

Ab Oceano-Origins – TMFF Promo Review

At one point in the third act of this pilot script, a character makes a toast to "finding peace in strange places". It's meant as a blessing, of sorts, as well as a line being drawn, to allow for the possibility of balance among those who have been suspicious of others, and yet, in context with the rest of this piece, it feels like the key line of the episode.

Tolerance, in the midst of devastation, has always led to many a conflict, and certainly nobody can deny that. In the 26 years since the beginning of this century, humanity has been tested in several ways, from moral dilemma to good versus evil to power and corruption versus happiness and peace, all elements that one can see great potential in exploring through the right context and with the right set of characters.

And so it is with this script, the pilot for what would be a series of hour-long episodes, that, according to a legend at the very first page, has its sights set on an ambitious, sprawling narrative that incorporates different timelines and character arcs in order to explore a world in the wake of disaster and the more metaphysical aspects of life on earth that decide to intervene in some way. That theme and narrative converge with very well-written results.

AB OCEANO is a character drama with historical undertones, set in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, but also set a good decade plus later, as a U.S. Navy Captain, Rehan, recounts a love story between himself and a Pakistani-Muslim woman, Amara, that, in 2003, brought her and her then 8-year-old son, Tariq, to America, where she and he marry, a union that seals her future in the U.S. along with her son's, and which appears to unite a family together in ways that mean to heal the pain of the terrorist attacks a few years earlier, not to mention the war in Iraq that is currently raging.

While this is a script that deftly uses historical context as a jumping-off point, it is also gently political, managing to be both laced with rhetoric and also deeply human, with human drama and conflict at its centre, but with a heart and something of an oddly whimsical soul to boot, made manifest in a bridging storytelling device, as the older Rehan tells the story of how he married Amara, to a character known as Sereia, who, while we don't know this yet, is actually a mermaid (or siren) and whose presence, one assumes, will carry more weight as the story unfolds.

That said, this element may need a little more contextualising or even signposting, as we only see Sereia (at this point, at least) as a reactive figure, with one exception, in which she eats lobster in a particularly carnivorous way, which obviously points to her aquatic origins yet makes no real sense in the context of the pilot, in this stand-alone element, and so, the behaviour simply seems weird and out of place, the only moment of this kind of surrealistic humour that sits awkwardly with the rest of the episode.

And that rest of the episode is, overall, about the logistics of trying to bring Amara and Tariq legally into the U.S., with 90 days to marry Rehan, and with Amara's own brother, Ahmed, as her sponsor, including the governmental red tape, the fine print, the

stumbling block when they misplace Tariq's birth certificate, and the knee-jerk reaction of some of the people within the community they have brought Amara to, including a Vietnam veteran neighbour, Frank, whose stance of Muslims has taken a turn for the worst since 9/11.

In fact, the script is extremely well balanced in how it focuses a human spin on political subtext, and the shadow of the Twin Towers looms large. Despite this taking place a handful of years later, the smoke has yet to settle for many Americans, and certainly one of the elements of the pilot script that makes this feel just as relevant and topical today.

Narratively, this is a flashback story, and one already knows that Amara and Tariq are no longer a part of Rehan's life, as he is now promoted and aboard a ship that is taking him back into service, accompanied by the ambiguous Sereia, and yet there is a note at the beginning of this episode that explains the perspectives we will see throughout the series.

This includes a suggestion that this will not be an entirely linear experience but a study in characters within scenarios that are all connected but may not show their connections for a while.

This does make one wonder as to how the bigger picture will unfold, but for the sake of the pilot, as a standalone piece, the tone you strike is really strong: a romantic drama, love across borders, with an implied tragedy right off the bat.

The characters here feel lived in and human, fully formed, and also flawed, and the script, while perhaps dramatically slight, with so much of acts one and two focused on the logistics and administration of bringing someone into the country in the wake of international tragedy that has left the world suspicious of foreigners entering our countries (a ripple effect we feel to this day and a subject matter that makes this feel incredibly timely), also has a captivating attention to detail, with superb observational beats.

It also has a romantic soul and the quiet, more intimate moments between the two main characters, along with an even earlier flashback, pre-9/11, that shows the meet-cute in which the couple first encountered one another, which is where this works its way into your heart, a smart play that allows us to feel a genuine empathy towards their situation as the many lines of paperwork start to add up, as well as allow us to lean into the notion of something so positive coming from conflicts that took so much from so many.

That sense of the back and forth and to and fro of life is represented in a number of characters, from Amara's own family, who are just suspicious of Rehan, to Frank, who is of the foreign immigrants who now live in the neighbourhood.

Frank is a terrific example of a character being more than what is surface level (an element that is even name-checked within the dialogue at one point), a man who is still in pain from the loss and shock of 9/11 and who sees things in very simplistic terms,

but, when you get to talk to him, realise it is simply the façade and that something far more complex is at work underneath, a man of substance and soul who feels cheated in his own life and needs someone to blame.

Blame lies at every doorstep, it seems, within this episode, and while we root for Rehan and Amara to get the life they are reaching for, we know, deep down, that the drama of the situation means they will never achieve it, even as the episode ends on their union. The bridging story is our harbinger of doom, so to speak, our indicator that while the characters are currently happy, the happiness can't last.

Like all good stories, this is a narrative that explores change. Not just the change of a country, but of the people, and change is rampant throughout, from the mannerisms and attitudes of those we see as bigoted to the change of religion that Rehan makes in order to be a part of Amara's family.

In a story about sacrifice, there is a terrific sense of balance between the darkness and the light, and yet, this all feels bittersweet, as if the shadow of 9/11 casts further than the characters assume, and their lives have perhaps yet to feel the full impact. This is ambitious in terms of its intent but has an intimate nature to how it approaches characters, and this feels like it will give it a far wider sense of appeal to the audience, not to mention to actors who may want to play these parts.

Overall Rating: 4/5

★★★★ = Strong script, minor improvements

Note from the reader: *Thank you for sharing your script. I hope the notes above help in some way. I think there are a number of elements within the script that could be developed further. If you would like to discuss these issues further, I wanted to let you know that we offer a one-hour one-to-one online consultation service (go here: <https://tmff.net/consultation>), where you and I could sit down virtually and go over the notes, any problems you are having and try and get you in the best position possible for your rewrites. This can be done via Zoom (or, if you prefer, in writing) at your earliest convenience. If this is of interest to you, please don't hesitate to contact us or click directly on the link above.*