everyone into the action. By not showing it, you're forced to TELL everyone about it after the fact. We should know all about the setting and the tribes by the time we meet Church (on page 2 or 3.) This way the audience will be grounded, not simply left guessing where we are and what's going on. This

has the added benefit of allowing you to eliminate a bit of the exposition in the current scenes.

Another cause of feeling adrift right at the start is because this script violates the mythic principle of establishing the protagonist in his known world before the story starts. We must always establish the protagonist in his known world, doing what he does best. This way we get to know the character before pulling the rug out from under him. But here we meet Church, and the rug's already out from under him the very first time we see him. There was never a chance to establish the character.

PROTAGONIST

Before launching into the story, we need a couple of scenes with Church showing him doing his duties as a Lieutenant. Is he a good officer? Well-respected? What are his actual job functions? Establish him as a layered, multi-textured character. Give him hobbies, an interesting backstory, quirks, foibles. By page 5 we should have a solid idea of WHO this guy is and WHY he's the star if this movie. How does he feel about returning to the colonies, where he had to abandon the woman he loved 15 years ago? Is he wondering about Awashonks? Is it at all on his mind? Perhaps he carries a memento of hers, something symbolic. Above all, this guy needs to be absolutely fascinating, a role of such depth and heft that it will make big stars fight to play this part.

You don't have to worry about actually starting the story until the INCITING INCIDENT, which is generally page 8-10 in a script. In this case, it's the abortive hanging of Manummah. And it should be Church who intercedes to stop the hanging here, because HE speaks the language and understands what Manummah is saying. (I would lose Peter, an unnecessary second fiddle.) Church should realize hanging these three men will mean instant war with the Natives—but Church is only able to save Manummah. Now it's page 11 and the wheels of the story are rolling. Church now has a CRISIS. He needs to go see the Indian leader Metacomet (who perhaps has a long-standing grudge against him) to try to stop an uprising. But since Metacomet will not see him, he's forced to go through an intermediary—his old love interest Awashonks. Keep the focus solidly on Church at ALL TIMES. He should be in every scene, and the scenes that he is not in should be ABOUT him. Again, this will help the readers feel grounded in the story. There are currently too many unimportant characters to keep track of. We really don't need Fuller or Winslow or the Mitchells or any of them, since all they do is take our focus off our protagonist and his quest.

Remember: Church's mission needs to be absolutely clear to the audience. He needs to say, "I've got to stop this war before it starts," or something to that effect. This becomes his DRAMATIC NEED, or goal, for the movie, the thing that propels the entire story—the through-line.

The STAKES must also be high. What will happen if Church fails? If the answer is, well, the natives will launch a couple of attacks, whatever...” then the stakes are too low. Again, make it clear: the stakes here are that the tribes are viewing the hangings as a violation of treaty with England. Therefore this means WAR. The Indians are going to rain pain on the British colonies and eradicate every last one of them. Heck, they’re pissed from having treaties reneged on. This is the last straw. And ONLY Church—who speaks the language AND has/had a personal with one of them can stop it. Now you’ve got your stakes, and you’ve made it clearly personal to the protagonist. All I’ve done here is clarify existing elements already in the script to make them more cinematic and easier to grasp.

My next note on protagonist has to do with CHARACTER ARC. It is always preferable when a protagonist evolves during the course of a movie. To do that, you need to give your character a notable flaw when we first meet him, something everyone else is aware of, but the protagonist is NOT. What then happens is that during the course of the story, the protagonist becomes self-aware. According to myth, the hero cannot figure out how to solve the EXternal crisis (achieve his goal or dramatic need) without first solving his INternal crisis (character arc.) For example, Church starts out as a bit of a drinker. So a simple arc would be that during the course of the story he learns to quit the bottle. By doing so he attains the clarity of thought necessary to think his way out of his jam in act 3, defeat the bad guy and eventually triumph. Or you could ascribe him a flaw like, say, he’s a blowhard, a braggart. So what would he need to learn? Humility. Whatever it is, it needs to be the reason for why he left Awashonks, or she him. Her simply abandoning him to protect him because she was with child does not work for me. This needs to go back to a character flaw. And it’s this very flaw that, 15 years later, he now has to overcome in order to solve the crisis.

