Screenwriting with Stanislavsky: Augmenting a Screenwriting Process Using Stanislavsky's 'System'

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This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.
To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed.

Date.....17 November, 2014.....

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Preamble

It was July 1998. From memory, we were on the seventh take and David Megarrity, the lead actor and my co-writer, was getting irritated. We were three hours over schedule on a six-hour shoot, a feat of incompetence I didn't think possible but, as the director, had somehow managed. Finally, after struggling with a long bump in, limited lighting options, costume disasters and prop malfunctions, we were on the last shot of the first scene. But something was wrong with it and I couldn't move on. I *wouldn't* move on.

The film we were making was *Fly Baby Fly* (Mullins 1998a). David, another friend Kier Shorey, and I had written the idea only a few days earlier for a local Brisbane film competition the theme of which was 'wings'. *Fly Baby Fly* told the story of Jeff, a reclusive man who was harvesting the wings of thousands of innocent house flies in order to build his own set of wings and fly (cue costume disaster). It was the second film David, Kier and I had made together. The first, *Neptune's Basket* (Mullins 1998b), had won us the award for Best Original Screenplay at the 1998 Queensland New Filmmakers Awards. Our next film, *Stop* (Mullins 1999), would be accepted into official competition at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival. But right now, we were still making our second film – our difficult 'second album' you might say. David was playing the lead role of Jeff, Kier was director of photography, and I was the director.

Prior to this, I had only directed two other short dramas, and was still very inexperienced as a filmmaker, but I had a background in documentary from my media studies degree at Griffith University. David, Kier and the rest of the crew had a theatre background, which, at the time, was very foreign to me – I made *films*, not theatre, which is why, I had declared, I was the director. However, three hours behind schedule and seven takes into the final shot of the first scene, the crew were beginning to suspect I had no idea what I was doing. And in a way, they were right. I knew what I wanted to do but, like many recent graduates, I lacked the experience to communicate my ideas to the crew. However, full of youthful bluster and cockiness, I soldiered on like the misunderstood genius I knew I was.

The troublesome scene was at a point in the script where Jeff has just completed his diabolical wings and there is a knock at the door. He opens the door, and standing outside are two pest fumigators. Terrified, Jeff slams the door and puts on his new wings and we cut to a close up of his face. This was the shot we were on. This was the moment. But, for me, David's performance wasn't working. From memory (unfortunately, the original screenplay was lost to computer viruses), all our script unhelpfully stated was "Jeff puts on his wings". My direction to David was: "I need to see Jeff make *the decision*." After seven takes, David, tired and confused, turned to me and said, "What *decision*?" I remember there was a long

silence, one that I think filled the crew with the hope I would call this whole debacle off so we could all go home and relax in front of a proper film. It had never occurred to me that what was happening in this moment of the script, the script that we had written together, was not crystal clear to both of us. We hadn't discussed Jeff as a character beforehand, and hadn't broken down the script because we all *knew it*. Right? We wrote it. If anyone should know, it was us. But we didn't know, not consciously anyway.

Eventually, I said the only thing that made sense to me in the moment. Admittedly, it was more a 'gut instinct' than a conscious understanding of the dramatic point of the scene. I said, "I need to see Jeff decide to fly." Without really knowing why, I needed to see in David's performance Jeff consciously shift his intention and decide, after all his meticulous planning, that now was the time to see if his bizarre invention would work. I didn't articulate this in so many words – I'm not even sure I could have at the time. All I said was, "I need to see Jeff decide to fly." But it must have worked because David did just that on the very next take.

Amazingly, we finished the shoot and were able to attract post-production funds from the Queensland film agency of the time to complete and send it out to festivals. Unfortunately, *Fly Baby Fly* did not fly like our previous effort (or subsequent ones), but I still have a fondness for the misunderstood Jeff and his macabre invention, not only as a film, but also for the learning experiences, such as the one above, it offered. These experiences are ones that I have repeatedly returned to in my professional career.

My experience on *Fly Baby Fly* heralded my interest in the words we use as storytellers to communicate our intent to others – be they fellow writers, actors, crew members, funding bodies, investors, distributors and marketers – in an attempt to ensure everyone is 'on the same page'. It highlighted the need for making sure all these participants are telling the same story, with the same understanding of its innumerable parts, and why those parts do, or – as is often the case – do not work together. My fascination with the words we use as artists is a constantly evolving professional process as new projects draw in new collaborators, each with their own vocabularies and understandings about how to identify and articulate technical and storytelling problems and how to fix them.

Clearly, finding the 'right' words to describe a project is a core skill of a successful director, since they are responsible for ensuring their crew is always on the same page of the same story. But the other two parties who are pivotal to the storytelling process are the project's writers and actors. Writers, using their own set of words and terminologies to describe the story's structure, work in collaboration with the director, producer and often investors to draft and redraft the story in great detail until it is deemed 'producible' and distributed to the rest of the crew. From here, the director, often without much input from the writer, works closely

with the actors, who use their own processes and terminologies (more words) to realise in performance each character's role in the overall story. From my work as a director, I know this can be a delicate process where the words the director chooses can open up an actor to deliver a stunning screen performance or, just as easily, shut them down completely. And, as the experience of *Fly Baby Fly* demonstrates, even when the director and actor are also the co-writers of a film, a shared understanding of the dramatic intent of a scene is not guaranteed.

These sorts of experiences provided the seeds of this doctoral project, which commenced in 2005 and continued to evolve among and between my various professional projects during the intervening time. Setting out, I asked what I thought would be a fairly manageable and utilitarian research question, which was, very broadly, "What might screenwriters learn from actors about narrative structure?" I planned to write two original feature films by adapting a range of concepts commonly used by actors to break down a script and use them to augment my existing screenwriting process. But, as with many doctorates I suspect, my resulting studio work ended up generating many more questions than 'answers' to my initial inquiry.

In the process of exploring some of the tools actors use to understand a script, I found myself confronted by the conceptual boundaries of the words we use as writers to understand what it is we think we're doing – how the very concepts we employ, the shape of their words and their subtle, underlying meanings can either liberate or suffocate our creative process and, with them, the stories we hope to tell.

As a result, my approach to all my work as a creative practitioner, whether as a screenwriter, director or teacher, has been permanently transformed by the discoveries encountered throughout this doctorate. There were periods of plodding persistence, long stretches of fallow inertia and flurries of rich and rewarding productivity. The resulting exegesis and studio work (three original television screenplays and associated creative 'bibles') represent a collection of insights I have had into my creative practice across a range of film, television and interactive projects over the last nine years. They also represent, I believe, some of the best work I have done as a screenwriter in my career so far. But this is not the end of the story. The ideas I have begun exploring in this doctorate will, I hope, become an ongoing process of experimentation and adaptation that will last my entire career.

And, to think, it all started with Jeff's decision to try to fly.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

When I enrolled in a Doctorate of Visual Arts in 2005, my intent was to explore the ways in which the script-analysis techniques of influential Russian theatre director and teacher Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) might be adapted to a screenwriting process.

The idea for the doctorate had arisen in 2002, when I was observing an acting class on the principles of 'Practical Aesthetics', based on the performance ideas of American writer/director David Mamet. As an emerging screenwriter and director, I frequently investigated different approaches to directing and acting for my own professional development. Acting, in particular, was still mysterious to me, since my background was in film (I had a Bachelor of Arts in Media Production) and I had little experience in theatre or performance studies. In the 'Practical Aesthetics' class I was observing, actors were asked to examine the script for what their characters were trying to achieve at each moment in the story, their 'objective', and the 'actions' they were performing to fulfil this objective. This approach was not entirely foreign to me, as I had used a similar technique in my own work, based on the recommendation of various directing manuals. However, in this instance, as I watched the instructors and volunteer actors break a script down into character 'objectives' and 'actions', I started to feel like I was sitting in a screenwriting class. "But what's the character's objective here, what's their goal?" asked the instructor of an increasingly uncomfortable actor. Such questions were the same type that I had constantly harangued my co-writers and myself with over the years in the hope we might produce more rounded characterisations and coherent storylines in our screenplays.

At that point in my professional development, my understanding of the screenwriting process, like most screenwriters at the time, was dominated by the concept of the 'three-act structure' made famous by Syd Field in his writing manual *Screenplay* (1979). Field, and many writers after him, presented a seductive formulation that declared all screenplays had three 'acts' (or large segments) separated by 'plot points' (also called 'turning points') that changed the direction of the story (Field [1979] 1994, 9-17). Discussions of the three-act structure also generally placed an emphasis on stories that featured a strong single protagonist who was 'active' (as opposed to 'passive') in pursuing a tangible goal (or 'objective') throughout the screenplay (Field 1984, 30).

Thus, the demonstration of 'objectives' and 'actions' in the acting class I was observing seemed to contain many reflections of what I understood to be the screenwriting theory of the three-act structure, primarily driven by the question "What is the objective the character is trying to achieve?" However, these complementary acting concepts also appeared to extract

far more detail about the script and its characters than was generally possible in the theory of the three-act structure. For example, by the end of the class, the actors had identified a series of clear objectives throughout the story for not just the protagonist, as emphasised by the three-act structure, but every one of the characters, right down to bit parts. This process seemed to help flesh out the characterisations of the secondary characters with hidden intentions and detail that were not immediately obvious in the script. Similarly, scenes were broken down into a series of specific actions for each character that helped reveal the dramatic inter-play between them. I felt this analysis was far more precise than the broad-brushstroke approach of the three-act structure that emphasised large 'acts' over small scenes, and lead characters over supporting parts.

For some time, I had been struggling with applying the three-act structure to my own work; while I sometimes found it clever, accessible and helpful, at many other times, I felt it was restrictive, frustrating and inherently limited. Do *all* screen stories have three acts? Do they *always* feature a single, active protagonist? Is a turning point *always* a single plot point or can it be a longer cascade of actions? Apart from Field, I had also read the work of many other popular screenwriting 'gurus', such as Linda Seger (*How to Make a Good Script Great*, 1994), Christopher Vogler (*The Writer's Journey*, 1992) and Robert McKee (*Story*, 1999), who all made similar cases for a model that featured three acts separated by 'turning points' with a focus on an active protagonist who pursued a tangible 'goal'. I was aware it was an immensely popular model of screenwriting and, in the years since the publication of Field's *Screenplay* manual, the three-act structure had largely been accepted within the film industry and teaching institutions worldwide as the 'secret' to screenwriting success. In fact, it seemed the model was so popular at the time that I frequently met screen producers and executives who were very familiar with its concepts despite having never written a screenplay of their own. Nevertheless, I was frequently frustrated with the narrow demands of the 'one-size-fits-all' model of the three-act structure.

