



SHORT FILM REPORT

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

PROJECT TITLE:	LAST THOUGHTS
WRITER:	Patricia May
MAIN GENRE:	Drama
SUB-GENRE:	War
SETTING:	Congo
PERIOD:	Unspecified
BUDGET:	Low
PAGE LENGTH:	1
FORMAT:	Short film
LOGLINE:	Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline
COMPARABLE TITLES:	BEASTS OF NO NATION
VERDICT:	Pass
REPORT WORD COUNT:	1,663
REPORT DATE:	9/30/18

Project Overview

LAST WORDS is a confined short with echoes of titles like BEASTS OF NO NATION and FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER, given its focus on a child soldier. Given its brevity, the crux of the narrative is its subversion of expectation, which is definitely a nice one in concept, but isn't enough in isolation to sell the concept as an effective short. Building up a narrative slightly more will help add weight to that conclusion. At present it feels like we have a pay-off without the set-up it needs to really have impact.

Notes

There are definitely some solid base ideas/themes here. War, and in particular its effect on the innocent, is an ever-pertinent one to explore. There's some really nice detail in this vein in the exchange between boy and soldier, an

exchange that hinges on highlighting the contrast between them. One's in uniform, the other topless. One has family, the other doesn't. And, more interestingly, one frames the discussion emotionally – 'you must feel lonely' – while the other remains completely detached.

Thematically, this touches on what feels like an important point, the fact that the power dynamic in a conflict hardens the weaker more than it does the powerful. The soldier is trying to reach across a divide, to connect on a human level, but for Rahid the luxury of that kind of connection and empathy is long gone. We can see it their brief exchange about loneliness and family. These two characters are involved in the same broader situation, but for one – the soldier – that doesn't require the sacrifice of close personal relationships or human emotion, because he's on the side with the power. It's a nice detail in this sense that it's only the boy whose name we learn. As above, this is a narrative that hinges largely on that final subversion of expectation, and a little detail like that is a great way of letting us believe that the soldier's attempts to reach out might actually get him somewhere. Of course, that breakthrough is short lived.

There's also an interesting point here about the distinction between the broader narrative of a conflict and the more immediate dynamic between two people, specifically the ways in which the former can completely consume the latter. The reveal at the conclusion of the film pretty conclusively puts these two characters on opposite sides of a conflict but in the conversation itself we're seeing an attempt to cast aside that wider narrative. It raises an interesting question about the culpability of the soldier as part of a collective. Though it's never confirmed, we naturally jump to the conclusion that the loss of Rahid's family is the result of that broader conflict. He didn't lose them in an accident or to an epidemic. They were killed by the soldier's peers.

It's possible, then, to read the soldier's actions as being indicative of a broader hypocrisy. He's acting as though he can remove himself from that wider narrative and simply connect with this lost child. In his mind, he can, because the conflict and his personal life are two separate things, and so he's able to compartmentalise. What the conclusion of the film helps illustrate is that this just isn't true across the board. The soldier's attempts to avoid his fate by reaching out are doomed from the start, because he's forgetting that, for Rahid, there's no dividing line between the personal narrative and the overarching one. They're the same thing because the latter cost him the former. There's no switch to flick between the two, and so the soldier's attempts to do so are futile.

So, there's definitely some thematic meat here. It's also worth noting the script's stripped back, laconic writing style, which gels really nicely with the dynamic of the two characters. As above, it's a dynamic characterised by an attempt to make an emotional connection falling on deaf ears, and there's something similarly detached and emotionless about the description. We can see it in the opening. There's no emotional language here. It's direct, practical. We're told what we're looking at, its size, its colour, what we can hear. And that's it.

This is even more pronounced at the end of the script. It's obviously a pretty significant moment, and one we might naturally assume to be written accordingly, with reference made to the character's movements and expressions, perhaps a moment of hesitation from the boy, or a last-minute plea from the soldier. But, again, the language remains emotionally detached, stripped back, plain. We're told what we're looking at, its size and, again, what we can hear. It gives the whole thing a clinical feel that falls into step with the way Rahid seems to be characterised. Just as the soldier's attempts at connection, at building empathy are met with an emotional wall, so to do the visual elements around the characters lack any and all emotional characteristics. They're just things. A subtle but clever way of illustrating that desensitisation.