Another mythic concept you want to consider is the black moment—the time when, towards the end of act 2 or beginning of act 3, your hero is the farthest from achieving his goal. This is when the hero screws up big time and has to figure out a new game plan, or sometimes gets captured by the bad guy, etc. Consider such a moment for Church. Perhaps his team has just suffered a big defeat in an ambush or battle. They’ve got injured men and are getting frostbite. So here is where Church needs to find inner strength by realizing and thus overcoming his character flaw in order to mount the attack on the Narragansett fort. Note that this must be Church driving the action here, not Mosely. We lose track of Church for too long while Mosely is kicking all that ass.

STORY AND STRUCTURE ISSUES

There are some really nice moments throughout the story.

The story is more or less solid, although the act breaks seem a bit soft. What exactly is the end of Act 1? This is generally the time when the protagonist chooses danger and enters the “new world” or the “journey” section of the story,

and there is no turning back. I can't put my finger on any specific place this occurs.

For a solution to this, let's look at myth. Myth tells us that the protagonist should be a reluctant hero, who turns down the call at first, only to come around when he realizes something personal is at stake. The best way to do this is to use Peter. Now currently Mosely kidnaps Peter--but why? This baffled me. Why doesn't Church say anything to Mosely about it? Maybe I misread this, but I read it twice and I'm still not getting it. Shouldn't Metacomet be the one who kidnaps Peter? So he can use Peter for leverage with England? So now carry this through. Suppose in Act 1, after the inciting incident (the hangings, page 10) Church is asked by the governor to do what he can to help the Indian situation, but Church refuses—"This is your problem, pal, not mine." But then he learns he has a son Peter with Awashonks. A mess of conflicted emotions about this—was he a deadbeat dad? Could he—SHOULD he have been in Peter's life—and then WHAM! Peter gets kidnapped by Metacomet. Now everything changes. Suddenly he has personal connection to the problem. He perhaps risks his reputation as an impartial never-get-involved neutral guy trusted by both Indians and Colonists in order to go off and find Metacomet, get his son back and stop this war. There's no turning back—his relations with the Indians and the Colonists will never be the same if he chooses this path. But he **MAKES HIS DECISION**. He chooses the danger and sets off with a small team to go after Metacomet. End of Act 1.

I don't get it when Church tells Fuller that the tribes will be ripped for the hangings. What does this mean? Why would the tribes be angry at anyone except the white man for the hangings? How did the governor ignore his own treaty? This is all unclear. Again here we are hearing about things after the fact, rather than simply **SHOWING** us the whys and wherefores in a short opening prologue.

One thing that bugged me about Church was that there didn't seem to be any depth of emotion upon meeting the son he never knew he had, or upon being reunited with Awashonks after all this time. Now maybe that can go back to his character arc—that's his problem, he's a stone. That's why Awashonks abandoned him 15 years before. So he has to evolve past that, get in touch with his emotions, allow himself to break down and feel something by act 3. Just a suggestion, but in any event, the reunion scenes in particular felt a bit mannered and stilted. Wouldn't Church be blown away upon meeting a son he never knew about? And yet he seems almost completely unperturbed.

We need **SUBTEXT** in the scenes with Awashonks and Church. What they **SAY** and what they **MEAN** should be two different things. Remember they have a history—but they would both be a bit guarded, defensive, fragile. Currently their scenes play out flatly. What is going through both of their minds? What are their emotions? How is Awashonks feeling after seeing this man she never thought she'd see again, suddenly back in her life?

When Church and crew arrive at Metacomet's camp and find it deserted, you're missing a great opportunity for an action sequence here. Instead of pages of not much happening, this should be a trap that Church walks right into. Remember to keep throwing rocks at your protagonist on his journey. This would be a great opportunity to kill off quite a few of those miscellaneous characters that clutter up the script, like Mosely for example. Do we need him at all? Probably not.