Apart from its extremely limited emphasis on single protagonist storylines, rather than large ensemble stories, or its focus on a lead character, rather than supporting characters, I found that the very definitions the three-act structure proposed in theory were often very problematic to apply in practice. For example, I had frequently found that any discussion with my collaborators around exactly where one act ended and another began commonly produced several different, and therefore unhelpful, results depending on how each person defined what an 'act' was. This was especially evident when examining an unstable script-in-progress, rather than a fully produced feature film, which was invariably how manuals like *Screenplay* demonstrated their theory. Furthermore, because of the popularity of the three-act structure model, a commonly held assertion at the time (and arguably even now) was that *all* screenplays had three acts when even a cursory survey revealed that television screenplays

routinely employed four, five or six acts separated by ad breaks (Thompson in Bingeman et al. 2013, 33). These sorts of generalised claims are not necessarily the fault of writers like Field who are often quoted out of context by both writers and non-writers (e.g., screen executives) looking for a 'quick fix' to their screenwriting problems (although Field's claim that *Last Year in Marienbad* had three acts was probably overstating the argument; (Field [1979] 1994, 15). However, at the time of commencing this doctorate, it seemed to me that there was a general overzealousness on the part of three-act structure advocates, which excluded other forms and techniques of screenwriting. There had to be alternatives, and the techniques explored in the 'Practical Aesthetics' acting class suggested there were, indeed, other ways to understand a script that did not presuppose three acts or become fixated on exactly where the first or second turning point was.

After the workshop, discussions with the participating actors revealed that the principles demonstrated in the class were variations of a script-analysis technique developed by the influential Russian director and teacher Stanislavsky. At that stage, all I knew (or naively *thought* I knew) of Stanislavsky was that he was a Russian acting 'guru' who had come to the United States in the 1920s and left behind a revolutionary approach to acting called 'the Method', which later became very popular with film actors. Over the years, I had heard many stories from screen folklore of famous actors, such as Marlon Brando, Dustin Hoffman, Robert De Niro and Daniel Day-Lewis, going to extremes to 'inhabit' their characters, for months at a time, using techniques derived from the mysterious 'Method'. But these tales were usually shared with a persistent undertone of derision, and I was often warned that the techniques the 'Method' promoted were not only impossibly cumbersome and self-indulgent but also potentially psychologically damaging. Indeed, the director associated with the 'Practical Aesthetics' workshop I observed, Mamet, famously lamented Stanislavsky's enduring influence on acting theory, calling his techniques "nonsense" and his followers a part of a "cult" (Mamet 1998, 6).

Yet, despite Mamet's reservations, Stanislavsky's ideas seemed to resonate with aspects of 'Practical Aesthetics', particularly in the technique of breaking a script into a series of character 'objectives' and 'actions' in order to explore its dramatic shape. Indeed, upon talking further with the actors, I found that Stanislavsky's script-analysis technique had been routinely taught in Western acting courses for much of the last century, and was still commonly employed by professional actors, including screen actors. This explained why I had encountered the technique in various directing manuals and on my own short films as if it was a universal technique, practiced everywhere for as long as anyone could remember, even though it appeared to have originated with Stanislavsky. Moreover, the actors from the class employed the technique enthusiastically, finding it clear, practical and precise. All of this seemed to conflict with the advice I had been given from various sources over the years to

'stay away' from Stanislavsky. It appeared there was much left for me to discover about his ideas, influence and legacy.

Indeed, the more I learnt about Stanislavsky from the actors, the more I felt his script-analysis technique had the potential to address some of the limitations of the three-act structure approach I had been using. Firstly, it encouraged an examination of the story on a detailed scene-by-scene basis, rather than by simply broad 'acts'. Secondly, Stanislavsky's approach analysed the psychological motivations of *all* the characters, not just the protagonist. Furthermore, I found Stanislavsky's technique complemented one of the core principles of the three-act structure – that a character is defined by their goals (or 'objectives') and the actions they take to achieve them. This common principle suggested there was much that screenwriters could learn from Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis, which had the potential to constructively build on ideas they were already using. These concepts had the added advantage of being employed by many of the actors who were ultimately responsible for bringing the words of the screenwriter to life. This, I believed, had the potential to give writers a powerful insight into the actor's process, as well as a new methodology with which to sharpen their screenplays.

I wondered why I had not been taught these techniques as part of my screenwriting education. Why had I not encountered Stanislavsky in the library of screenwriting books I'd read over the years? In revisiting certain texts, including Field's *Screenplay*, I found only three brief references to Stanislavsky and his techniques, two of which were in McKee's *Story* (1999, 65, 112) and one in Seger's *Making a Good Script Great* (1994, 178). Similarly, when I asked other screenwriters and teaching colleagues if they were aware of Stanislavsky, their response was much like mine had been – "Isn't he that weird Method acting guy?" Apparently, despite Stanislavsky's enormous influence on the way actors interpreted a screenplay, his legacy was largely lost on those people who actually wrote the scripts. It seemed there was a knowledge gap in the field of screenwriting that might provide writers with some important lessons about the very specific lens through which many actors understand a script.

Reflecting on the workshop, I started to wish that I had employed such detailed script-analysis techniques when writing my previous screenplays, rather than during the first rehearsal when it was usually too late. I wondered what level my scripts might have achieved if I had taken the time during writing to examine them through the lens of an actor – if I had used or, at least, been aware of the techniques and terminology (the *words*) an actor might have used in deciphering my scripts. Would the script's strengths and weaknesses have been any clearer to me? Could the characterisations have been made sharper, more defined? Would the story have been more focussed and, ultimately, more dramatic?

Therefore, when embarking on this doctorate, my initial research question centred on whether knowledge of Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis could provide a screenwriter (such as me) with a range of new analytical tools to employ while developing, writing and editing an original screenplay. The challenge, as I saw it, was to *augment* the three-act structure approach to screenwriting, rather than completely reinvent a process that had been widely adopted and accepted by the screen industry since the late seventies, despite its apparent limitations. The planned studio work outcomes were two feature-length screenplays, which would provide a practical context through which to adapt, explore and reflect upon applying Stanislavsky's script-analysis technique to a screenwriting process.

Since commencing this research, my professional career as a screenwriter and director has travelled a colourful and surprising road that has led me from short dramas and television documentaries to television drama, feature-length documentaries, and the rapidly evolving field of interactive media. This last category saw me spend six-and-a-half years as the full-time Creative Director of Hoodlum (www.hoodlum.com.au), a Brisbane-based but globally active screen production company specialising in multiplatform storytelling. During my time at Hoodlum, I wrote and directed numerous interactive projects for major international television dramas, including *LOST* (ABC, US), *Spooks* (BBC, UK) and *Primeval* (ITV, UK). These interactive projects were highly successful and won numerous international awards, including two British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA) (2008), a US Primetime Emmy award (2009), and an international Emmy award (2010). Naturally, these professional opportunities at times prevented me from working directly on my doctorate and I was forced to frequently apply for leave. Furthermore, my professional interests have evolved over this extended time to focus more on television drama rather than feature films, which has influenced the studio outcomes of this doctorate as well as the accompanying exegesis.

However, despite these unexpected detours and delays, my research remained a present force within my ongoing professional work, either directly in my writing process or in surprising moments where I was working through an unfamiliar creative challenge. This frequently occurred while I was at Hoodlum, where the discoveries I made were often fruitful, sometimes frustrating, but always intriguing. In many of these instances, I was working with collaborators who were able to offer their perspectives on my evolving approach to writing and script analysis, which provided valuable markers to test my own research reflections against.

As a result of these various professional experiences, and the fact that they occurred alongside my slowly unfolding doctorate, the central ideas of this research now form an

ongoing and constantly evolving part of my creative life as a screenwriter/director. Whether I am working in television drama, documentary, feature films, interactive media or teaching, the research discoveries and insights I have made about my own creative process, as well as screenwriting practice in general, have become a feature of the instinctive ways I create stories for the screen. It's just how I do things now.

The studio work for this doctorate consists of the pilot script and creative bibles for three original television dramas, *Kelly Country*, *Saviour* and *Starting Over*. These have been selected from over thirty major professional works in film, television and interactive media I have completed since commencing my doctorate, since they best represent its influence in my ongoing practice. Synopses for these shows will be provided in Chapter 5.

The studio work is accompanied by this exegesis, which seeks to outline the ways in which I have explored and adapted a number of Stanislavsky's techniques to augment my own writing process. Specific examples of how this has occurred will be drawn from both the completed studio work as well as various professional experiences throughout this time. To do this, I will use both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include materials drawn from my own creative process in the form of story outlines, treatments, screenplay drafts, script notes, story 'maps', production reports and journal entries, as well as meeting notes and email communications with colleagues and students. The writing style of the exegesis is predominantly a critical reflective exploration of my work over this time combined with passages of personal narrative where appropriate. Personal narrative will frequently be used to effectively capture the significant developments in the evolution of the research and their meaning in the context of my ongoing development as a screenwriter. An example of this approach is the story of *Fly Baby Fly* contained in the preamble to the exegesis.

Research Question

My initial interest in adapting acting theory to a screenwriting process specifically focussed on Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques. However, over the course of my research, and in the face of various frustrations and 'dead-ends', I became interested in a wider appreciation of Stanislavsky's 'System' of acting and career as a whole. Further research revealed Stanislavsky encountered the same sorts of obstacles I was facing in devising a way of working that was flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of creative challenges, as well as practical enough to actually use. "Human life", wrote Stanislavsky, "is so subtle, so complex, and multifaceted, that it needs an incomparably large number of new, still

undiscovered 'isms' to express it fully" (Stanislavsky in Carnicke 2009, 34). It seemed that his 'System' was less a rigid method of working and more an unending search for useful discoveries, many of which I felt I could use or dismiss as required. Wary of attempting to create my own rigid system of screenwriting (such as the three-act structure), I decided instead to embrace Stanislavsky's restless process of experimentation, reflection and adaptation. In response, I expanded my research question to include a variety of components from Stanislavsky's work across his entire career, many of which, I discovered, were either widely misunderstood or little known outside of Russia.

As a result, the research questions explored in this exegesis are as follows:

- In what ways might Stanislavsky's method of script analysis, as well as other components of his work, be adapted to augment my professional screenwriting practice?
- In what ways would the resulting techniques be both similar to and different from widely known forms of screenwriting theory and practice, particularly the model of the three-act structure?

I have designed this exegesis to be read in conjunction with the principal studio works (three television screenplays and creative bibles, as outlined earlier), which are products of the processes used to examine the above research questions. The studio work can be reviewed at any time; however, an ideal point to do so would be at the beginning of Chapter 5, *Stanislavsky in a Screenwriting Practice*, where I draw on various examples from the studio work to illustrate a range of specific screenwriting techniques inspired by Stanislavsky and how these form part of my ongoing practice.

Exegesis Structure

I will now outline the broad shape of the exegesis and the topics examined within each chapter, before finishing this chapter with a discussion of my methodology.

In Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, I will outline a range of common understandings of Stanislavsky's work, particularly his techniques of script analysis. For this I will include recent research by a number of writers, including Sharon Carnicke (2009, 1998, 1993), Bella Merlin (2007, 2003, 2001, 2000) and Jean Benedetti (1998), who have sought to re-evaluate Stanislavsky's work in the context of access to fuller and more accurate translations of his notebooks and original manuscripts for his popular acting manuals, including *An Actor Prepares* ([1937] 1986). I will also outline the most common understandings of the three-act

structure theory of screenwriting. To do this, I will discuss the key concepts of the three-act structure model as presented in what are arguably the most influential screenwriting manuals of the last thirty years; namely, *Screenplay* (1979), *Making a Good Script Great* (1994), *The Writer's Journey* (1992) and *Story* (1999). The key concepts I will outline, among others, include the 'act', the 'turning point' (also called 'plot point'), and the protagonist's 'goal'. Where useful, I will refer to updates by the authors in later editions of these key texts as well as adaptations and/or critiques from other authors on screenwriting or by screenwriting professionals. Finally, I will compare the key concepts from Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques and the three-act structure model of screenwriting in an attempt to provide some starting points for adaptation into practice.

In Chapter 3, *Experimenting with Stanislavsky*, I will discuss a selection of early attempts at understanding and adapting Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques into a writing process. These experiences, which took place between 2005 and 2006, included adapting a screenwriting model developed as part of my Master's degree in order to accommodate some of my initial understandings of Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis (Mullins 2004a); pursuing a process of improvisational writing as part of a television documentary I wrote and directed for SBS Television called *Elvis Lives in Parkes* (Mullins 2006); and a failed attempt to write a screen adaptation of an unpublished manuscript, *His Father's Son* (Kneen 2005).

As will be shown, throughout this time, I also developed numerous screenplay concepts that were abandoned before they reached an outline stage. Despite what might sound like a series of digressions and setbacks, these early project experiences provided a variety of discoveries that informed what would, ultimately, become a highly productive process of reflection and adaptation.

In Chapter 4, *Adapting with Stanislavsky,* I will discuss two major stages of reflection and adaptation that initiated significant shifts in my creative practice, both in terms of process and dramatically increased levels of productivity.

The first was in 2007 when I started to consider ways I might adapt my process in moving forward. This reflection was largely inspired by my frustration with my research's lack of progress; the adaptations I had implemented from Stanislavsky's concepts were proving to be cumbersome to use in practice, particularly when it came to generating new story ideas. I started reading more about Stanislavsky's career and discovered he too found many of his 'round-the-table' script-analysis techniques very cumbersome (Carnicke 2009, 194-95). At this time, through recent research by Carnicke, Merlin and others, I discovered Stanislavsky's late career experiments with 'Active Analysis', a little-known technique that employs

intuition and improvisation, rather than analysis and planning, to explore the structure of a story and a character's role within it (Carnicke 2009). This discovery offered an insight into not only the creative process of Stanislavsky's actors, but also my own creative practice. It suggested a productive way forward.

The second stage of adaptation I will outline in this chapter is my professional engagement as Creative Director of the Brisbane-based multiplatform studio Hoodlum between 2006 and 2012. In this section, I will discuss the insights this unpredictable, and often innovative, work offered my research. To do this, I will outline my work on two very different Hoodlum projects and how I adapted my discoveries about Stanislavsky's work to help solve a range of creative problems. These projects are *Find 815* (Hoodlum 2007b), an interactive drama for the US television show *LOST* (Abrams 2004-10), and *Soap Star* (Hoodlum 2014), an interactive narrative/game designed for Facebook and mobile. I will also discuss my role as a part-time member of Hoodlum's television development team, where I had my first opportunity to experience the process of creating television drama in large writing teams. The creative insights I gained from these particular collaborations provided crucial insights that not only had many synergies with my recent discoveries about Stanislavsky and 'Active Analysis', but also took my studio work in new, exciting and very productive directions.

In Chapter 5, *Stanislavsky in a Screenwriting Practice*, I will discuss how, since leaving Hoodlum at the end of 2012, I further adapted my discoveries in 'Active Analysis' and television drama writing and how these were employed in the writing of three original television drama series (synopses outlined in Chapter 5). Each series has been developed to a pilot script (second draft) and series bible stage and form the core of my studio work for this research project. Notable production companies Essential Media and Matchbox Pictures have subsequently optioned *Kelly Country* (Mullins 2013a) and *Saviour* (Mullins 2013c) for further development.

Methodology

With the focus of my research on the adaptation and synthesis of specific artistic concepts from different but related fields (screenwriting and acting), the activities of the project will adopt a research design informed by 'reflective practice'.

Donald Schön (1983) argues that reflective practice aims to marry research with practice by recognising that there is a dynamic, but rarely articulated, knowledge that professional practitioners, including artists, routinely employ in the execution of their work. Describing

the process as 'reflection-in-action' (in which practitioners reflect upon and adjust their work while actively engaging in it), and 'reflection-on-action' (during which practitioners regularly step back from the process to evaluate and determine the best way of proceeding), Schön (1983, 78) argues that practitioners engage in a type of "reflective conversation with the materials of the situation". But the sorts of situations in which practitioners apply and build on this tacit knowledge is often unpredictable and less directed towards generalised knowledge or repeatable processes than a traditional research scenario. Indeed, as Scrivener (2000, 2-5) argues, many (but not all) creative-production research projects struggle to fit within the usual 'problem-solving' modes of traditional research because, in many cases, there is no 'problem' to be solved – only better work to be produced as a result of modified practice.

The dominance of positivist epistemologies since the late-nineteenth century have regarded this type of practical knowledge as outside the accepted forms of scientific knowledge encompassed by logic, mathematics and empiricism. This has resulted in a long-standing separation between the professions and academia (Schön 1983, 32). One outcome of this has been a tendency for research *into* practice, and the real-world problems associated with it, to be carried out by those outside of the field in question (e.g., historians, sociologists, educationalists, etc.). Unfortunately, because of the positivist demands of traditional research, particularly in the form of generalised knowledge and repeatable research procedures, this sort of research *into* practice omits much of the valuable tacit knowledge practitioners employ in practice (Gray and Malins 2004, 22). As a result, areas of research that involve the typically messy, unstable and uncertain processes of creative art and design production have struggled to gain acceptance alongside traditional research. However, Schön argues that re-evaluating what we believe is happening when a practitioner engages in 'practice' provides an opportunity to recast the relationship between practice and research by uniting the two fields in an immediate and dynamic dialogue.

To do this, Schön challenges two enduring, but misguided, views about practice that suggest that 'thinking' disrupts 'doing' in ways that make reflecting on the practice of art and design seemingly impossible:

> First, artistry being indescribable, reflection *on* action is doomed to failure; and second, reflection *in* action paralyses action. Both arguments are largely, though not

> entirely, mistaken. They owe their plausibility to the persistence of misleading views about the relation of thought to action. (1983, 276)

Schön argues (1983, 280) that the common separation of *thinking* from *doing* leads to a fear that *any* thinking about doing will result in an unproductive loop of reflection that inhibits fluid future actions; thus, the practitioner gets caught in an "infinite regress of thinking about thinking". However, Schön's numerous case studies of practitioners at work indicates a dynamic interplay between thinking and doing where each builds on the other while at the same time setting boundaries as to this interaction.

> It is a surprising result of action that triggers reflection, and it is the satisfactory move that brings reflection temporarily to a close. It is true, certainly, that an inquirer's continuing conversation with his situation may lead, open-endedly, to renewal of reflection. When a practitioner keeps inquiry moving, however, he [sic] does not abstain from action in order to sink into endless thought. Continuity of inquiry entails a continual interweaving of thinking and doing. (Schön 1983, 280)

In other words, it is the practitioner's desire to constantly 'move forward' in order to solve the design problem at hand that generates inquiry shaped by reflection *in* and *on* action and stops the process from stalling. This unpredictable and inherently intuitive interplay between thought and action makes creative art and design research different from, but not entirely separate from, traditional research. Indeed, Scrivener (2000, 6) argues that many "problem solving" PhD processes, despite being ultimately presented as deliberate and clinical processes, routinely have "false starts, readjustment, redefinition and uncertainty" hidden within them.

It is this apparent 'messiness' that makes up the ever-expanding knowledge base (or 'repertoire') of the practitioner and for which Schön provides a framework for understanding and documenting. Schön (1983, 145-47) identifies various forms of experimentation that occur in practice: 'exploratory experiments' (where the objective is to "see what happens"); 'move-testing experiments' (where action is directed towards an intended change); and 'hypothesis-testing experiments' (where an action suggests an intended discrimination amongst competing hypothesis). However, Schön (1983, 151) goes on to point out that practitioners, because of their transactional relationship to the situation and the unpredictable outcome of the intended work, violate the traditional requirement for objective observation in controlled experiments: "The phenomena he [sic] seeks to understand are partly of his own making; he is *in* the situation that he seeks to understand." Therefore, whereas a traditional

research project might frequently avoid describing the process of trial and error that achieved a particular result, for the art and design researcher, this journey (rather than its destination) and their ability to describe it, best demonstrates that they are "self-conscious, systematic and reflective creators" (Scrivener 2000, 9). Scrivener (2000, 11) argues that if we are to research creative production, then it is crucial that the focus should be on the systematic recording of moments of reflection in order to make the research process accessible to both the researcher (via their documented reflections) and to those it is to be communicated with. However, it is crucial that the documentation process's design not impend effective action; Scrivener writes, "Rigour in reflection-in-action and -practice must be the maidservant of effective action, yielding to action's inherent structural integrity" (Scrivener 2000, 11).

My experience as a screenwriter and director illustrates much of what Schön and others have argued, with much of my practice involving a highly intuitive process of trial and error. While many of the theories I had learnt during my Bachelor's degree, and subsequently via various screen production manuals, were often useful, they did not always fit the specific requirements of the films I was producing. The situations presented often unique or complex problems that did not fit neatly with conventional practice. With no appropriate theory on hand and little experience to draw on, I worked out solutions in process, or – put another way – via reflection-in and -on-action. At other times, my objective was to actually avoid convention so new approaches had to be conceived along the way. For example, in 2006, I was commissioned by SBS to write and direct the television documentary *Elvis Lives in Parkes* (Mullins 2006) because the SBS documentary commissioner thought I would be able to do something 'different' with it. The resulting production not only featured relatively novel re-enactments by the documentary participants depicting the origins of an Elvis Festival in central New South Wales but also provided a relevant group writing experiment for my research that employed Stanislavsky-like techniques (which I will discuss in a later chapter). Similarly, when I was initially engaged at Hoodlum as Creative Director, despite having virtually no experience in interactive storytelling, the projects we were executing were highly innovative, meaning there was little established theory or experience within the company to draw on. As a result, I had to experiment with and adjust my processes as I progressed. In these sorts of situations, my only option was usually a very messy, but often productive and exciting, process of reflection-in- and -on-action.