In a sense, the brevity and simplicity of the script serves it well here in the sense that we can easily apply the readings above, and plenty more varied, because the story is slight enough to allow it.

But however we want to parse the script's meaning, its 'point', the crucial thing worth noting is that, as a narrative, it doesn't yet prove entirely impactful or satisfying.

As above, what the narrative is trading on is that final subversion, that cut forward and the realisation that the power dynamic is the opposite of what we naturally assumed. To be fair, the script definitely puts in some groundwork here to make sure that subversion has some meaning. On the visual end, there's the soldier's uniform in contrast to Rahid's toplessness, immediately suggesting a power dynamic. The opening shot of the van is a nice lead in, because we naturally associate the vehicle with the soldier and think we have the whole situation figured out. And, with the exchange itself, the fact that the soldier so clearly takes the lead – he's the one asking the questions – further reinforces that read.

However, there just isn't quite enough here for that subversion to play as anything more than a 'didn't expect that' moment. The foundation isn't quite

there to elevate it to emotional and impactful. It's like a punchline without enough set-up. For a rug pull like this to work, we need to weave the rug in the first place. And, as above, the only markers we have are superficial ones: the uniform, the van, the fact that the soldier is asking the questions. We're subverting a snap judgement rather than a developed investment in a situation, because that situation doesn't have the time to go anywhere before the truth is revealed.

As such, drawing out the exchange a little, even just a page or two, will really help here. The fact the characters are in a van, on a journey, is a nice tension builder because we know there's a kind of ticking clock in play, that their destination will end the exchange and reveal something about their situation. But that tension doesn't really fly if it's only in play for thirty seconds. There's scope to play around more with the dynamic between boy and soldier, to let the audience feel like they're getting a clearer and clearer picture of the situation, so that when we reveal to them that their read is inaccurate, it has more to subvert. A big part of the strength of a 'twist' (if we can call it that) is the way in which it reframes what's come before, the way in which it lets us look back at the preceding narrative and realise its true meaning in context.

The soldier trying to pry into Rahid's life, trying to build a rapport, for example, is definitely something that could be pushed further in this regard. The ending obviously makes us realise that the motivation behind these attempts is to humanise himself in Rahid's eyes and hopefully avoid his fate. The more depth that exchange is given in the moment, the more powerful that realisation is going to be. Currently, we don't actually have all that much to reframe. If we push the soldier's attempts that bit further, give him more time to try and wrangle that sympathy, then we can play with the audience's assumptions, which will likely be that he's nervous about Rahid's fate and is trying to make him feel comfortable, or that he's guilty for his role in the conflict and is trying to find a way to mitigate that feeling by connecting with someone on the other side. Again, the more we push that, the more the ultimate realisation that what we're seeing is actually motivated by fear will carry weight.

It also feels like we're perhaps missing some surrounding details in the conclusion itself. Once Rahid says 'it's time' and we cut forward, the description makes it seem as though it's still only he and the soldier. He's described pulling the soldier out of the van, and, though we can obviously assume someone is driving it, we don't get a tangible sense that someone else is overseeing this. Even accepting that the soldier's hands and legs are bound, it's a little difficult to buy the eight-year-old Rahid pulling him from the van

and executing him without an attempt at resistance by the much larger, stronger soldier. A small point, but worth noting.

Conclusion

Definitely some strong thematic ideas here, and what's here is well-crafted. The issue moving forward is that there just isn't quite enough of it to sell the subversion at its core. Taking the time to build the tension of the situation a little more, to wring a little more out of these characters, will help make that great reveal work. What we want to avoid is the narrative playing like an immediate 'here's a situation'/'actually no' bait and switch, which risks feeling hollow.

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
- **EMPATHY 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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