ACT 3

Script does run too long. I made a few scene trims throughout. But here's a surefire way to shorten the script. The storming of the Narragansett fort is a fantastic sequence with several big moments—the death of Fuller immediately followed by the death of Manummah. Now the script really seems to be building up a big head of steam here. Our *expectations* are that the script is only about 15 pages or so till the conclusion. But script does go on quite a bit beyond that. Consider wrapping it up fairly quickly after the storming of the fort. Instead of wrapping up the battle so quickly, I'd make it into a siege and have it become the centerpiece of your Act 3. Think Bond movie here. The plan is to storm the fort, rescue Peter and Awashonks, and take down Metacomet. There should be a showdown between Church and Metacomet, the rescue of Peter, the escape and the passionate reunion with Awashonks. This can all be done in 15-20 pages, which would bring the script in right around 100-110 pages, which is perfect.

Shooting Church is a bad idea anyway. All the momentum of that fantastic fort storming sequence is lost. Right where the script is winding to a conclusion, it takes a left turn, then keeps going! I recommend cutting everything from page 84 on and starting afresh.

Now I realize that this is an adaptation of a true story. This is why adaptations are so tricky. On the one hand you have to be true to the source material, but on the other, you have to tell a compelling story in 2 hours. This necessitates much editing, changing, tweaking. You have to be unafraid to chop out characters, or combine several characters into a composite one. You must cut interesting but extraneous detail so that you remain focused on the protagonist's goal. The good news is that this is a compelling enough true story to make the adaptation worthwhile.

CRAFT

Your writing is superior. There was precious little to mark up in the script to be sent back. Style is strong and wordsmithing excellent.

DIALOGUE

“Saints and Strangers” features dialogue which sounds and feels absolutely correct. It is clear that the writer knows her stuff, is passionate for the era and got all the details right. HOWEVER, as far as screenplays go, a little verisimilitude goes a long way.

I’ve seen this happen many times—a writer painstakingly gets a vernacular or patois right, only for it to lose the reader for that exact reason. This is something you need to be aware of: many readers in Hollywood may not have the *patience* required to read and understand this script, because the dialogue is a bit challenging. That is the reason why certain historical films (the newest versions of the “Three Musketeers,” and the Kevin Costner “Robin Hood” being perfect examples) are written largely in standard American conversational English, but with a few touches here and there to denote the flavor of the times.

The sad reality is that readers, agents, managers, CEs, etc., are all horribly overworked. They might have to read 4 or 5 scripts each night. And so you want to do everything possible to keep their interest, keep them reading. If they have a pile of 5 scripts, and yours is 128 pages but the other four are 100-118 pages, guess which one is going to get read last? And then after a few pages, it becomes, “Uh, oh, period drama. What did that person just say? Screw it, let’s watch Sportscenter.” And just like that, they’re done.

And so I would recommend keeping this in mind while reviewing your dialogue. Is there perhaps a way to say something which is closer to standard American dialect yet still retains the flavor of the period? If so, do it.

MARKETABILITY

This is a tough one, because you’ve chosen subject matter which is traditionally considered “to be avoided” by Hollywood—a costume period piece. Now of course these films DO get made. But the odds of getting a project like this set up are not quite as good as, say, a screwball comedy. Historical epic dramas are expensive to mount, and if the studio is going to spend \$100 million on something, they generally want it to be based on material already proven in another genre—a book, TV show, comic book, etc. In order to get a big historical adventures like this do get made, oftentimes it is best to try to get a star or director passionate about the project. They would then hopefully champion it, call in favors, twist arms, and take a pay cut, to make it happen. So just be aware that despite the quality of the writing, finding an agent or manager willing to shop this script as a spec might be tricky.

Title could also be a lot stronger. (title) tells us nothing about the milieu. The best titles give us a flavor of what the script is going to be about. Try to find something that connotes the colonial era, Indian battles, and possibly a man torn between two worlds.

CONCLUSIONS

I highly recommend the book “The Writer’s Journey,” which distills myth down into an easily digestible formula applicable to virtually every movie. Armed with this knowledge, it becomes much easier to focus your story and hit the certain structural and emotional beats that people expect in a story. Applying the principles of myth throughout this script could really make this piece blossom, and I’m confident you have the talent to pull it off. With judicious editing and focus on the protagonist, and effort made to make the script more accessible, streamlined, and easier to follow, this script could attract some interest.

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:

PASS
CONSIDER