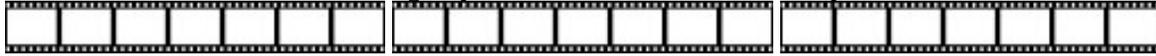


# SCRIPTGAL

## Screenplay Consultation & Analysis



**TITLE:** LOS PONCHEROS

**WRITER:** Jimmy Nguyen

**FORM:** Screenplay

**LOCATION:** American West Territory

**DRAFT DATE:** N/A

**CIRCA:** Mid-Late 1800s

**PAGES:** 119

**GENRE:** Western/Action/Drama

**COVERAGE DATE:** 06/23/2017

**SUBMITTED BY:** Writer

### COMMENTS ONLY

**LOGLINE:** The racially diverse former members of a notorious gang find themselves on different sides of an escalating race war between Caucasians, Native Americans, and Blacks in the developing West.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Budget	
Concept		X				
Story Line		X			High	
Characters	X				Medium	X
Dialogue		X			Low	
Tone		X				
Technical/Execution			X			

### RECOMMENDATION:

**Screenplay:** CONSIDER WITH RESERVATIONS

**Writer:** CONSIDER WITH RESERVATIONS

SCALE: RECOMMEND, CONSIDER, CONSIDER WITH RESERVATIONS, PASS FOR NOW, PASS

**OVERVIEW:** It's really hard to distill this very complex, ensemble story down to a single logline that conveys any of the excitement, humor, and intricacies of this script. The writer has done nothing short of a heroic job weaving these different yet connecting storylines together, while incorporating flashbacks to show what the former gang were like in their heyday. Even calling them a "gang" feels reductive - they were a family. They weren't (necessarily) committing crimes, rather they were advocating for social justice in the ever-changing, late 1800s American West.

It seems Los Poncheros started out seeking adventure and doing good. But their reputation and situation changed when - apparently under the auspices of doing good - their most notorious act was killing Texas Rangers who were brutalizing the Navajo Indians they had forcibly removed from their land and were marching to their new reservations. Presumably after this event, the members scattered to the winds. One of the biggest notes is confusion in the script - especially since the script is so complex. But these are fixable issues - for example - including some dates in the opening montage would help. Maybe adding some supers with dates throughout the script, to really clarify the time frame between flashback and present.

But story-wise, it seems at least some time has passed since the notorious killing of the rangers and the present day, which starts on page 2. Now the gang members are split up - Lew Dang is in jail and about to be executed, Turban Corbett has become a religious fanatic and is hiding in the hills, Respects Nothing is joining forces with Black cowboys to rid their territory of the White Man, and another, Charlie Dart, has a family - but it's really not clear what his day-to-day life has become.

They all become players and pawns, in a way, in different schemes. The liberal minded (and slightly insane) Governor wants to integrate the community and enlists Lew Dang's help. Respects Nothing is helping a scheme which will bring Black residents into town, with the hopes of causing "White Flight." Charlie Dang's son is kidnapped by White town elders - to get him back, Dang must convince black landowners - rich and poor - to sell their lands. Turns out, the elders know the lands hold silver.

The body of the script consists each former gang member moving forward with his different agenda. There are also significant ancillary characters - all incredibly vivid and distinctive and at times amazingly funny. The characters, dialogue and relationships are extraordinary. I can really see this movie! The different storylines intersect and are filled with tension, drama, and inventive action. We meet Lew Dang first - in the present, and he seems to be the de facto protagonist - although this is truly an ensemble piece. The writer was smart enough to assign the characters brilliant, often hilarious and definitely distinctive names. But it still takes some work keeping track of the characters and storyline.

So overall.... I really enjoyed this script! It felt, at times, like the Quentin Tarantino version of SILVERADO! In a good way. As mentioned, the characters and dialogue are really very strong. And we are invested in the story of these four former brothers-in-arms. I think it's very smart that they end up - post-gang - working together and against one another. I also love the backdrop of the conflict between the different ethnic groups and how that drives the action. The Native Americans are being moved off their lands. Some blacks are free landowners, others live in homes resembling little more than shanties, some are cowboys, but none are really welcome in Copper City proper. Lew is an Asian but his group seems to be considered, for lack of a better phrase, "closer to white."

And while I really did like the script a lot and think with work it could be a movie that people would enjoy seeing - for sheer entertainment value as well as its deeper message and the progressive point of view of minorities - I think there are some serious issues that keep it from being a full-fledged success at this time.

