



ACT 1 SCRIPT REPORT

Note: this report has been edited to be fit for public download.

PROJECT TITLE:	THE MEETING
WRITER:	John Benchley
MAIN GENRE:	Drama
SUB-GENRE:	Black Comedy
SETTING:	Rural Location
PERIOD:	Present
BUDGET:	Low
PAGE LENGTH:	26
FORMAT:	Feature Film First Act
LOGLINE:	Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline
COMPARABLE TITLES:	NEBRASKA, CARNAGE
CONSULTANT:	FYZ
REPORT WORD COUNT:	2,147
REPORT DATE:	04/18/19

Project Overview

THE MEETING presents a focused and darkly comedic character study with echoes of titles as varied as NEBRASKA, CARNAGE, ROPE and even UP. The situation the first act engineers is a good one, trapping two diametrically opposed characters together with a clear dramatic clock and central conflict, bolstered by some really effective visual storytelling on the way there. The script does fare less well when it comes to pacing, however, covering relatively little ground in its first act to the extent that it becomes difficult to see what tensions that central story will resolve beyond the immediate one, and as such how we're going to stretch that out across a feature.

Notes

Premise

Turning first to the base details of the premise, THE MEETING has an effectively simple framework. The initial structuring of the central conflict is really well handled, the script almost immediately introducing _____ at the top of p.2. It bolsters our investment quickly afterwards by building to a moment on p.4 in which we see the almost spiritual connection between Martin and the farm – 'the stone walls and green grass flow through his veins'. This is deft work, layering the central thrust of the story *and* our emotional cause to invest in it side by side right from the off.

We can see a similar technique in play at the close of the act, which places Martin's attempted suicide(s) across p.18-21 either side of the reiteration of the narrative clock on p.20 and running straight into the establishment of the 'trapped' situation that presumably forms the story's core by p.27. It marries its moments really well. Just as the opening immediately adds impetus to the repossession letter by underscoring it with a sense of the farm's importance to Martin, the conclusion feeds tension into its core 'trapped' situation by leading into it with a display of just how desperate Martin really is. We now know full well that the stakes here go up to and include life and death. It's neatly constructed.

What proves a little harder to parse about the core concept, though, is its intended tone. The relatively languorous pace of the opening act (more below), and its focus on establishing Martin and the farm, alongside more specific moments like his attempted suicide (certainly the first attempt) seem to suggest a largely dramatic, quite dark character study. This ends up slightly undercut by some of the interactions we get with Nathaniel. Nathaniel's dialogue on p.9/10 perhaps errs a little too close to Bond villainy, what with the wine swirling and the 'hollow victory', and this slightly more tongue-in-cheek style reappears near the close of the act with Nathaniel accidentally letting the suicidal Martin run out of the room on p.20 or the fighting on p.25/26, in which we wring comedy out of those cuts forward to the two of them post-wrestle.

None of these moments are problems in isolation, but as an overall act it feels like we haven't quite landed on a clear tone by the close of the set-up. It's not that clear what kind of film we're in. If we're looking at a comedy, even a dark one, it's played too straight, and if the tone established by the bulk of the act is the intended one, then some of these moments with Nathaniel end up feeling a little jarring.

This isn't to say we can't play comedy and drama off one another, but it's important to note how crucial it is to establish a narrative's tone right out the gate. What the audience sees in the first scene or sequence unavoidably sets a precedent that will colour what follows (think the opening of HAROLD AND MAUDE, which immediately sells that blend of humour and darkness), and what we get here is a downbeat, played-straight opening establishing a character about to lose everything he cares about. When we then try and feed that into something we could read as a kind of mismatch, almost MIDNIGHT RUN-esque pairing at the close of the act, with Martin and Nathaniel handcuffed together and incompetently wrestling with one another, the two don't quite feel integrated. It's worth making a clearer-cut decision about what tone we're aiming at, and making sure that our opening provides that initial sense of it.

