

Pitching resources for “The Other Landscape”

Summary (40 words)

1950's. David Urquhart is searching for Douglas Menzies. Menzies is searching for his dead wife. What they find will change their lives for ever. A film of love, death, and magical realism set in the wild Scottish Highlands.

Pitch (500 words)

The Other Landscape is a screen adaptation of 1956 novel by Neil Gunn.

Highland born anthropologist David Urquhart, (30) is sent homeward by his friend, Alan Townbee, to track down the film composer, Douglas Menzies (50).

Townbee is editor of a London literary magazine to which Menzies has submitted “The Cliff”, a story that to Townbee reads like ‘mad music in the nature of an overture’. Townbee wants to commission more, but Menzies has failed to respond. By sending Urquhart he hopes to find Menzies and also shake his friend out of his sheltered academic life and thinking. Urquhart is struck by Menzies’ writing which tells of a terrible shipwreck and which struggles with reconciling creation and destruction.

Two years earlier Menzies and his wife Anna had retreated to an isolated cliff top house following the trauma of Anna’s miscarriage of their first child; a tragedy precipitated by Menzies infidelity. Abandoning composing for films, Menzies began his dream of writing a symphony. But when the notes failed to flow, Menzies wrote the story.

On arrival in the remote Highland village, Urquhart is shaken to realise that “The Cliff” is a metaphor for Anna’s recent death in the miscarriage of their second child. Meeting Menzies for the first time, Urquhart is emotionally and intellectually pulled into Menzies’ quest to use music to penetrate what he calls ‘the other landscape’ and find Anna.

His rationalist foundations shaken, Urquhart’s life is also upended by the daughter of the hotel landlord. From the first time he sees Catherine singing at a ceilidh he is mesmerised, and the moment mirrors the first meeting of Menzies and Anna years before. Now following the path Menzies has set for him, Urquhart finds himself a participant in an ever more powerful cycle of recurrence.

Tensions between the local community and the English sporting guests at the hotel form a subplot of two cultures in conflict. The self styled leader of the hotel guests, the retired diplomat, Major Thorneybank, begins to challenge Menzies growing influence on Urquhart, but his colonial cynicism and fear of the unknown is no match for the composer’s romantic creativity.

Catalysed by his encounters with Urquhart, Menzies begins the last part of his profound journey to his “other landscape”. Meanwhile the tensions in the community are fuelled and partially resolved by often comedic episodes including the Major’s temporary disappearance and a hotel fire. Further reconciliation comes with a dramatic sea rescue in a storm beneath the cliffs of Menzies home in which he is the hero.

Following the storm, Urquhart now grown in maturity and understanding, persuades Menzies he may never defeat the forces of creation and destruction but he can finish his symphony.

Wildcat

Menzies does so, but the price is high. Menzies dies in Urquhart's company while descending the cliff and reaches "the other landscape", while above, his house is destroyed by fire.

In a final act of recurrence and renewal, Urquhart and Catherine have the child so tragically denied to Menzies and Anna.

Writer/Director's statement of intent

I believe passionately in film to tell stories and explore ideas. This is not just a cracking story, packed with romance, drama, tragedy, comedy, but a film unafraid to challenge an audience with big ideas - creation and destruction, rationalism and idealism.

With a background in both cinematography and direction I believe I can craft both picture and performance to leave the audience emotionally satisfied and intellectually stimulated.

Drama has long been the poor commercial cousin of rom-com and action. But things are changing and distributors are realising that there is a larger market than they appreciated for "grown up" films.

And why not television? Because big ideas, big characters, big landscapes, need a big canvas. For twenty years as a cinematographer I have crafted composition to tell stories and convey emotions, and know what does and doesn't fit into a living room plasma. And The Other Landscape doesn't fit.

USP

The Other Landscape was an iconoclastic novel of its time and this adaptation will excite and intrigue audiences with a novel mix of period drama, romance, philosophy, and subtle magical realism.

Novel Blurb

The author was one of the most significant Scottish writers of the last century and this was his final novel. He uses it, through a tale of emotional and physical turmoil, to raise some impossible questions about the mystery of life.

The action, both deeply tragic and ironically humorous, takes place against the backdrop of the remote coastal Highlands where the influences of nature and Celtic tradition propel the protagonists to their destiny.

The questions remain unanswered but the novel ends with a final glimmer of hope and renewal.

Rights

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