



SCRIPT PIPELINE

XXXXX by xxxx

OVERALL: With its strong female protagonist and timely thematic message, this script tackles its historical subject matter with an approach that should have broad appeal. In some ways structured like a classic western, the plot includes a number of exciting action sequences, as well as some memorable supporting characters. And at its heart, it's an underdog story, with the sympathetic miners battling against both greedy owners and corrupt officials. While all this amounts to an emotionally engaging story, the current draft gets a bit bogged down in the second act, leading into a third act that feels rushed. There also seem to be some missed opportunities, both in the action and the characterizations. Addressing these plotting and character issues, as well as finding moments to enhance the conflicts and stakes, should lead to a script that takes full advantage of the concept's potential.

CHARACTERS: The opening scenes introduce Iverna in a way that both conveys her personality and introduces some of the story's central themes. There is significant symbolism in much of the action involving the animals, from the bond between mother and child (the bit with Shelly and her calf) to the idea of keeping people in groups of their own kind (the lashing together of the different animals during the storm). The former is something that only intensifies over the course of the story, while the latter provides an opportunity to give Iverna more of a character arc.

Iverna's arc is somewhat stunted because of how she is portrayed in the opening scenes. She's both wise and heroic, and the only thing that seems able to bring her down is an act of god (the devastating storm). She doesn't seem to have a fault, and as a result her big moments at the end of the script (revealing her identity to the others and finding her "voice" in her speech to the miners) seem somewhat shallow. These dramatic beats are correcting characters flaws that aren't really intrinsic to who she is but that have been imposed on her by the situation (having to work in the mine).

So it seems like the characterization has been overshot a bit. Iverna is so impressively fierce in the opening scenes that it doesn't really give her character a place to go. Yes, she's immediately appealing (who wouldn't find her interesting and charismatic), but she loses some of her intrigue as the story unfolds. And while there's a last minute attempt to create a beat in which Iverna presumably comes to accept that violence isn't the answer, the reasons for her change of heart aren't exactly clear (it seems mostly the result of the pleadings from Russel).

While a complete rethinking of the characterization is an option, it seems like some small moments of shading might be enough to create more of a sense of progression. So getting back to the symbolism of how she ties the animals together by species, maybe more could be done with that idea of Iverna being cautious when it comes to the mixing of races. Yes, in her household it isn't a problem, but she knows from experience the tragedy it can lead to.

Although she does tell Russel to not let anyone know about her relationship with Tug, that seems more about keeping her gender a secret (that's the major deception) than about facing any sort of racism. So maybe there could be a moment near the beginning of the second act where Iverna admonishes Russel for playing with a kid

from one of the other groups? And maybe Iverna is more cautious/doubtful about the groups coming together to form one union? Maybe she thinks that the whites, Italians, and Cubans should work together with the blacks and the Indians staying out of any leadership roles? Maybe her reasons for this are revealed later in a conversation with Mother Jones? On pg. 69, maybe she reveals that her father was lynched?

Another option would be to create more of a sense of a dichotomy between the private and public Iverna. A suggestion of this can be conveyed visually. For example, on pg. 7, maybe Iverna is watching through a gap from outside the tent while she stacks crates. And on pg. 20, maybe Iverna and Russel should be waiting on the street outside the bank. This would not only be a way to convey a sense of Iverna not yet being the public warrior that she will become, but it would also be a way to set-up some of her conflict with Tug. Despite their evenhanded relationship, there is still a part of Tug that wants to assert himself as a man. (It would also seem to be more in keeping with the social norms of the era.)

To create a bit more of a sense of Iverna's vulnerability, it might also be helpful to create more of a two-step into the first act climax. So maybe the initial plan is for Tug to get a job in the mine, with Iverna there as Russel's mother. But then, as they arrive at the train station, Iverna stops and asks Tug for his cap. She goes into the bathroom and emerges with her head shaved, wearing the cap, and tells them that if they are going to get the farm back, she will need to work too.

There are many different ways to stage a scene like this (maybe they arrive by wagon and Iverna goes off to the river to shave her head), but it seems like Iverna having to take some time to make the decision will not only create a stronger beat for her but will also help to create more of a sense of complexity in her relationship with Tug.

As written now, Tug comes across as a somewhat underdeveloped character. His conflict with Iverna mostly involves his doubt about the union. The scene on pgs. 46-47 is good, but the conflict is mostly about their views about working at the mine. Instead, the audience should get a sense that their disagreement in the scene is about something deeper. Their dialogue should touch upon underlying issues in their relationship—on themes and ideas that were established in the first act.