In this way, Schön provides an apt framework with which to understand the self-conscious and systematic practice at work in engaging with the issues central to the research project – i.e., the adaptation and synthesis of Stanislavsky's techniques into a screenwriting process. Indeed, I would argue both Stanislavsky's various techniques and the conventions of the three-act structure already contain a great deal of self-conscious and systematic reflective practice built into them. Both are conceptual frameworks employed by artists to both grapple with and regularly step back from the creative materials at hand in order to determine the most satisfying way forward. Stanislavsky's technique of 'round-the-table' script analysis is traditionally undertaken early in the process of preparing actors for a role, with days, sometimes weeks, spent, dissecting the script as a group to understand each character's role in the overall story. Similarly, the three-act structure is widely used as a planning tool in screenwriting to analyse if the story in progress (positively or negatively) adheres to the theory's conventions before writing begins. Both techniques are also used throughout their respective fields of practice to dynamically experiment with different narrative and character options and assess their appropriateness.

Carole Gray and Julian Malins (2004, 104) define practice-based research methodology as "developing and making creative works as an explicit and intentional method for specific research purposes". They argue that it can be used in a variety of ways, from the gathering and generating of data through to the communication of findings. One of the principal advantages of practice-based research methodologies, as suggested in relation to my own professional experience, is the potential for deeply understanding the issues at hand due to the practitioner's experiential and informed knowledge. As indicated above, its principal disadvantage is that practice can be open to criticisms of over-subjectivity that limit its ability to make more generalised claims (Gray and Malins 2004, 105). While this is not an insignificant disadvantage, it should be viewed in the light of the experimental nature of the proposed research. The precise application of any artistic terminology in practice brings with it a range of individual interpretations informed by the practitioner's experience and the project at hand. Nevertheless, this has not stopped both Stanislavsky's 'System' and the three-act structure from having significant influence over their disciplines despite a great deal of evidence indicating varying methods of application and persistent debate over their effectiveness. Subsequently, the proposed synthesis of the two approaches into my personal screenwriting process is intended to suggest potential starting points for continuing exploration and application rather than a definitive practice or model.

In these ways, the research project is 'practice led': it essentially takes one artistic practice (components of Stanislavsky's approach to acting) and uses them in a different but related field (screenwriting) in order to produce new work as well as observe and reflect upon its effects on this work. As a result, Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis and the three-act structure model of screenwriting have formed the principal methodological tools I have employed throughout my research project, the process and outcomes of which are discussed in detail throughout this exegesis.

Another methodological tool I have employed throughout this project is a model of screenwriting analysis I developed during my Masters of Arts (by Research) degree (Mullins 2004a). Partly inspired by Kristin Thompson's previously discussed study of classical Hollywood storytelling (1999), I called my model a 'character-centred model of screenwriting', and designed it to reveal a screenplay's structure according to an exploration of character, rather than a prescribed number of acts, as demanded by the three-act model. However, my model was not without its own flaws, and this project has revised it by using insights provided by Stanislavsky's techniques that allow it to account for a wider variety of screenplay structures as guided by an examination of the protagonist's internal choices and actions. The revised 'character-centred' model will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The other methodological tool I have employed is, of course, the process of critically reflecting upon my creative practice over the course of the project as documented in this exegesis. To do this, I have used various working documents to provide illustrative markers of my creative development as well as to test the veracity of my reflections. The working documents employed have been drawn from a range of projects conducted between 2005 and 2014, and include story outlines, treatments, screenplay drafts, script notes, story 'maps', production reports and journal entries, as well as meeting notes and email communications with colleagues and creative collaborators. These documents, while written in many disparate professional and personal contexts, have provided the raw materials to construct a coherent timeline of the major developments in my working process. This timeline has helped form the spine of the exegesis as I reflected on my various attempts to adapt and synthesise Stanislavsky's concepts into my screenwriting process, and how these informed the creation of the principal studio work.

Scrivener (2000, 15) argues that there are a number of very good reasons to undertake doctoral research in creative production. One is that the process will generate more reflective practitioners who will, presumably, produce "better results" than their unreflective peers. Another is that the benefits will be reflected in innovative work and explicated theory that will provide "examples and understandings" for others to explore. In relation to my work, while I feel my writing has undertaken a significant and positive transformation as a result of this doctorate, it is for others to judge if it is 'better' (although my work does seem to get optioned a lot more now than it used to). However, I am confident that others will find its documented 'examples and understandings' of my screenwriting process, if not immediately transferrable, at least illuminating.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will explain in more detail the artistic practices I have attempted to adapt and employ in my studio work, specifically Stanislavsky's original technique of script analysis, as well as the three-act structure theory of screenwriting. To do this, I will endeavour to outline the broad historical origins of each practice as well as a range of common understandings of their associated terminologies. I will also observe a number of similarities and differences between the practices and how these offered starting points that informed my studio work.

As indicated in the previous chapter, my interest in Stanislavsky's techniques is to explore how it might augment a more traditional three-act analysis of a screenplay, rather than completely reinvent a well-established process. As such, in the last section of this chapter, I will emphasise the similarities and differences between Stanislavsky's techniques and the three-act structure.

I acknowledge that the creative practices under discussion represent only the specific focus of the exegesis and not a comprehensive list of the approaches employed in the resulting studio work of this project, of which there were many more.

Furthermore, the following descriptions of Stanislavsky's 'System' and the three-act structure are only indicative and by no means comprehensive. As the following discussion will demonstrate, it would be erroneous to downplay the diverse ways in which film and theatre practitioners have interpreted, modified and applied these practices to suit their own needs over many years. Indeed, the very purpose of this research project is to adapt an existing practice (Stanislavsky's 'System' of acting) into a new but complementary context (screenwriting). Similarly, as discussed below, particularly in relation to Stanislavsky's 'System', it is evident that a number of historical and cultural factors compromise the precise description of these practices, their associated terminologies, and the way in which practitioners apply them.

Stanislavsky's 'System'

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) was a Russian actor, teacher and director who, over the course of more than thirty years, developed a highly influential series of actor training and rehearsal techniques that are still employed by actors worldwide today. Stanislavsky sought to challenge the dominant presentational modes of performance of his time, which limited actors to formulaic roles, known as *emploi,* that used stock gestures, declamatory vocal styles and costume to convey character (Merlin 2003, 7). Instead, he pursued a new form of realism that aimed to capture the inner psychology of the characters rather than just their external presentation. For example, when discussing the artist's "main objective" in his most famous acting manual, *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavsky ([1937] 1986, 14) writes:

> His [sic] job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul. The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form.

Stanislavsky also challenged the widespread idea that acting could not be taught, a situation that required new actors to slavishly copy every detail of the stage business of great performers in order to learn their craft (Merlin 2003, 8). Drawing on a variety of influences, including Aristotle, Leo Tolstoy, early psychology, Russian Formalism, yoga, as well as his own observations and experiments, Stanislavsky searched for a reliable series of techniques that would allow a cast of actors to maintain an "uninterrupted exchange of feelings, thoughts and actions" between themselves and the audience during a performance (Stanislavsky [1937] 1986, 157). He called his constantly evolving process the 'System' and declared his aim to be "unconscious creativity through conscious technique" (Stanislavsky [1937] 1986, 50). Stanislavsky's theories were not only popular within his native Russia but also widely distributed in the West, particularly the United States, via his numerous books on the 'System', as well as through charismatic teachers such as Lee Strasberg who had attended Stanislavsky's lectures during his rare trips abroad. Within the United States, Stanislavsky's ideas became particularly popular with film actors such as Marlon Brando and Warren Beatty, even though Stanislavsky himself never worked in the cinematic medium. The theories Stanislavsky developed, and their various interpretations, are still fundamental to the teaching of acting in the West today (Konijn in Zarrilli 2002, 63). Indeed, some, like Bella

Merlin (2007, 3), have claimed that Stanislavsky is the "father of contemporary acting practice".

For the purpose of consistency throughout this exegesis, I will adopt the spelling "Konstantin Stanislavsky" as employed by Sharon Carnicke and others. Some researchers use variations like "Constantin" and "Stanislavski" which I will only employ when directly quoting these authors.

Translating the 'System'

Sharon Carnicke (1998, 1-2) argues that while Stanislavsky himself insistently pursued a holistic model incorporating various and at times contradictory approaches, translation of his work has emphasised two distinct strands – that of 'emotion', as practiced by the American Method school of acting, and 'action', as promoted in Soviet Russia.

In the West, American teachers like Strasberg stressed Stanislavsky's early experiments in 'affective memory', whereby actors would draw on personal memories analogous to the character's fictional experience in order to perform emotion on stage. This technique was central to what became known in the United States as 'Method acting' and, because of the wide appeal of the film actors who employed affective memory, and the charisma of those who taught it, the technique became the way in which many in the West came to understand Stanislavsky's work as a whole, even though it was only one of many techniques he developed over his career. Indeed, Stanislavsky himself had significant reservations about the over use of affective memory, fearing for the "mental hygiene" of actors who were constantly required to dredge up personal memories in order to perform (Carnicke 2009, 158). He had similar fears this approach might also derail the playwright's intended direction for the overall play in preference for the 'truth' of the actor's memory (Stanislavsky [1937] 1986, 301). While Benedetti's (1998, 61-68) examination of Stanislavsky's later work indicates Stanislavsky's ongoing application of affective memory in rehearsals, it is perhaps more accurately described as a creative "lure" (Stanislavsky in Carnicke 2009, 64) within a more complex, multi-faceted process than a comprehensive method in its own right.

Meanwhile, in Russia, the Marxist materialist philosophy of the Soviet government encouraged an emphasis on a different aspect of Stanislavsky's 'System' that they considered far more scientific than emotion – that of 'action'. As Merlin (2003, 28-29) argues, Stanislavsky's early experiments in affective memory proved incomplete and problematic and, in his later years, his focus shifted to the role of physical 'action' as both a means of analysis and performance of the text. His later experiments in the 'Method of Physical Action' and 'Active Analysis' regarded the text as a "score" of actions that could be discovered through physical rehearsal (Carnicke 2009, 190). Actors would analyse the text as a sequence of character actions and, by concentrating on the performance of these specific actions, Stanislavsky believed, they would naturally experience an associated emotion as a by-product of the action. This part of Stanislavsky's 'System' fitted more comfortably with Marxist philosophy than his occasionally idealistic references to concepts like the "soul", the "life of the human spirit", or the "ocean of the subconscious", notions that would have been at odds with the materially determined world of Soviet Russia (Carnicke 1998, 80-82). As a result, Russian interpretations of the 'System' from this time tended to favour techniques exploring physical 'action' rather than 'emotion'.