Story/Pace

This is where some of the script's current problems lie. Simply put, it doesn't quite feel like there's enough meat to the opening act yet, which leaves us with quite a slow pace and a potential lack of impetus. Even if we're aiming for a slower pace, we still need each new scene to provide something new, either moving the story forward or providing some new insight into the character. As above, THE MEETING's opening does a great job establishing the piece's central conflict and giving it an emotional edge via Martin's clear connection with the farm. The problem, though, is that this is a point that it draws out for a little too long.

On the technical level, we could put some of this down to the description. It's undoubtedly well-written, but so much attention is paid to Martin's moment-to-moment actions, to movements, gestures or thoughts that it draws out relatively slight sequences beyond their necessary scope (e.g. Martin in the field on p.2/3, for instance).

More broadly, though, it's about a lack of breadth when it comes to the drive of the story. There are, of course, details here that work beautifully, like using elements of Martin's daily routine to build the sense that he's about to do something stupid e.g. leaving the gate open on p.11 in contrast to p.7 or filling the cow trough with nuts on p.13. What we have to bear in mind, though, is that the simpler a narrative framework is, the deeper it needs to be. If we think of relatively slow-paced narratives like, say, LOST IN TRANSLATION or INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS – these work because they introduce a breadth of character conflicts that completely compensate for what could be argued is a lack of eventfulness. In the former, we have Bob and Charlotte's respective marriages, a midlife crisis for the former, an inability to figure out what to do

with her life for the latter, and, of course, their isolation all introduced at the front end to convince us that there's a lot to develop moving forward. In the latter, we have Llewyn's ailing career, the escaped cat, the pregnancy, the backstory of his musical partner all doing much the same.

The issue facing THE MEETING at present is that it feels like the only point we're making is that Martin is hugely _____, that this means everything to him, and that Nathaniel wants to take it away. It's a good set-up, but it's 1) not one that can quite sustain 26 pages on its own, hence the pacing issue and 2) not one that yet sells us on the idea that there's a tonne to develop and pay off in the story that follows. Good reference points here would be titles like CARNAGE or ROPE or THE PARTY or FREE FIRE. These similarly locked-down titles sustain themselves by, like the examples above, hinting at a potential range of conflicts we might uncover/develop later alongside the central one.

This in mind, to convince the audience that this set-up has legs, to convince them to invest, we need to give them more at the front end. If, for example, there's actually an ulterior motive for Martin's staunch refusal to let go of the property (like a slew of buried bodies, to give an OTT example) then that's something for which we'd want to sow the seeds early on, to give the audience at least a sense that there's more to this situation than meets the eye. Nathaniel's 'five years I have waited...' line on p.21, to use an example in the script, suggests a history between the two that we could potentially elaborate on within the first act a little more. After all, we're asking the audience to, it seems from the act's conclusion, invest in a story that sees these two locked together for a significant chunk of the duration, which means we absolutely need to see the depth, or the potential for depth, in their relationship right away.

So in a sense what we're missing here are the Chekhov's guns (bar the actual gun, which is a nice exception), the narrative elements we can identify in the first act that create a sense of tension from our understanding that they must have somewhere to go or something to do later in the story. We need there to be less reiteration of the details of the farm and more that reveals new and enticing elements of Martin's character. His attempted suicide on p.18 is a great moment for precisely this reason, in that it marks a key step up in our understanding of his character, of how far he'll go in pursuit of his goal. But this is, really, the first new thing we've learned about him since p.3 that isn't a kind of reiteration or expansion on the idea that he's deeply connected to his home.

In moving the story forward, it's therefore definitely worth delving into the idea that there's more to uncover about this central situation beyond simply wringing the story out of the pure 'Martin won't give up the house/Nathaniel is determined to take it' dynamic under the ticking clock of the approaching Thursday. As above, these could be things like a sense that Martin has an ulterior motive beyond the one he outlines on p.20 about not letting his grandfather's legacy go, or the sense that Nathaniel's quest for the farm is rooted in some deeper vendetta between the two men.

This grants us a potential two-birds-one-stone solution, in that exploring or hinting at these ideas early on will allow us to vary the pacing of the opening a little more by avoiding focusing too heavily on Martin's routine and the details of the farm, *and* will more clearly sell the audience on the idea that, come p.26, this is a situation that has a lot to unearth and develop.