So maybe Tug should have a line like, "I've always done my best to take care of you." Or maybe he tries to set his foot down with a line like, "I've made the decision. I listened to you about coming here, now you have to listen to me." And this power dynamic between them should then develop over the course of the second act.

Ideally, both Tug and Russel should have character arcs. As written now, they are mostly written in service to Iverna's characterization. But how do they change over the course of the story? For example, if there were more of an exploration of Tug's feelings of inferiority in the relationship (and inferiority in comparison to Sticks), then his final sacrifice would come across as more of a climactic beat in his arc.

PLOT / STRUCTURE: The major plot points all fall about where they should. The first act ends when Iverna and Tug decide to go to the mine, a scene that ends on pg. 25. The second act ends when Iverna gives the speech to the camp on pgs. 97-98. That scene comes a bit late, and if the structure has a major problem, it is that the second half of the second act feels slow and padded, leading into a third act that seems rushed (minus the dénouement, only taking up around ten pages).

So while the first act could be tightened (more on this later), the major plot changes that should be considered happen in the second and third acts.

First, it might be good to have more of a gradual reveal of the horrors on the mine. The explosion scene on pgs. 49-50 (and the deaths it causes) comes across like a repeat of the earlier action on pgs. 30-31. So maybe that earlier incident shouldn't involve an explosion, and maybe it only results in a single death or a major injury?

Second, the script would perhaps benefit from a stronger midpoint and more of a ticking clock. So perhaps more could be done with the idea of the union movement slowly approaching Logan? To expand the scope a bit and create a major action sequence earlier in the second act, maybe the action should cut away from the main story? Maybe the midpoint could be a brief scene showing the Battle of Matewan? So that's the turning point in the union movement, which then unleashes the forces that will eventually come to a head during the Battle on Blair Mountain?

If we see that incident, there will also be more of a sense of the impending violence that will soon come to the miners, creating more tension in the scenes on pgs. 60-76 showing the "good times" at the tent camp.

Overall, this second half of the second act would benefit from more action and less dialogue. As a general guideline, there should be some sort of action (and the resulting escalation in the overall conflict) every seven pages or so.

As for the third act, it seems like this should be created into much more of a climactic set-piece, with some time taken to create suspense, and with more simultaneous action. In many ways, this sequence is like a classical western climax (movies like *HIGH NOON* or *OPEN RANGE*) as the various forces that we've been following finally come face to face.

What about this idea: Apparently one of the things that the Battle of Blair Mountain is known for are all the weapons that the miners hid in the woods. So why not do something with that historical fact (even if the timeline is fudged a bit)? Maybe, sometime in the second act, a group of kid miners (including Russel) has to quickly abandon their weapons in the woods before escaping from a group of guards or deputies? Maybe, at some point in the climactic battle, Iverna is injured and seems doomed? Maybe she hobbles her way into the woods, Clayton hot on her tail? Maybe she then seems to realize something? Clayton approaches, Iverna collapsed against a tree. He starts taking down his pants (thinking he'll rape her in her injured and exhausted state), but then she turns around and shoots him. It turns out that she recognized the tree that Russel hid his gun in. (This beat then being a call back to that scene in the first act when they are discussing hiding the thimble. And maybe the idea of where Russel likes to hide things—like maybe in a particular type of tree—could be planted in this scene.)

That's just one idea, but it does seem like so much more could be done with the climax. But whatever is done, it doesn't seem like the script really gains anything from Iverna showing mercy on Clayton. But if she does make this decision, it should be the culmination of a journey that has moved her from thinking that violence is the answer to agreeing more with Mother Jones' point-of-view (although nothing else that happens in the story seems to support this message). So if that is going to be the final beat, then it seems like much of what precedes it will need to be changed.

CONFLICT / STAKES: The primary conflict would benefit from a more effective antagonist. The ultimate antagonist is the mine company, but Briggs remains primarily a voice heard over the phone. Perhaps that is the point (the true villains remain behind the scenes), but it might be good to create a foreman character (or some "company man") who abuses the workers. Perhaps Bill should be given this role in the story. The conflict

between Sheriff Chafin and Arthur provides enough of a power struggle within that family, and it is unclear what making Bill the uncle really adds to it.