## COMMENTS:

### EXECUTION / CONFUSION

I mean to discuss this in both broad storytelling and specific screenplay format ways.

#### Specific

As mentioned, the script was often confusing. I had no idea what the time frame was other than knowing it was post Civil War. This should be clarified - for the ease of the reader. But I think that including Supers with dates would really help when you jump around in time.

Also, when you introduce Lew, you never say he is Asian. He's described as having a "handsome baby face." You need to clarify this for the reader. Anything that will be clear - and important - on screen needs to come across in the script. When we meet people, especially in this script, you need to let us know right away their age and race. Don't assume people will know this or (more importantly) want to work to figure it out. The script shouldn't be a struggle to read and follow - you need to do whatever you can to make the read as easy and effortless as possible.

Also there were lots of format errors. First - scene numbers are usually only included on shooting scripts - they shouldn't be used here. And there are some basic mistakes, like not using a CHARACTER NAME when dialogue continues after a block of description. And you shouldn't split a line of dialogue between two pages. There are many, many typos and punctuation errors. Transitions were not formatted properly, etc. These not only distract from the story, they make the read more difficult, and they signal the reader (rightly or wrongly) that you aren't careful or professional enough to make sure the script is at its best.

Bottom line, even though I think the script is really good and has true potential, some readers (especially ones who aren't being paid!) are going to stop reading if the experience is too difficult. So don't shoot yourself in the foot!

#### Broad Storytelling

I think given the number of characters and different storylines, plus flashbacks, overall you've done a great job keeping things straight. But, it is still a lot of work for a reader - especially to remember which white man has what agenda. And more than once I had to flip back to the first meeting between the Black cowboys and Respects Nothing (again - I

love the names!) to figure out what exactly their plan was. Especially once Corbett comes onto the scene.

And I found the differences between and different agendas of the Native American tribes confusing. It was hard to track which group wanted what - and who were enemies. I would do whatever I could to clarify this.

I think all of these storylines will be much easier to follow once on screen. But, again, the goal is to make the script as clear and easy to follow as possible. I'm not sure the best way to do this. In general, I would try to simplify whenever and wherever you can. I don't have specifics for that.

But you could also help the reader by using devices such as Chapter Titles. Again I think of Tarantino. Some sort of device to remind the reader of the different storyline agendas.

## FLASHBACKS

In general I liked the flashbacks to when they were a gang, but in the reading it took me a while to realize we were only seeing one continuous sequence being told over time - the story of the march. This, in and of itself was a little confusing.

And I think their overall arc - that at first they were exciting, famous, Robin Hood, social justice "outlaws," then crossed a line by killing the Rangers - doesn't come through as strongly as you need it to. I didn't really grasp how much trouble they were going to be in. And why. For example - why is Lew going to be executed when the others seem unscathed? And I didn't feel there was even a very distinctive scene of them killing Rangers. They chance after the Native Americans who steal the children - which is a great sequence - and I think at least one Ranger gets shot in the process, but I felt like I missed something.

And I really wanted to feel how this episode changed their lives. Finding a new territory seems to be the last mention (in the past) of what the future holds. But I really don't know what happened.

The whole arc needs to be stronger and we need to really feel how the present plays against what happened in the past. The distinction between the two feels too muddled - while I like the flashback, I'm not sure why I'm seeing it. If the only point is to show them as comrades as a counter to how disparate they are now - it could be a lot shorter. Which I think would be a mistake.

Maybe one of the problems is they come into the job saying they are there to keep an eye on the Rangers - and the Rangers are bad and cruel from the start - so nothing much changes. Maybe the Rangers' bad actions should be more of a surprise? But that would mean you need to give them another reason for being on the walk - why not just use the Rangers.

**ENDING**

I got very confused here. I'm still unclear why Corbett turns on Lew - because he is for integration (or at least is working for someone who is?) And I'm not sure the subsequent flashbacks to Corbett and Dart killing people and setting Old Man Tuba's orchard on fire made sense. The entire ending felt very abrupt. I wasn't quite sure what to make of the final scene - are you setting things up for a sequel? That scene in particular felt abrupt and unsatisfying. I LOVE that Lew is alive and saved by Bat Girl - and that he is shot, actually and lives. I just need to understand what happens afterward.

**CONCLUSION:** This is an exciting, fun script with great characters and dialogue. Currently its biggest hindrance is readability - both in screenplay format/typos/errors and following the complicated narrative. But I can see this as a movie that audiences will want to see.