



TITLE: **LOS PONCHEROS**

WRITER: Jimmy Nguyen

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SUBMITTED BY:	Confidential	DATE:	July 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2017
AGENCY/COMPANY:		LOCATION:	Old West
FORM/LENGTH	SP / 126p	CIRCA:	1868; 1990s (w/ flashbacks)
DRAFT/PUBLISHER:		GENRE:	Western

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LOGLINE: Several ethnically-diverse gunslingers, who were once “Poncheros” and close friends under the Bat Flag Republic, find themselves on different sides when they’re recruited by rival parties to carry out conflicting agendas in an Old West settlement named Copper City.

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COMMENTS: We want to underscore the positives in this material. There are technical issues to fix and plenty of criticism below, but some of the elements at work in these pages are genuinely a great deal of fun. Above all else, the characters are great, the tone is a blast, and the “world” of the story and the themes swirling within are compelling. From there, it’s a matter of taking a chainsaw to these pages to both fix some technical glitches and to reshape the plot into something with more clarity and commercialism.

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ELEMENTS/NOTE:

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PROJECT: **PASS w/ reservations**  
WRITER: **PASS w/ reservations**

PREMISE  
CHARACTERIZATION  
DIALOGUE  
STORYLINE

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
	X	X	
	X		
	X	X	
		X	

## COMMENTS:

The box score and recommendation for this project don't tell the whole story because there's a cool story lurking in these pages. Right now, however, we might compare this script to a block of marble which is about to be carved into a statue. A huge amount of stone needs to be chipped away to reveal what's underneath. In its present form, this whopping 126 page screenplay is woefully overwritten and makes for an exhaustive read. It's far too heavy on dialogue (even though some of that dialogue is crackingly-good) and the narrative comes across as rather muddled. The lack of clarity is compounded by the rather complex dynamic between the characters, technical glitches (such as missing scene headings), and a plot which needs to be tightened up from beginning to end. Clearly then, there's a considerable amount of work here for the author to dig into. On the upside, he's created some genuinely entertaining characters and there's a fun tone throughout the narrative. To truly bring this story to life, however, the author needs to streamline this story so it's faster-paced, easier to get a grasp on the broad strokes of the plot, and as cinematic as possible. We love the Poncheros and some of the story components are fresh and compelling (e.g. Lew's efforts to combat discrimination), but the pros are hidden by too many cons right now.

Westerns are tough business. There's no way around that cold, hard reality in the current landscape. A decade or so ago, the domestic box-office ruled the world and whatever a movie grossed in the U.S., producers only expected 50% of that amount at the international box-office. Consequently, the pictures which fared well with American audiences ruled the day. Now, in recent years, this formula has flipped. International box-office is now worth double or triple domestic. As a result, producers, studio execs, and financiers want project which will work globally. Unfortunately, there are several genres which are very culture-specific. Comedy and drama are in that category. What's funny in, say, Kansas may not get laughs in Romania. Here, where LOS PANCHEROS is concerned, our worry is that the western genre has very limited international appeal. It's so immersed in Americana that very few producers are willing to roll the dice on westerns. Fortunately, there's a sizeable element in this script which could help tip the scales back in its favor – the ethnic diversity of the characters. In blunt terms, we have an Asian, African-American, Caucasian, and an Apache driving this story.

This diversity in the lead characters lends this entire project – along with the Poncheros backstory and iconography – it's conceptual identity. Yet we can't help but come away from these pages wishing these characters were reunited upfront, and had to work *together* throughout the narrative. Instead, they each move along their own parallel tracks as their agendas and journeys are juxtaposed until they intersect in Act III. The ending of this story suggests there's much more to come and suggests a sequel would thrust the Poncheros into more direct contact. Yet therein lies another concern with this draft – it needs to function more effectively as a stand-alone picture. It'll be incredibly hard to get filmmakers invested in making one western, let alone a western which demands another installment, or two. All of this leads us to ponder, how can we take all of these fascinating characters and work them into a tighter, more entertaining story.

As touched on earlier, another systemic problem with this screenplay is the heavy reliance on dialogue. To be candid, there's far too much talking and not enough cinematic spectacle. That's not to say there aren't any gripping visual sequences, because there are. Nevertheless, the amount of page space taken up by dialogue exchanges is immense. Some of the dialogue is verbose too and it's not hard to identify conversations which could be whittled down. The bottom line here is that this script should clock in around 110p, far less than its current 126p. Moreover, the existing length isn't even accurate because this draft is missing scene headings, character slugs, and parentheticals. So if formatted perfectly it would probably span well over 135 pages. There was a time when 120p was the widely accepted average but for whatever reason, perhaps shrinking attention spaces or producers who simply have less time, there is now more pressure on writers to deliver their stories in clipped, tighter packages.

One means of helping bring the page count down would be to get rid of the narrative bookend upfront, i.e. the 1990s documentary interviews. There isn't even a second bookend to match at the end of the narrative, which makes the opening pages even more ineffective. To be fair to the writer, we understand why we chose this route because the backstory of the Poncheros is a rich and detailed history. Unfortunately though, we're going to need to receive this exposition some other way because the first 5p of this script will hinder the appeal of this project. A producer wants their attention grabbed right away and we fear they'll be turned off too quickly by so much exposition, so fast, all of which screams period western. It would be better to jump into the adventurous spirit of this story with a set-piece that establishes the comedic tone and the swashbuckling action.