But it is the conflict between Iverna and Tug that should propel her character arc. If this is the story of Iverna finding her power and voice, then it seems like there should be a slight recalibration of their relationship in the beginning. Yes, Iverna is not a shrinking violet, but she did enter into a relationship with her husband's best friend after his death. So even if Iverna's arc is not going to be as extreme as say (to cite another story about unionization) the one in *NORMA RAE*, it does seem like there needs to be some suggestion (if even only with some of the small brushstrokes that have already been suggested) of Iverna as someone who has yet to become who she is meant to be.

This conflict with Tug should then inform Iverna's internal conflict. Again, whatever doubt she has over proceeding should connect to one of her flaws, whether it is not believing the groups can really come together or not believing in herself.

As for the stakes, it seems like doing more to create the sense of the Battle of Blair Mountain being the culmination of a series of events involving Union activity will give the climax more impact. It might also be good to make a mention of another industry in which unionization led to significant improvement in wages and working conditions (it's important to remember that many viewers will have little knowledge of the historical context).

TONE: While an argument could be made that unions are more essential than ever, for the most part they have taken a less prominent role in society (at least in the U.S.). That might make some people think that the thematic scope of the story is somewhat limited (and thus its potential audience). But there are some broader principles at play here, and deploying the appropriate tone, and emphasizing certain story and character points, should help to convey those principles. Specifically, it seems like the broader thematic message here is not of the need for unions but for understanding and cooperation between social groups. So whether in a union or just amongst members of a community, it is essentially for people to recognize their common interests and avoid being divided by those who wish to exploit them.

While the script does a great job of depicting how the various groups come together, it might be interesting to go into the issue from the other side, with Sheriff Chafin and/or Briggs espousing (and then implementing) a "divide and conquer" strategy of pitting the groups against each other. So maybe Chafin's dialogue on pg. 33 could be tweaked a bit to suggest this. Maybe there could be a beat where we see Bill purposely putting fuel on the fire of one of the ethnic skirmishes? Maybe something could be added to his line "Let them fight it out" on ph. 37 to suggest this strategy? Or maybe Briggs decides to offer the white miners a higher wage (maybe he disguises this tactic by giving them some sort of elevated job title)?

DIALOGUE: There are some strong character voices, particularly amongst the miners. As already discussed, it seems like the villains could be a bit more impactful, and the script would benefit from a bit more dialogue in some of the encounters between the villains and the heroes.

There are also a few passages that come across as unnecessarily expository. For example, it seems like the scene with Bill the banker on pg. 21 should perhaps end on Tug's line, "How do you expect us to do that?" The information about the rules at the mine should be moved to a later scene (such as the first scene with Coop). The scene also doesn't entirely make sense—Bill is trying to convince Tug to take a job in the mine, but then he seems to say at the end of the scene that it's not worth it ("It doesn't. It hurts you."). It also seems like the

dialogue on pg. 10 could be made more concise.

The storm sequence could also be tightened. Consider cutting the kitchen scene on pgs. 14-15 and moving Russel's recitation of the Declaration of Independence to the field scene on pg. 12 (maybe he is reciting it as he jumps around the bales while Iverna and Tug are having their conversation).

Finally, look for ways to have the action compliment (and at times contrast) the dialogue. For example, on pg 12, why have the line of description "They kiss again and hold one another closer" convey essentially the same idea as the dialogue. Instead, maybe Iverna's behavior here should suggest that there might be a bit more going on. Maybe Tug is holding Iverna close and kisses the top of her head, but she's now looking out at Russel.

OTHER CONCERNS:

--On pg. 7, maybe the tent should shake before they run.

--Consider cutting earlier out of the scene on pgs. 9-10. When Iverna talks about Sticks, the context and the way the dialogue is delivered should be enough to convey the idea that Iverna wants Russel to know how much she loved Sticks.

--On pg. 15, it seems like "slides" is supposed to be "sides."

--Either Bill the banker or Bill the guard should be given a new name.

--On pg. 47, consider cutting the kiss that ends the scene. It might be better to exit the scene on a note of conflict.

--On pg. 79, the reactions of the others to Iverna's reveal should be described.

--On pg. 97, it seems like "muttered" should be "muddled."

--Some typos: On pg. 1, "it's mouth." On 26, "She drop." On 28, "months pay." On 36, "nights sky." On 42, "it's horn" and "are talking." On 45, "to long." On 51, "off himself." On 57, "Hillbilly's." On 58, "site." On 64, "miners hands." On 70, "Arthurs." On 82, "Iverna face." On 83, "others face." An on 103, "Whose the best."

GRADE: Further Development Suggested (FDS)