Of course, the circumstances of the dissemination of Stanislavsky's work also had a significant impact on how it was interpreted outside of the rehearsal room, not least of which would have been the difficulties in understanding Stanislavsky in the first place. Always a reluctant writer, Stanislavsky wrote his various books over a long period, and they were often theoretically incoherent or contradictory due not only to his own constant revisions but also those of the Soviet government, as indicated above (Carnicke 1998, 152). Similarly, problems with the translation of Stanislavsky's ideas by his English translator Elizabeth Hapgood were also a significant obstacle to the clear communication of the 'System'. For example, a vital concept within Stanislavsky's 'System' was the Russian word *zadacha*, meaning a "problem or task requiring action" (Carnicke 1998, 87-88). Stanislavsky used this concept to help actors break down the script into a series of immediate tasks (or *zadacha*) their character faces and the actions they take to address them. These actions could be reactive and unplanned or they could be conscious and controlled. However, Hapgood translated *zadacha* as 'objective', which, in English, places a particular emphasis on a conscious future outcome the character is working towards; in English, it would be a misnomer to discuss an 'unplanned objective'. So, in an English translation of Stanislavsky's 'System', actors were required to look for 'objectives' in each scene, forcing them to devise a

future outcome the character is working towards, even if it could be argued from the story that the character was responding spontaneously to the conflict in the scene and not consciously trying to achieve an objective. In other words, there is an important semantic difference between a 'task' and an 'objective' – a 'task' can have a spontaneous quality because it places an emphasis on the present action (e.g., "I am chopping wood"), whereas an objective is more conscious because it is usually about the future result of the action (e.g., "I am chopping wood for the fire").

In my experience of directing my own and others' scripts, using the term 'objective' can lead to problems when a character does not consciously know what he/she wants, which is often the case in more passive and/or reactive characters. In her directing manual *The Film Director's Intuition,* Judith Weston (2003, 161-180) undertakes a script analysis of a scene from the Steven Soderbergh film *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (Soderbergh 1989). Obviously influenced by the English translation of Stanislavsky's ideas, her analysis involves identifying each character's scene 'objective'. However, Weston does not give the protagonist Ann an explicit objective like the other characters. The scene is a dinner where Ann's husband, John, has invited an old friend, Graham, to stay. The two men couldn't be more different and it has already been established that Ann is fascinated by the contrast (Soderbergh 1990, 15-20). But Ann is a very shy character, and by no means plays a particularly active role in the scene, which may explain why Weston avoids giving her an 'objective' – a big part of Ann's characterisation is that she is anxiety ridden and does not know what she wants or what will make her happy. However, I would argue, much of the scene plays out from Ann's point of view as she listens for details about her strange guest as John and Graham talk. Instead of imagining what Ann's 'objective' is in the scene, which would by definition have a conscious end result attached to it, we can see her activity as an immediate 'task' that she is engaged in. By doing this, we have the potential to understand what Ann is doing in the scene without implying she knows where her actions will lead. For example, one way to interpret Ann's 'task' in the scene is to scrutinize the mysterious Graham. From this task, simple actions start to emerge, such as *engage* Graham, *quiz* him and *reciprocate* when he enquires about her. Over the course of the scene, as well as the broader film, Ann's engagement with the eternally enquiring Graham sees her reveal feelings and desires about herself she was previously unaware of. This leads her to demand a divorce from John and begin a new relationship with Graham. So, the use of 'task' allows Ann's actions to be understood when she does not consciously know where they will lead, whereas 'objective'

could be interpreted to imply her actions are conscious and planned in a way that does not seem consistent with her cautious and meek nature. This problem also arises when discussing secondary characters, who often have much less-defined or weaker objectives than the protagonist does. Objective implies knowledge on the part of the character of the intended outcome, which is in many cases absent.

Of course, 'task' and 'objective' are often used interchangeably in common use English, so in any professional setting, precise definitions would need to be established to ensure these more nuanced applications of their meanings are useful; as I will show later, this is something I attempted to do in my studio work, and achieved mixed results. Weston (1996, 115), in another directing manual, *Directing Actors*, seems to acknowledge the potential of the term 'task' over 'objective' when she suggests it "keeps the actor's attention forward, not focused on whether he is doing the role 'right'". However, Weston, like many teachers and actors in the West who may have been directly or indirectly influenced by Hapgood's translation of Stanislavsky, predominantly uses the term 'objective' throughout her various publications. As Carnicke (1998, 87-88) argues, the translation of 'objective' rather than 'task' potentially confuses the logic of many of Stanislavsky's original Russian passages just as it disrupts Weston's analysis of *Sex, Lies and Videotape*.

Thus, not only did both ideological (i.e., Russian materialism) and historical factors (i.e., limited direct access to Stanislavsky in the West) compromise the effective transporting of the broader scope Stanislavsky's ideas, but also the very concepts he adopted to make the 'System' more accessible ultimately conspired to introduce new misunderstandings and semantic puzzles that are still evident in the West today. Nevertheless, our incomplete picture of the original 'System' was not just the fault of Russian editors or English translators like Hapgood. Stanislavsky himself rarely settled on one definition or approach and was forever experimenting, frequently revising his work in a relentless search for new concepts and techniques to incorporate into his holistic 'psychophysical' technique of performance. As Carnicke points out, even three months before his death, Stanislavsky argued that "One must give actors various paths" whether through action or emotion" (Stanislavsky in Carnicke 1998, 151). This openness to discover and explore new approaches suggests a highly reflective aspect to Stanislavsky's creative practice, a quality I found myself drawing on in later stages of this doctorate in an attempt to overcome numerous creative blocks that had emerged along the way.

Stanislavsky's Technique of Script Analysis

A technique that Stanislavsky utilised in both the 'emotion' and 'action' strands of the 'System', and that remained uncharacteristically consistent throughout almost his entire career, was his particular approach to script analysis. Drawing on Aristotle's assertion that drama, unlike other art forms, is defined by its imitation of action, Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis aimed to uncover the dramatic structure of the story by examining the actions each character performs in the text and the resulting counter-actions of the other characters.

During rehearsal, actors would break down their script into a series of 'tasks' (or *zadacha,* as discussed earlier) that each character was attempting to achieve in any given section, or 'unit', of the script. For example, individual scenes might be broken down into smaller units, shaped around a particular exchange between the characters and the tasks they were attempting to achieve in it. These smaller units could then be further analysed from the perspective of each character's 'given circumstances', or the situation the character finds themselves in, the task that arises from the situation, and the specific 'psychological action' the character needs to perform to fulfil the identified task. This interplay between the character's tasks, actions and counter-actions creates conflict and, therefore, drama. To provide a simple example, in a particular unit of a story, two characters, John and Mary, may need to finalise an important agreement. Part of the given circumstances for John is that he is at a disadvantage in the negotiations and needs Mary's cooperation to get a better deal. So John's task is to *gain cooperation from Mary*. To achieve this task, he could perform a variety of actions to get Mary's help – to *plead*, to *demand*, to *bribe,* to *reason with*. Mary's given circumstances, however, include a past betrayal by John, which is influencing how she approaches the current situation. Her task is to *teach John a lesson*. The actions Mary could perform to do this might be to *dismiss,* to *tease,* to *taunt,* or perhaps even to *empathise.* Each action has a potentially different effect on the direction of the scene. The role of the actors and director is to determine which *action* is most appropriate to the dramatic purpose of the scene. Stanislavsky argued that giving the actor a specific action to play provided a focus in performance that, if appropriate to the intent of the story, built a coherent chain of psychological cause and effect. Stanislavsky called this chain of cause and effect the character's 'through line of action' which was designed to allow the actor to unify the

moment-to-moment actions of the character into a flowing logical sequence (Carnicke 2009, 226).

As Merlin (2003, 15-37) argues, this technique of breaking down a script into a series of actions was a constant through Stanislavsky's entire career although it did take a number of forms. The most common execution of this technique in the West was an early version called 'round-the-table' analysis, used by Stanislavsky from at least 1906, where the actors would spend long periods of time sitting in the rehearsal room, reading the script, imagining the scenes and the action, discussing their thoughts and re-reading. This process could take days, sometimes weeks, even months, after which the actors would stand and start to put their discoveries into action. As mentioned earlier, a later and less well-known approach that Stanislavsky employed from about 1936 was called 'Active Analysis', a highly dynamic and physical technique that encouraged actors to discover the text on their feet in a cycle of improvisations and short discussions. Instead of studying the text or learning lines beforehand, the actors would simply read each scene in rehearsal, sometimes for the first time, in order to determine their character's 'impelling action' in the scene. They would then improvise the scene and its dialogue using their impelling action as a guide and afterwards compare their spontaneous discoveries to the actual text. The aim of each improvisation was to move closer to the content of the script, taking useful discoveries forward and jettisoning irrelevant ones (Carnicke 2009, 194, 212). While 'round-the-table' analysis and 'Active Analysis' might sound quite different, they were both still underpinned by Stanislavsky's assertion that the text was most effectively broken down into a series of 'tasks' that could be performed with 'actions'.

Merlin (2003, 54) argues Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis is perhaps his most significant contribution to twentieth century acting theory. Indeed, Beckerman (1970, 3) argues that, as late as 1970, reliable tools for analysing dramatic form were "simply not available" and that Stanislavsky's technique, while not comprehensive, was an "invaluable contribution". More recently, Australian actor Sean O'Shea, when interviewed by Terence Crawford, notes that these techniques are enduring shorthand for communicating fundamental acting concepts:

> What are you doing? What do you want? How are you going to get it? What action are you playing? Things like this are a good way to start that. And thankfully, for

> most of us now, it's pretty much a common language. (O'Shea in Crawford 2005, 62-63)

To further delineate the components of Stanislavsky's 'System' I will explore in this exegesis and have employed in my studio work, I will now provide definitions of the major terminologies associated with his technique of script analysis. These definitions are my own but have been drawn from common understandings of the terminologies, as evidenced in various publications of Stanislavsky's theories, including *An Actor Prepares*, as well as Carnicke's research into how Stanislavsky originally employed them. The intended purpose of these definitions was to provide a starting point for my studio work.

Action

What the actor performs on stage to fulfil the task of his/her character as set out by the circumstances of the script.

'Action' is at the core of Stanislavsky's 'System' and is central to his script-analysis technique. He believed that actors, by seeking to be constantly 'in action', would inevitably be more alive and aware on stage, providing a focus of attention that allowed them to engage with fellow performers spontaneously (Carnicke 1998, 88). Additionally, Stanislavsky saw the script as a 'score' of actions that could be analysed by the actors to guide their performances. He argued that each action identified in the script should be appropriate for the circumstances of the play and must progress logically and consecutively from the previous action. Like Aristotle's belief ([c. 335 BCE] 1982, 52) that a character is revealed by their "habit of moral choice…when the choice is not obvious", Stanislavsky believed a character's choice of action potentially revealed their hidden psychology as well as informed a logical progression of character behaviours throughout the whole script, providing the basis for a coherent and cohesive portrayal. Stanislavsky called this the 'through action' (also called 'throughline') of the character (Carnicke 1998, 169-170). He also specified that for every action a character performs, they experience a 'counter-action' that produces dramatic effect. Therefore, an actor can also trace the 'counter-through action' of forces antagonistic to the character through the script (Carnicke 1998, 172).

It is worthwhile noting that Stanislavsky generally refers to action in terms of action *by* characters rather than the incidents of the wider story, which is a more common use of this

term in the West, particularly in the film industry. Stanislavsky refers to these story incidents as the 'events' and 'facts' of the story.

Task
(translated as 'objective' by Elizabeth Hapgood in *An Actor Prepares*)

The task or problem requiring action by the character as posed by the circumstances of the script.