Character

It's here worth noting the script's effective visual storytelling. It may be a laconic first act, but that absolutely doesn't preclude us from investing in Martin as a character, because the script displays a keen eye for those quiet moments of visual characterisation. Little details like the cow being used to Martin on p.5 illustrating his kind of synthesis with the place, or moments like him uncovering his grandfather's old whiskey bottle on p.4, or rearranging the furniture prepare for his death on p.12, do a brilliant job confirming the script's emotive line back on p.3, that 'This is not Martin's farm, he is the farm'. It's worth iterating that, though we may spend a little too much time on this aspect of the story, that absolutely doesn't reflect on its in-the-moment quality. There's a great marriage of environment and characterisation.

This stretches to Nathaniel, too. What's notable about the farm as a reflection of Martin's character, is how geared it is to acting on behalf of or cultivating others. We see him repairing the wall on p.3/4. Obviously, given it's a farm, we see him caring for animals, but also note that he affords them more care than he does himself, leaving his washing in a crumpled ball on p.6 so he can feed Barney, taking great care of his cow but struggling to dress himself on p.7. This facilitates a great contrast with Nathaniel come p.9. Martin has a 'holy picture' on his wall, while Nathaniel has his own diploma. Where Martin's clothes and boots are left in disarray, everything about Nathaniel is cultivated. It's a great way of visually reflecting the conflict that will later form the crux of the story. The script clearly recognises that the key to a good narrative twosome is that each possesses some core trait that the other lacks, and it's easy to see the clash between these two playing out well.

Conclusion

There's definitely an effective core concept here, trapping two desperate (one arguably dangerous) characters together inside the object of their goal as the clock ticks – there's a tonne of inherent tension there. However, the slow pace and relative slightness of the first act isn't yet selling the concept as one that will sustain the full runtime. The key moving forward is to delve deeper into the two characters at the centre in aid of finding a wider breadth of conflicts (besides the central one) that we can introduce at the front end and develop/pay-off as the story develops. It's also important to make a clear decision about tone and ensure that our opening scenes set that as a precedent.

About Your Script Consultant: FYZ

Your analyst is an experienced pro script consultant and editor who has assessed material extensively for Industrial Scripts, and is also a screenwriter with several projects under option.

Useful Resources

There's already a plethora of information online about screenwriting, so we thought we'd cut to the chase in this section and describe the best link for the scenario you might find yourself in.

- What you need if you're **struggling to see the wood from the trees** and want to get back to the essentials of screenwriting – the really important stuff: our [ULTIMATE Screenwriting Online Course](#) (free with FFN).
- What you need if you're **looking for inspiration**: our list of [31 screenwriting books](#) you might enjoy.
- If you just need a good ol' pick me up! Our article on "[10 Great Tales of Screenwriting Determination](#)" will get you there!

Glossary of Script Development Terms

Overall Rating

Note: we give our script consultants great leeway in terms of the verdict they deliver. Their decision is based on myriad factors, and no one score in any column is decisive.

- **PASS** – the script is not ready to be shown to agents, managers or the industry yet and to do so would be foolhardy. Upwards of 80% of the scripts we receive are Passes. Many scripts have, through a thorough development process with us, improved their rating significantly and been upgraded to Considers and Recommends. Whilst a Pass is by no means the death knell for a project, it's important not to shy away from the script's shortcomings, at least at this stage.
- **LOW CONSIDER** – the script *might* be ready to be shown to the industry, but it could be risky. In this case the script displays significant promise, but is letting itself down in a few key areas. Plenty to build on for the next draft.
- **CONSIDER** – this is a strong script, which is likely to provoke a favourable reaction from the industry, without blowing anyone away. The script has a number of strong attributes, but isn't "taste-proof" yet. Many will like it, a smaller number will have a lukewarm reaction.
- **RECOMMEND** – this script is pretty much good to go, or very close to being so. Scripts at the higher end of Recommend will be essentially taste-proof: even if the project itself isn't for that agent or that executive or that producer, they can't fail to be impressed by it, and good things will entail when they tell their friends about it. Less than 1% of script we assess receive a Recommend verdict.

