

COLD CITY

Oni Press talent search script
for San Diego Comic-Con 2009

by

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NOTES FOR ARTIST

COLD CITY is an espionage story set in Berlin during November 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell. At time of writing, the story is not yet finished; but it is underway. What follows is therefore a real sequence (the first five pages, in fact) from a real script.

The dimensions and scale of the artwork are entirely up to you. The script is written for a standard comic page (roughly 10.25" x 6.75"), but if you want to draw it as a trade digest (6" x 9") or even manga size (5" x 7.5") that's fine. So long as everything is on the page and legible, it doesn't matter. Along the same lines, remember to leave enough space for the dialogue balloons and text.

As COLD CITY is a period piece, and set in the world of political espionage, it will emphasise your skills in storytelling, characterisation, and visual research. The reference is all out there if you look for it, I promise you.

The script format itself may also look very different to others you've seen, as I favour a screenplay-like format. There's no standard format for comic scripts, and every writer's style is different. Editors will expect you to be able to work from any format given to you, so don't panic and just follow it logically.

Okay, here we go. Good luck!

PAGE 1

PANEL 1

NINE PANEL GRID for this opening page.

We're in BERLIN on the NIGHT of November 9th, 1989 -- the date East Germans crossed the Berlin Wall forever.

CLOSE ON a man's arms swinging a SLEDGEHAMMER. The unidentified man is on top of the Berlin Wall, and he's bringing the hammer down on the heavily-graffitied stone.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 2

CUT TO elsewhere, simultaneous. It's DARK -- heavy shadows and just a plain black background in this environment.

CLOSE ON the mouth of a MAN, puffing on a narrow CIGAR.

The man is DAVID PERCEVAL, an MI6 officer and designated BER-1 -- Station Head of the West Berlin station. He's about 50 years old, with light-coloured hair. He has a bushy moustache, and he's a little overweight, but he dresses well -- dark three-piece suit, old school tie, oxford shoes and raincoat over it all.

PERCEVAL

Well, old boy, I suppose that's it for us.
(cont)
We're obsolete.

PANEL 3

CUT TO the Wall.

ON a crowd of West Berliners stood in front of the Wall, shouting and waving encouragement to the East Berliners who've climbed their side and are ready to jump down into the West.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 4

CUT TO Perceval.

CLOSE ON him, giving us a good look at his face. He looks tired, his face lined from years of stressful spy work. But there's also a trace of happiness -- relief that this sad episode of history is over, perhaps?

BALLOON (JAGGED)

Die Mauer ist gefallen! Die Mauer ist gefallen!

PANEL 5

CUT TO the BRANDENBURG GATE. ON the QUADRIGA OF VICTORIA, atop the gate, with the night sky behind it.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 6

CUT TO Perceval.

VIEW FROM BEHIND. He looks back over his shoulder at his unseen companion, and raises an eyebrow.

PERCEVAL

I must say, I was surprised you wanted to meet me here. Tonight, of all nights.

PANEL 7

CUT TO the Wall.

ON the crowd, as the West Berliners jubilantly embrace their Eastern brethren.

BALLOON (JAGGED)

...sofort, unverzüglich...

PANEL 8

CUT TO Perceval.

He resumes looking into the distance, puffing on the cigar, smiling a little.

PERCEVAL

Some of them are saying there'll be no more secrets, from now on. But you and I both know that's not true.

PANEL 9

And now we break the alternating rhythm -- we're not going back to the Wall this time.

CLOSE ON a GLOVED HAND, holding a SMALL PISTOL. The gun FIRES.

NO DIALOGUE

PAGE 2-3

PANEL 1

DOUBLE SPLASH PAGE!

Perceval lies dead in the street, cigar smouldering by itself on the ground. The surface is cobbles -- we're in a narrow back alley, dark and isolated.

Perceval has been shot in the back, evidenced by the hole in his raincoat. Blood pools under his body, slowly spreading through the haphazard grid of cobblestone channels.

He's alone. There's no sign of his attacker.

That's the lower half of the image, gritty and depressing. The upper half is more symbolic, and jubilant -- the Brandenburg Gate again, a portion of the Wall, and fireworks exploding against the clear night sky.

DATELINE

November 9th 1989
Berlin

PAGE 4

PANEL 1

CUT TO a MILITARY AIRFIELD in Portsmouth, southern England.

A small, two-engine PLANE bearing RAF colours comes in to land on the airstrip.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 2

MOMENTS LATER.

The plane door opens, steps already in place, and a WOMAN steps out.

This is LORRAINE BROUGHTON, also an MI6 officer. Lorraine is in her late 30s, with long dark hair tied back in a ponytail. She's very average-looking, neither attractive nor unattractive; exactly the sort of nondescript features that suit a spy.

Lorraine is dressed conservatively, in a below-the-knee skirt, blouse, overcoat and low-heeled shoes, with a scarf wrapped around her neck against the November chill. She carries a satchel-style shoulder bag.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 3

LORRAINE'S POV, looking down the steps from the aircraft door.

Two MIDDLE AGED MEN wait for her at the bottom of the steps, both wearing three piece suits and overcoats, both expressionless and, again, nondescript. More MI6 officers.

Behind the men, waiting, is a BLACK JAGUAR car.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 4

CUT TO some minutes later, in the back of the car as it drives through London streets.

Lorraine is in the back, with the two officers sitting on either side of her. Nobody speaks.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 5

EXTERIOR SHOT of the car as it passes LAMBETH NORTH tube station.

NO DIALOGUE

PANEL 6

CUT TO an OFFICE nearby.

ERIC WADDEL, designated H/BER -- the head of the MI6 Berlin section -- is at his desk, going through a stack of papers and CX reports.

Waddel is middle-aged, balding and very overweight. He looks up from the papers at a voice from off:

VOICE OFF

She's here, sir.

WADDEL

Put her in the bin. I'll be down in ten minutes.

PAGE 5

PANEL 1

LARGE PANEL.

CUT TO a stark, plain room in the basement of the MI6 HQ. It's almost like a police interrogation cell -- a single table, a chair either side of the table, no windows except for a two-way mirror set into one wall, and just one door.

Lorraine sits in one of the chairs. Her overcoat and scarf are folded over the back of the chair. She's fairly relaxed, smoking a cigarette -- the pack, a book of matches and an ashtray are on the table in front of her. Her satchel is also on the table, lying down.

A UNIFORMED SECURITY GUARD stands in a corner of the room, impassive. NOTE that the guard has a handgun holstered on his hip.

Waddel enters the room, carrying a thick dossier under one arm.

DATELINE

November 11th 1989
Century House, London

WADDEL

Good morning, Lorraine. Sorry to bring you in on a Saturday.

(cont)

How was your flight?

PANEL 2

ON Lorraine, inhaling on the cigarette.

LORRAINE

Uncomfortable.

(cont)

Sir, why am I in the bin? I was going to type my debrief up for you.

PANEL 3

ON Waddel. He sits down in the second chair, placing the dossier on the table.

WADDEL

Given the events of the past two weeks, I want to hear it directly from you.

(cont)

Perceval's funeral is next Friday, by the way.

PANEL 4

Lorraine taps ash from the cigarette into the ashtray. Waddel opens the dossier folder.

LORRAINE

He didn't have any family, did he? Just as well, I suppose.

WADDEL

No, none to speak of.

PANEL 5

ON Lorraine, smoke from the cigarette swirling around her as she looks straight out at us.

WADDEL (OFF)

(cont) So. Let's get down to brass tacks, shall we?
Start at the beginning.

//ENDS

Antony Johnston
7th June 2009
England