Stanislavsky used the common Russian word *zadacha*, meaning "a task or problem that requires action" (Carnicke 1998, 87-88), as a means to locate the reason for the character's action in a particular moment. Each action was subordinate to the task that gave rise to it. As the story progressed, the character would be called on to achieve different tasks that required different actions. The purpose of each task was to form a "logical and coherent stream" through the whole story (Stanislavsky [1937] 1986, 117).

As discussed above, *zadacha* was mistranslated as 'objective' in Stanislavsky's most popular book, *An Actor Prepares*, and has become the most common word for this technique in the West. Carnicke (1998, 87-88) makes the intriguing observation that the use of 'objective' rather than 'task' makes many of Stanislavsky's passages potentially confusing by placing the emphasis on the future result of a character's actions rather than the immediate task at hand.

Unit
(adopted as 'beats' in the United States)

An analytical division in the script identified by the unfolding interplay of tasks and actions between the characters.

'Unit' is a translation of 'bit', which was used by Stanislavsky. Confusingly, the term 'beat' came to be commonly used in the United States, possibly due to a mishearing of Stanislavsky's Russian accent during his only lecture series in New York. In the English translation of *An Actor Prepares*, 'units' were employed to divide the larger structure of the play, its acts and scenes as defined by the playwright, into more manageable sizes for the

purpose of analysis. Unfortunately, there has been ongoing confusion around how to determine where each unit starts and ends, particularly within scenes where there is no indication given by the playwright. Some, like Waxberg (1998, 56-7), advocate a new unit (which he calls a 'beat') each time there is a change in action by one of the characters. The result of this approach is that even the smallest scene may contain dozens of units. Others, like Merlin (2003, 158), argue that units are more usefully employed when there is a change in the *task* of one of the characters. Indeed, Benedetti (1998, 151) argues that Stanislavsky, in his later days, referred to 'bits' as 'episodes' (large bits of the story) and 'events' (smaller bits of a scene) to avoid the script being broken down into too many parts. This would seem to be consistent with Tortsov, the fictional teacher in Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*, when he says to his students "Do not break up a play more than is necessary, do not use details to guide you" (Stanislavsky [1937] 1986, 115). Tortsov goes on to speak of the "organic bond" that units have with tasks (Stanislavsky [1937] 1986). For the sake of clarity, I will also use the term 'unit' throughout this exegesis, which will be linked to 'tasks'.

Through Line
(also known as 'through line of action' and 'through-action')

The unifying action that connects all the smaller objectives and actions of a character in a coherent logical progression.

When completely worked through the whole script, each character possesses what Stanislavsky called a 'through line of action' that unifies all of their subordinate tasks and actions through the whole story to create a coherent pattern of behaviours (Carnicke 1998, 181). That is, all the tasks a character pursues, and all the actions they perform to achieve these tasks, create a logical spine along which they travel through the story. Each character has a through line. Confusingly, Stanislavsky (1981, 78) also used a term called the 'super-task' (or super-objective), which encompassed the various tasks and actions of the character, as well as all the through lines of all the other characters and the creative intentions of the writer, to create the story as a whole:

> The super objective contains the meaning, the inner sense, of all the subordinate objectives of the play. In carrying out this one super objective you have arrived at something even more important, superconscious, ineffable, which is the spirit of [the writer] himself [sic], the thing that inspired him to write, and which, inspires an actor to act.

Merlin (2003, 75) notes that various scholars, including Carnicke (2009) and Benedetti (1998), have different interpretations of what Stanislavsky meant by the super-task and how it relates to the through line of the character. Professionally, I have heard actors and directors use 'super-objective' and 'through line' interchangeably. I have also heard many screenwriters use 'through line' to describe the narrative arc of a character. For the purposes of this exegesis, I will use 'through line' as related to a single character in order to describe the interconnectedness of his/her various tasks and actions throughout the story.

Facts
(referred to as 'Given Circumstances' in the West)

The 'fixed' elements of the script (characters, events, locations, objects, etc.) as provided by the writer.

Carnicke (1998, 173) argues that 'facts', as Stanislavsky used them, are elements of the script that are not open to interpretation by the actors, and may include details provided by the director and/or designers. Actors are meant to adapt their performance to account for the 'facts'. Benedetti (1998, 108-110) seems to align 'fact' with 'event'; that is, what actually happens in a given unit. Either way, the term is used to clarify the content of the script as provided by the writer. It is worth noting that 'Practical Aesthetics' uses the term the 'literal' whereby actors describe the events of a unit without interpretation in order to clarify what is 'objectively' happening (Bruder et al., 19-20).

An associated, and perhaps better known, term among actors in the West, is 'given circumstances', which refers to the elements implied by the play that might inform the character's behaviour (i.e., the social, historical and personal background of the story). Throughout the exegesis, I will employ both 'facts' and 'given circumstances' as terms.

Other Components of Stanislavsky's 'System'

The above components broadly represent what I knew about Stanislavsky's work at the commencement of my doctoral project (although the historical circumstances of their misinterpretation were unknown to me at the time). There are a number of other components

of Stanislavsky's 'System' that I have incorporated into my studio work; in particular, his later experiments in 'Active Analysis' (as discussed above). However, because I learnt about these other components during the process of this research, I feel it best to outline my understanding of them at the point in the exegesis where they directly impacted on the progress of my studio work. These components and how I adapted and employed them will be described in Chapter 6.

The 'Three-act Structure' Model of Screenwriting

To define the principal concepts of the 'three-act structure' model of screenwriting that have been adapted and applied in my studio work, and their relevance to screenwriting practice in general, I will examine the work of four of the most influential screenwriting manuals since the emergence of this model in the late 1970s. They are Syd Field's *Screenplay – The Foundations of Screenwriting* ([1979] 1994, [1979] 2005); Linda Seger's *Making a Good Script Great* (1994, 2010); Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey – Mythic Structure for Screenwriters* (1992, 1999, 2007); and Robert McKee's *Story – Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (1999). These books, all of which specifically address the model of the three-act structure, are routinely cited by other screenwriting authors, filmmakers, film executives and teachers and are on the reading lists of the majority of film and television schools around the world. Where relevant, I will acknowledge updated concepts in later editions as well as other publications by the same authors.

So as to efficiently summarise the content of these manuals, I will focus on three central concepts they all address that represent the most influential concepts of the three-act structure: the 'act', the 'turning point', and the 'goal'. As with the discussion of Stanislavsky's terminologies, the definitions provided are by no means exhaustive interpretations of how the concepts may be used in practice, and simply represent a starting point for adaptation to my studio work.

It is also worth noting that Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee almost exclusively apply these concepts to feature films, with little discussion of the structures of television, short film or documentary and how these may be different. With this in mind, I will also make a number of observations about the potential limits of the three-act model of screenwriting that might

suggest some starting points for adapting Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis in order to augment the screenwriting process and its theorisation.

The Model

The three-act structure model of screenwriting emerged with the publication of Field's 1979 screenwriting manual *Screenplay – The Foundations of Screenwriting.* Field is generally credited with popularising the concept despite Constance Nash and Virginia Oakley outlining the same model in their 1978 publication *The Screenwriter's Handbook* (Thompson 1999, 22). There had been innumerable 'scenarios manuals' published since the earliest days of cinema, each of which offered budding writers various principles to assist in creating an original screenplay, including the concept of breaking a story into a series of 'acts'. Where the approach of Nash and Oakley, and eventually Field, was different was in the exact formulation of the number of acts (i.e., three) and the proportion of the acts (e.g., twenty-five pages, fifty pages, twenty-five pages) (Thompson 1999, 23). Field ([1979] 1994, 7) called his approach the 'Paradigm' but it became more widely known as the three-act structure and it utilised the three central concepts listed above.

The Act

A large-scale section of a script that ends on a 'turning point'.

Field ([1979] 1994, 10) describes an act as a "unit of dramatic action", which is separated from the next act by a "plot point", a development that "spins the story around in a new direction". In his 'Paradigm', a screenplay is divided into three acts of specific proportions and lengths – Acts One and Three are thirty pages long, while Act Two is sixty pages long ([1979] 1994, 7-17). Thompson (1999, 21-22) argues that while the technique of dividing scripts into larger sections had been a common feature of scenario manuals since at least 1922, describing them as 'acts' with the formulation that they be of a specific length and proportion was a new development that emerged in the 1970s. Field ([1979] 1994, 25-38) also argues that each act has a specific dramatic purpose that shapes its events: Act One is about 'set-up', the establishment of character and dramatic action; Act Two is about 'confrontation', the development of the dramatic action; and Act Three is about 'resolution', the closure of the dramatic action.

Seger (1994, 19) references Field but defines the act proportions and lengths less rigidly. She (1994, 19-38) also suggests a similar purpose for each act – 'set-up', 'development' and 'resolution' – and separates acts with a significant event in the story, which she calls a 'turning point'.

Drawing on Joseph Campbell's theories on mythology, Vogler (1999, 18) divides the twelve stages of Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' into three acts, and sets out a purpose for each act: 1) the hero's decision to act; 2) the action itself; and 3) the consequences of the action. Campbell ([1949] 1993) described these three stages as 'Departure', 'Initiation' and 'Return'. Vogler (1999, xxi-xxii) does not specify the proportions or lengths of acts but does argue that each act redirects the protagonist in the pursuit of a new goal. McKee (1999, 41) describes an act as "a series of sequences" that "turns on a major reversal in a value-charged condition of the character's life". Like Field and Seger, McKee (1999, 218-219) also proposes act proportions but argues there are many variations of this structure.

The Turning Point

An event at the end of an act that changes the direction of the story.

A 'turning point' is a major story development that changes the direction of the narrative and defines the end of one act and the beginning of the next. Field ([1979] 1994, 115) uses the term 'plot point' in *Screenplay*, and defines it as "an incident, episode or event that hooks into the action and spins it around into another direction". Field (1984, 30) also implies plot/turning points are some sort of narrative event external to the protagonist: "A plot point can be anything: a shot, a speech, a scene, a sequence, an action, anything that moves the story forward."

Seger uses the term 'turning point', which has been more widely adopted by other screenwriting theorists as well as filmmakers. The reason for this may be because 'turning point' suggests a major narrative event, whereas 'plot point' could be any event that may or may not be a major change. As Thompson (1999, 23) argues, "Field confusingly claims that there are plot points within acts, citing ten in Act Two of *Chinatown*." Like Field, Seger (1994, 20) suggests the key feature of a turning point is that it turns the action of the story in a new direction at the end of an act: "The movement out of one act and into the next is usually accomplished by an action or an event called a turning point." However, unlike Field,

Seger (1994, 29) argues a turning point can also be "a moment of decision or commitment on the part of the main character" as well as a narrative event external to the protagonist.

Vogler (1999, 18 & 195) makes reference to two types of turning points in his model: "The "First Threshold" is the turning point between Acts One and Two, whereas "The Road Back" marks the transition from Act Two to Act Three.

