

THE NIGHT DESK

A drama series in six episodes of an hour

An example from the Scriptopus Screenwriting Library

Logline and engine

THE NIGHT DESK
A series bible

Logline. The night editor of a failing London newspaper keeps it alive by chasing the stories the day staff won't touch, while secretly feeding its rival the ones the owner won't let her print.

The engine. Every episode is one night at the *Meridian*, from the moment the day staff go home to the moment the first edition comes off the press. Each night brings one story nobody upstairs wants: a tip, a leaked document, a caller who won't give a name. The night desk has until the deadline to stand it up. If the owner kills it, Nora has a choice to make, and as the season goes on each leak costs her more. The night's story is settled by dawn; Nora's secret carries on.

The world and the tone. The *Meridian* is 140 years old, losing money every week, and still housed in a building it can't afford. After eight in the evening half the lights are off and the newsroom belongs to a skeleton crew: Nora, two subeditors, a picture editor who also runs the website, and whichever reporter drew the short straw. Outside is London after dark. The show is funny the way a newsroom is funny at one in the morning, and tense the way a deadline is. Nobody makes speeches about journalism; they argue about headlines.

NORA QUINN (40s), night editor. Twenty years at the *Meridian*, the last eight running it after dark. She can hear a lie down a phone line and can't remember the last party she went to. She loves the paper more than its owner does, and every story he kills goes quietly from her desk to the *Lantern*, its loudest rival. Season one takes her from believing the leaks keep the stories alive to suspecting they are finishing off the paper.

SAM OKAFOR (25), reporter. Came to the *Meridian* from a local news site that closed under him, and treats every shift as an audition. He is openly in awe of Nora, so when the owner asks him to find the leak, he says yes before he has thought it through.

FELIX HART (60s), owner. Made his money in property and bought the *Meridian* when nobody else would, a fact he mentions often. He never takes his coat off in the building. Felix kills the stories that touch his friends and calls it protecting the paper. What he hasn't told anyone is that the money has run out and he is quietly looking for a buyer.

1. "Late Final". Sam's first night shift. A caretaker rings the night desk with fire-safety reports for a block of council flats, signed by inspectors who never visited. Nora and Sam stand the story up by eleven, and at half past Felix kills it, because the developer is an old friend. At one in the morning Nora takes a second phone from the lining of her coat and calls the *Lantern*. By breakfast the story is on their front page, and Felix wants the leaker found. He gives the job to the one person on the night desk he is sure is innocent, Sam.

2. A woman reports her brother missing and the police won't take her seriously. While Sam searches south London, he also starts on the night's phone records, and Nora offers to help.
3. A strike at the print works threatens to keep the *Meridian* off the news-stands for the first time in its history. The *Lantern*'s editor asks Nora for more, and she learns what he will do if she refuses.
4. Felix brings a story of his own to the night desk, a smear on a businessman he calls an enemy of the paper. Checking it line by line, Nora finds the man is bidding to buy the *Meridian*.
5. Sam finds the second phone. He doesn't take it to Felix. He puts it on Nora's desk and asks for a byline on the front page.
6. The *Meridian* is sold, and the buyer owns the *Lantern*. On the last night before the deal closes, Nora can print how the paper was bought so cheaply, if she is willing to put her own part in it under her name.

Beyond season one. Season two puts both newsrooms on one floor. Nora works for the paper she spent a year feeding, under an owner who knows what she did, and the stories people in power want buried keep coming, with nowhere left to send them.