Ultimately, we want to underscore the positives in this material. There are technical issues to fix and plenty of criticism above, but some of the elements at work in these pages are genuinely a great deal of fun. Above all else, the characters are great, the tone is a blast, and the "world" of the story and the themes swirling within are compelling. From there, it's a matter of taking a chainsaw to these pages to both fix some technical glitches and to reshape the plot into something with more clarity and commercialism.

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## PAGE NOTES / TECHNICAL ISSUES:

For starters, the following are a few global issues, i.e. “mistakes” which are widespread throughout these 126 pages and would be too laborious to list one-by-one.

*Global Issues:*

- # 1 Using Final Draft instead of other screenwriting programs can help perfect the formatting. A consistent issue in this draft is that dialogue gets interrupted from one page to the next. In FD, dialogue passages are split and indicated with CONTINUED and (CONT'D) on each respective page, without breaking up an individual sentence. It simply makes for a smoother read.
- # 2 If a character has back-to-back lines of dialogue which are interrupted by a line of narrative action, then repeat the character slug (name) followed by (CONT'D).
- # 3 If a character pauses, or there's a dramatic silence between sentences, use a parenthetical (BEAT). Don't just leave a blank line.
- # 4 Scene headings. Always use hyphens to break up components, never a comma. Start with the smallest location and go to biggest, ending with time of day.

For example:

(incorrect) EXT. COPPER CITY, HOTEL PORCH, DAY

(correct) EXT. PORCH – HOTEL – COPPER CITY – DAY

Only include Copper City when essential or else it's redundant. Alternately, the larger location, city or town, could be put in parentheses.

EXT. PORCH – HOTEL (COPPER CITY) – DAY

- # 5 Always include at least one line of action after a scene heading, even if it's only to mention who is present in the scene. This helps with the script breakdown in pre-production (i.e. it tells line producer which talent is in scene).
- # 6 Always include a comma to separate dialogue and name of character being addressed, e.g. “Yes, sir.”
- # 7 Avoid camera and stage direction. A couple of times is okay but here (see p.44) the author often uses camera framing when it should be a scene heading.

*Page specific:*

- p. 1 No need for a comma before “, discovering a new pass...”

Capitalize Jean's name the first time it appears.

- p. 2 Ditto for Laurel – *always* cap a name the first time.
- p. 5 “Early spectators mill about in a dusty square.”
- p. 6 Insert line of description after scene heading, perhaps move up intro of J.D. Flowers to fix this.  
Repeat character slug before “Come on in, fellas.”
- p. 7 Don’t need to capitalize “...future Judge.”
- p. 8 Again, repeat character slug when J.D. Flowers’ dialogue is interrupted.
- p. 9 Another example of comma use: “Buck up, son.”  
Delete extra space in Warden’s dialogue: “Have you ever tried...”
- p. 13 Moses dialogue interrupted (add slug and CONT’D).
- p. 17 Some dialect seems to be purposely misspelled, is that correct? In this instance, “camaradee” (camaraderie).
- p. 19 Use (beat) instead of blank line when dialogue pause is required.  
“But I do not want to share...”  
“...rivers, and forests provides all we need.”
- p. 23 More dialogue breaks.
- p. 25 Ditto.
- p. 26 “You are a very fair man.”
- p. 27 Introduce Yucca and Polonio properly (cap names, etc.)
- p. 39 Never start a scene or follow a scene transition (CUT TO:) without a scene heading.
- p. 40 “...buried up to its head...”
- p. 41 See p. 39 note.
- p. 45 Use INT. in scene headings, not INTERIOR  
The description mentions Madelyn’s “exotic accent” but where it is from?

p. 45 In dialogue, typically every number is spelled out, i.e. five not 5, unless it's a phone number or address.

Even if "idn't" is intended as dialect it could be construed as a typo, so spell correctly and leave the delivery to the actor.

p. 46 "evidemment" ???

p. 49 Peeks (looks) not "peaks" (mountain).

p. 51 Position INTERCUT WITH: on the right side of the page, as a transition.

Consider using scene headings for each vignette in this sequence. Same on p.52

p. 53 Break up montage into individual lines for each vignette. Some writers number each one or use bullet points.

p. 56 Even when we BEGIN FLASHBACK, still need a scene heading.

p. 61 Include a line of description under MANSION scene heading, if only to introduce the VALET.

p. 63 Peek (looks) not "peak" (mountain).

p. 67 Be wary of getting too verbose in the description, e.g. "cephalopodic frenzy."

p. 70 Cornfields is a single word.

"He is wearing..." works better than "He has on..."

p. 73 "It's all the rage with the upper classes..."

p. 74 Capitalize "Say..." at the start of the sentence.

p. 75 Remove apostrophe before Charlie's character slug.

p. 76 Breathes, not "breaths."

Combine into single sentence: "And a all these rebel Indians, who are now fugitive?"

p. 81 Fix Lew's interrupted dialogue; insert (beat) or delete line space.

p. 84 "...suddenly comes to a stop..."

## LOS PANCHEROS (7/27/17)

- p. 85 Peeks (looks) not “peaks” (mountain).
- p. 86 “...when you fall asleep...”
- p. 87 “...guess whose crazy stick...”
- p. 90 Underway is a single word.
- p. 102 Add possessive apostrophe: “Charlie’s hat.”
- p. 103 “...telling my friends what they can and can’t do with their own property.” (Unless this is on purpose).
- p. 108 “She’s sent to us by the Lord.”
- p. 112 “Whose side are you on now?”
- p. 115 Need a scene heading after CUT TO:  
“Shoot im already.”
- p. 117 Need scene heading in flashback.
- p. 119 Need a scene heading after CUT TO:
- p. 122 Peeks (looks) not “peaks” (mountain).
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