He describes the First Threshold in the following way:

> Now the hero stands at the very threshold of the world of adventure…Crossing the First Threshold is an act of will in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure. (1992, 149)

'The Road Back' is Vogler's term for the turning point at the end of Act Two:

> Once the lessons and Rewards of the great Ordeal have been celebrated and absorbed, heroes face a choice: whether to remain in the Special World or begin the journey home to the Ordinary World. (1992, 217)

As suggested by the above, Vogler (1992, 150) sees turning points as a moment of decision for the main character, whether they are imposed by an external narrative forces or, by what he refers to as 'internal events'.

McKee (1999, 234) draws explicitly on Aristotle when he refers to turning points as minor, moderate and major "reversals" that not only happen at the end of acts, but also sequences and scenes. While suggesting that reversals are often external plot events that change the protagonist's situation from "positive to negative" (McKee 1999, 217), McKee also underlines the importance of character "choice" at turning points in the story when he argues "A Turning Point is centred in the choice a character makes under pressure to take one action or another in the pursuit of desire" (1999, 248).

As evidenced here, the concept of a turning point at the end of each act, which provides a major change in the direction of the story, is an important feature of a screenplay's narrative structure for Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee. Of them, Field and Seger see a turning point as usually an event external to the protagonist.

The Goal

A specific and tangible desire actively pursued by the protagonist throughout the story.

The third and final concept central to the three-act structure is the protagonist's 'goal'. Field refers to it as the "need" of the character:

> What does your character want? What is his [sic] need? What drives him to the resolution of the story? In *Chinatown* Jack Nicholson's need is finding *who* set him up, and *why*...You must define the need of your character. What does he want? ([1979] 1994, 24)

Field ([1979] 1994, 30) also emphasises the role of obstacles to the dramatic need of the character in order to give the story "dramatic tension". Similarly, Seger argues there is an intimate relationship between the character's goal and the overall shape of the story:

> Character influences story because the character, particularly the main one, has a *goal.* There's something the main character wants...This goal gives direction to the story. (1994, 150)

In the second edition of *The Writer's Journey,* Vogler explicitly connects the protagonist's goal to the shape of the acts:

> ...each act sends the hero on a specific track with a specific aim or goal, and the climaxes of each act changes the hero's direction, assigning a new goal. The hero's first act goal, for instance, might be to seek treasure, but after meeting a potential lover at the first threshold crossing, the goal might change to pursuing that love. (1999, xxi-xxii)

McKee argues that "classical storytelling", as he calls it, requires the protagonist to have a "need or goal, *an object of desire*" (1999, 138). McKee's (1999, 136-141) emphasis is predominantly on the protagonist having an external "conscious desire", which plays a significant role in shaping the structure of the screenplay.

> Other characters may be dogged, even inflexible, but the protagonist in particular is a wilful being...A fine story is not necessarily the struggle of a gigantic will versus absolute forces of inevitability. Quality of will is as important as quantity. A protagonist's willpower may be less than the biblical Job, but powerful enough to sustain desire through conflict and ultimately take actions that create meaningful and irreversible change (1999, 137).

McKee (1999, 138) also goes on to briefly discuss the role of the protagonist's "unconscious desires" in the story and also makes mention of protagonists who are more inward and passive and do not actively pursue an external goal (1999, 50).

General Critique of the 'Three-Act Structure' Model of Screenwriting

The screenwriting model of the 'three-act structure' is undoubtedly a highly influential and, in many respects, useful starting point for understanding the basic storytelling structure of feature films. The writers discussed above have offered practical ways of working through the complex and often opaque creative process of screenwriting, and have presented insights that, while not universally applicable, are useful in understanding a certain type of movie. One of the key appeals of the three-act structure is the simplicity of its argument, which claims that all stories have a "beginning, middle and end" structure of three acts. This seems like good old-fashioned common sense and has a tradition that goes back as far as Aristotle ([c. 335 BCE] 1982, 52) in *The Poetics* with his similar, though equally vague, assertion. And, arguably, it was this simplicity that saw the three-act structure quickly become an irrefutable law of filmmaking, adopted by not only professional and amateur screenwriters, but also their bosses in the form of producers, development executives and investors – the vast majority of whom had never written a screenplay. One of the unintended effects of this was that non-writers now had a new list of terminologies (such as 'turning point', 'act', 'goal' and many others) to dissect and demand change of a writer's work, without any first-hand experience in writing, as Rupert Walters (in Owen 2003, 34) seems to suggest;

> I do sometimes look at something and think, "We're not really getting into the story fast enough here", but the language of 'inciting incidents' is difficult to understand. It's difficult not to use it, because it's the language of development meetings, but it's much more important to understand what the story is and what the point of telling it is.

Even McKee (in Coleman 1995 , para 4), frequently quoted by executives, is disturbed by these sorts of unintended uses of his writings:

> They toss terminology at the writer – "what's the controlling idea, what's the spine?" – not in an effort to develop the screenplay, but in an effort to impress and intimidate the writer that they've got some kind of knowledge, which they don't have.

Despite its widespread adoption, however, the three-act structure has many detractors. Screenwriter, producer and well-known screenwriting blogger, Alex Epstein (2002, 60), puts it this way:

> Maybe half of all truly great movies have three distinct acts, and in some of those, you have to stretch to figure out where exactly the act breaks are. Where are the act breaks in *Hard Day's Night*? *All that Jazz*? How about *Spartacus*? *Forrest Gump*? *Apollo 13*? *Annie Hall*? Or the superbly written *Wild Things*, which has about five or six major twists.

Dancyger and Rush (2002) provide a particularly illuminating analysis of what they call 'restorative three-act' storytelling in their well-regarded text *Alternative Screenwriting: Successfully Breaking the Rules.* In it they argue that the limits of three-act structure go beyond how widely applicable it is and take in its assumptions about the nature of free will, the relationship of character to society and the transparency of motivation (Dancyger and Rush 2002, 30-38). In essence, they argue that the widespread practice of the 'restorative three-act' structure in Hollywood filmmaking helps to explain why so many movies establish a psychologically flawed protagonist in the first part of the film (Act One), put the protagonist through various challenges that highlight their flaw in the second part (Act Two), and have them realise their mistakes and psychologically change in the last part (Act Three).

Another screenwriting 'guru', John Truby (2004, para 6), writes more vehemently on the structure in *Why 3-Act Will Kill Your Writing*, where he claims "The so-called 3-act structure is the biggest, most destructive myth ever foisted on writers. I would like to call it obsolete. But that implies that it worked in the first place." Of course, Truby's comments should be understood as coming from another writer on screenwriting with a rival product to sell, but they do capture much of the frustration I have encountered and heard from fellow writers struggling with the constraints of the three-act structure. My experiences of using the three-act structure in my professional work, as well as teaching it, can be summarised into the following observations about its limits as a screenwriting tool:

1. The key screenwriting manuals promoting the three-act structure (including Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee) rarely address screenwriting forms other than feature films, if at all. This seems a significant omission for a model that many, like Field, argue is the "*foundation* of a good screenplay" and just "works" ([1979] 1994, 16). But, one-hour television is routinely structured into five acts, and occasionally six, each ending in an ad break. In other instances, like the HBO crime drama, *The Sopranos* (Chase 1999-2007), I would argue it is difficult to identify *any* act breaks because the show was broadcast advertisement free, and featured an approach to

dramatic structure that resisted the established, "teaser, four acts, tag" formulas of television (as evidenced by often quiet, thematic endings of episodes, as well as the controversially ambiguous ending to the entire series). These examples alone would seem to undermine the claim that "all stories" have three acts.

2. Discussions of the three-act structure focus almost entirely on the protagonist and rarely examine how the secondary characters play a role in shaping the events of the story. Vogler (1992, 33-94) makes a case for a range of "archetypes" that commonly occur in myths, but it is clear from his discussion that they are only there to serve the narrative journey of the central "hero", rather than having a narrative of their own or contributing to a wider ensemble story. Similarly, Field (1984, [1979] 1994, [1979] 2005), McKee (1999) and Seger (1994, 2010) offer negligible discussion on secondary characters and instead focus on the key narrative stages of the protagonist. This omission makes it hard to examine films or television shows with large ensemble casts, where there are many storylines intersecting to create the shape of the narrative.

3. As Dancyger and Rush (2002, 142) have argued, the model of the three-act structure, as well as mainstream Hollywood films in general, tends to preference highly energetic and active protagonists who pursue a tangible goal. But, as discussed earlier in relation to the character of Ann in *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (Soderbergh 1990), not all films feature protagonists know what they want and how to actively pursue it. Ann knows her anxiety is a problem but struggles to identify anything she can do about it. Even when she is drawn to her husband's friend, Graham, it is only through the actions of others that Ann is presented with the opportunity to take the next step. Ann is more *passive* and *reactive* than the sorts of protagonists used as examples in the three-act structure. She often plays the role of an observer on the main action and resists doing anything about the challenges that come her way. Dancyger and Rush (2002, 146-155) convincingly argue for a range of alternatives to the dominant 'active protagonist' of mainstream cinema and provide a number of film examples, including *My Own Private Idaho* (Van Sant 1991), *Black Robe* (Beresford 1991) and *Mystic Pizza* (Petrie 1988), all of which received critical acclaim and good box office returns in their time. More recent examples, such as the quiet, searching passivity of Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) in *Lost in Translation* (Coppola 2003), or the weary reactivity of David (Will Forte) in *Nebraska* (Payne 2013), indicate that these sorts of

characters are still finding a place in notable feature films, even if it is one considered increasingly beyond the mainstream. While there is clearly a preference for 'active' characters in the three-act structure and mainstream Hollywood films, this commercial reality should not limit screenwriters from being aware of other narrative possibilities and the opportunity to innovate.

4. I believe the model of the three-act structure is predominately focussed on the large-scale organisation of the narrative in a way that makes detailed examination difficult. For example, scenes are gathered into 'acts', which are shaped by the protagonist's 'goal' and conclude at a 'turning point' in the story. Yet, there are rarely equivalent concepts to discuss how lines of dialogue and action are organised into scenes or scenes into sequences. Approaches like Vogler's interpretation of Campbell's twelve step 'Hero's Journey' help to break down the story further but he does not present any tools to examine the structure of scenes in detail. McKee, Seger and Field offer chapters on scene design filled with very good advice, with McKee (1999, 273) even using the term 'beat', which would appear to be drawn from a knowledge of Stanislavsky. But these take up far less space than discussions of act structure, and the terminology used does not always make it clear how to connect scenes to the story's overall structure in a unified whole.

5. As Epstein's quote above suggests, there are common problems in the model of the three-act structure when trying to determine exactly where the 'turning points' occur in a story. This may have to do with competing and/or contradictory definitions being used (as evidenced with the contradictory use of 'plot points' by Field as discussed above) but may also have to do with the observation that, in many cases, the turning point is not a single moment, but a series of events and choices made by the protagonist over an extended sequence. As Epstein (2002, 60) once again argues:

> In *The Fugitive*, does the second act begin when Dr. Richard Kimble escapes the prison bus, or when he escapes the following manhunt? When does the last act begin? When he discovers the one-armed man? When he confronts Dr. Charles Nichols at the doctor convention? When Marshal Samuel Gerard begins to realize that Dr. Kimble is innocent?