Statistical Performance Explanations

- **MARKET POTENTIAL** – How well does the script fit into the marketplace? Is it in a genre likely to attract an audience? Do the concept and characters have demographic appeal?
- **ORIGINALITY** – Does the script stand apart?
- **CLARITY OF GENRE POSITIONING** – How well does the script fit into its intended genre? Does it manage to uphold the necessary

conventions and tone? Is it clearly marketable as a certain 'type' of story?

- **MARKET CAPABILITY** – How well is the script likely to perform once in the marketplace?
- **SCENE FLOW** – How effectively are scenes constructed? Does each beat serve to lead us to a clear point of resolution? Or does the scene feel drawn out and aimless?
- **SEQUENCE FLOW** – How effective is the script's act structure? Is there a sense of cause and effect from scene to scene?
- **ORIGINALITY OF STRUCTURE** – How cleverly is the script constructed? Does the structure serve a clear purpose to the story or the perspective from which it's told?
- **CLICHÉ AVOIDANCE** – Does the script avoid well-worn story beats or lines of dialogue? If it's a genre piece, does it manage to fit into that genre without falling back on tired tropes?
- **PACE** – The flow of the overall story. Do action scenes as written convey a sense of speed or urgency? Do slower sections work effectively to build tension, or do they drag? Does the speed and flow of the narrative fit with the premise/story itself?
- **CHARACTER DISTINCTIVENESS** – Are the characters sufficiently different from one another? Do they have clear, separate motivations, voices, mannerisms and so on? Or do they all sound like the writer?
- **CHARACTER ORIGINALITY** – Is this character just an archetype (grizzled male action hero; ruthless businesswoman), or are they a unique, nuanced creation
- **EMMARTINHY GENERATED** – The extent to which we can invest in the core characters, their motivations and their struggles.
- **CASTING POTENTIAL** –
- **VISUAL AMBITION/FLAIR** – Does the script display a keen understanding of the visual medium? Is information conveyed to the audience in a visually arresting way? Does that style feel integrated or gimmicky?
- **ORIGINALITY OF SETTING** – Does the setting feel fresh for the genre? Are we avoiding log cabins in horror films and eerily empty spacecraft in sci-fi?
- **CINEMATIC MOMENTS** – Does the story facilitate impressive moments of spectacle? Clever set-pieces? Well-staged reveals?
- **MATCH FOR THE GENRE** – How well does the setting suit the core premise of the piece? Is it a natural fit?
- **DIALOGUE AUTHENTICITY** – Does the dialogue sound believable? Or is it too obviously a vessel through which to convey story information?

- **SUCCINCTNESS** – Fairly self-explanatory. Is the dialogue concise? Does it avoid clunky, drawn-out exposition or pontification and clearly articulate the intended dramatic/character point?
- **DIALOGUE DISTINCTIVENESS** – Do the characters have a clear voice, as distinct from the work of other writers? Within the script itself, is dialogue sufficiently varied to reflect shifts in emotion or the voices of distinct characters?
- **ORIGINALITY OF THEMES** – Does the script’s core message/theme feel like something that hasn’t been fully explored before? Or are we reiterating that ‘if you believe in yourself you can accomplish anything’?
- **SOPHISTICATION OF THEME EXPLORATION** – Does the script have something complex to say about its core theme?
- **CLARITY OF THEME EXPLORATION** – How clearly is the script’s central theme conveyed? Is it clearly represented in each character and the broader course of events?
- **RELEVANCE/TOPICALITY OF THEME** – Does the central theme or message of the piece draw on something that will resonate today? Does it have something important to say about the world we live in?

Thank You!

Thank you sincerely for allowing us to read and critique your project. Please bear in mind that the comments and opinions in this script coverage are not intended to be the final say on the potential of the script or its writer.

Everything in the world of script development is subjective.

Yes, an impartial, truly trained eye who assesses screenplays 24/7 has written this report but ultimately the comments herein remain one human being’s *opinion*.

As a Hollywood screenwriter we know put it: “a script note is only as good as *you* think it is”.

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