My experience teaching about the concept of 'turning points', as well as analysing them with writing colleagues, supports this argument, with any discussion of the exact position of a film's act breaks usually generating a variety of competing views.

6. Finally, and most importantly, is the position that, depending on your definitions and approach, it is possible to convincingly demonstrate that most films have more than three acts. Notable film scholar Kristin Thompson (1999) does exactly this in *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique,* her inductive examination of the narrative structure of 100 films from 1910 to 2000, ten from each decade, including a number that are examined by Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee. Rather than assuming all films have three acts, Thompson took the widely argued position that an act break occurs when the character's goal changes, an idea generally supported by Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee. Using this simple definition, Thompson (1999, 27) discovered that the vast majority of films in her study had four acts, sometimes five. This observation was aligned with discussions by Field (1984, 131-146), Seger (1994, 35-36), Vogler (1992, 181-201) and McKee (1999, 303-309) around the concept of the 'mid-point crisis', which is essentially another 'turning point' in the middle of the long second act. This has the effect, even by the definitions of Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee, of breaking the story into four acts. Thompson's (1999, 36) argument hinges around the timing of the acts, and asserts that there was a tendency in all the films examined for the acts to run between twenty to thirty minutes. The natural result of this is that longer films had more acts, sometimes five or six. McKee (1999, 220-21) also argues that five-to-eight act structures can be found but asserts they are the exception and that the three-act design is the minimum. While space does not permit an in-depth analysis of Thompson's assertions here, my own observations of the growing length of event films, such as *Man of Steel* (Synder 2013)*, The Dark Knight Rises* (Nolan 2012) and *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (Jackson 2012), all of which run over 150 minutes, support her argument. By Field's own definition, the length of the smallest acts in films of this duration would be approaching forty minutes – a length, I'm quite sure, even the most ardent fan would struggle with.

In summary, while highly influential across the screen industry with writers and non-writers alike, and arguably a useful starting point for understanding narrative structure, the

screenwriting model of the 'three-act structure ' would appear to have a number of practical as well as conceptual limitations when examining a wide range of screen stories and the way in which they work structurally.

Stanislavsky and Screenwriting – Some Starting Points

Having established the foundation of this research, I will now indicate some of the potential starting points for adapting Stanislavsky's techniques of script analysis for the purposes of screenwriting. Clearly, even this preliminary analysis reveals similarities between Stanislavsky's techniques of script analysis and concepts used in the three-act structure model of screenwriting. Stanislavsky's practice of breaking down a narrative into a series of 'units' determined by changes in character 'tasks' shares many similarities with the three-act structure's technique of breaking down a story into a series of 'acts' that are separated by a change in the protagonist's 'goal'. While I do not propose here to examine why these similarities exist, the most obvious reason is likely to be the enduring influence of Aristotle on Western concepts of drama. Probably one of the most influential passages from Aristotle's *Poetics* ([c. 335 BCE] 1982, 52) sees the philosopher assert that "Character is whatever reveals a person's habit of moral choice – whatever he [sic] tends to choose or reject when the choice is not obvious." Both Stanislavsky and many screenwriting manuals often employ notions of 'unity', 'reversals', coherent cause-and-effect progressions, and character revealed through 'choice' and 'action'. The apparent central importance of character and choice to both Stanislavsky and the three-act structure seems to underscore the enduring influence of Aristotle and *Poetics*, firmly locating both approaches within Western philosophical and narrative traditions. Indeed, perhaps these unacknowledged similarities betray assumptions about the 'universality' and 'truth' of these concepts. Certainly, Vogler's (1999, xi) thoughts on the "life rules embedded in the structure of stories", as well as McKee's (1999, 62) proclamation that "Classical design is a mirror of the human mind" would seem to suggest this.

Of course, as discussed earlier, this might also explain why screenwriting manuals in general do not point out or explore their similarity to Stanislavsky's highly influential techniques – the concepts are simply assumed to be 'universal' knowledge, rather than specific techniques, practised and understood in different ways, at different times, for different purposes. Both McKee (1999) and Seger (1994) briefly acknowledge Stanislavsky or employ terminology

supposedly drawn from his influence. Seger (1994, 178) makes one explicit reference to "Stanislavsky's method of acting" in a discussion on conflict and how to use strong "objectives" to add an emotional weight to exchanges between characters. When talking about scene design, McKee (1999, 233-287) makes reference to a character's "scene objective" and how it is connected to their overall "super-objective", or "throughline", and analyses a scene by breaking it down into "beats", or exchanges of character "action". Strangely, he does not reference Stanislavsky in these instances but does elsewhere in relation to a writer's inspiration (McKee 1999, 65 & 112). I am not suggesting McKee is deliberately avoiding acknowledging Stanislavsky but, rather, the concepts he is using are perhaps assumed to be 'universal' techniques with no specific source. Apart from these two instances, there is virtually nothing in the scores of screen manuals I have examined in this research to connect the practice of screenwriters with the actors who will interpret their work.

It could, of course, be argued that this is not necessarily a problem as actors do one thing on a film and writers do another. However, I would argue that both are types of storytellers and the hope in any collaboration between them is that they are telling the *same* story. Based on my own writing experience, and from observing the creative process of many colleagues and students, I know that it is not uncommon for screenplays to undergo a dramatic overhaul during rehearsal because the script is either unclear, incoherent or contains characterisations that are not 'playable' by the actors. Screenwriter Robert Benton (in Seger 1990, 211) shared this insight into refining the script of *Kramer vs. Kramer* with Dustin Hoffman, an actor trained in the Stanislavsky inspired 'Method' school of acting:

> During *Kramer vs. Kramer,* Dustin Hoffman taught me a lot about writing, so that every character at every moment must be specific. He really made me see as we worked on that picture, there was no moment that character had where he could afford to be general. He had to be specific and precise.

Benton's quote suggests that even experienced writers can learn a great deal from actors, particularly ones like Hoffman, about what is needed to perform a character. In this instance, the insight had to do with examining each moment precisely to clarify what the character is trying to do – their 'task' and 'action' as Stanislavsky might say. However, techniques like Stanislavsky's approach to script analysis could just as easily be applied to secondary characters to ensure they are also 'playable'. Or they could be used to examine the 'throughline' of any of the characters to ensure they are clear and coherent. Or a troublesome

moment in a scene that isn't working. Or the 'turning points' of each act to ensure they build coherently.

With these observations in mind, my project seeks to explore the ways in which Stanislavsky's practice of script analysis could potentially augment my screenwriting process to address many of the limitations of a traditional three-act structure analysis. For example, in much the same way that Thompson examined a wide range of films using the character's 'goal change' as the key marker to determine the structure of their narrative, Stanislavsky's approach to script analysis similarly uses a character's 'tasks' to break down the script and reveal its structure. Obviously, many of the plays Stanislavsky staged had explicit 'act breaks' signalled in the script (which would have often been more than three), and Stanislavsky was not writing scripts; he was interpreting them. However, what I aim to examine here is how this approach could potentially liberate the writer – in this case, myself – from having to automatically assume the story being developed has three acts, and how this could allow the emerging structure of the story, as well as the evolving qualities of its characters, to be examined in detail for coherence and unity.

To this effect, I will briefly revisit the six observations raised earlier about the limitations of the three-act structure model of screenwriting and suggest ways in which Stanislavsky's concepts of script analysis might address them:

1. As discussed earlier, the 'three-act' model predominantly focuses on feature films at the expense of other forms, including television, which usually has five to six acts. However, Stanislavsky's script-analysis technique does not presuppose any particular number of acts or their relative proportions – it only uses an examination of the characters' 'tasks' in relation to unfolding events to determine the structure of the story. Of course, in Stanislavsky's case, the script was pre-existing and was not being written, but this approach could inform the conception of the broad shape of a new work, potentially freeing the writer to explore different formats and structures in the 'story-in-progress'. Potentially, this would even allow for projects to start their life in one format (i.e., feature films) and end in another (i.e., television drama).

2. The 'three-act' model focuses principally on the role of the protagonist, with little attention given to secondary characters and their role in the overall structure.

Obviously, Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques were designed to work for an entire company of actors, from the lead actor to the spear-carrier, and have the potential to address this limitation in the 'three-act' model. Once again, this involves taking into account the 'tasks' of the various characters and how they act and react to each other to create drama. This sort of examination has the added advantage of generating reflections on not only the structure of the story-in-progress, but also the 'characters-in-progress' and what their evolving actions reveal about their qualities.

3. The model of the three-act structure struggles to account for passive or reactive characters, such as Ann in *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (Soderbergh 1990), who do not have a clearly articulated goal. However, examining these characters in terms of their immediate 'task', as Stanislavsky would have called it, rather than a future 'goal', potentially helps to liberate the characters from an understanding of what they want and where their actions might lead. Similarly, concentrating on the specific 'actions' a character performs in the moment to achieve their 'task', rather than a future 'goal' or objective', leaves room to explore characters who are more passive and inwardly directed than the traditional hero of the three-act structure.

4. The three-act model is far more concerned with the large-scale shape of the acts, with little attention given to how scenes play into this larger structure, or how they work dramatically in and of themselves. In contrast, Stanislavsky's approach relies on dissecting the scene down into a series of 'tasks' and specific 'actions' for each character to play in each and every moment. This is an extremely detailed way of working when compared with the 'three-act' model and provides a way of analysing and understanding the scene-in-progress for its dramatic potential.

5. As discussed, many problems arise in defining exactly where 'turning points' occur in the 'three-act' model, potentially leading to confusion and disagreement among collaborators about solutions. However, Stanislavsky's approach makes a clear and indissoluble link between the units of a story and changes in character 'tasks'. This focus on changes in a character's 'task' or goal, as Thompson (1999) has demonstrated, is potentially a far more precise method of reliably and consistently breaking down a narrative and may provide more accurate insights into the evolving structure of the story-in-progress.

6. As evidenced in the discussion above, many feature films – arguably, most – actually have four or more acts. As stated earlier, Stanislavsky's approach has the advantage of not presupposing a particular number of acts or specific proportions to the acts. It is an inductive method of examining what is presented, using a consistent toolkit of concepts focussed predominantly around character 'tasks', that offers a potentially more rigorous way of understanding the unfolding 'story-in-progress'. If the story being developed happens to require five or six acts, then a process informed by Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques could take account of this, whereas the model of the three-act structure would seek to re-shape the story. This alone, I would argue, is a major attraction in examining the potential role Stanislavsky's techniques could play in a screenwriting process.

To summarise, Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis, which divides a script into 'units' based on various character 'tasks', would appear to complement the principle concepts of the three-act structure model of screenwriting; namely, the 'act', 'turning point' and 'goal'. As a result, Stanislavsky's techniques appear to have the potential to augment the model of the three-act structure by addressing a number of its limitations, including a lack of clarity in definitions and restrictions around the range of story structures it is able to accommodate.

Having described these foundational points, the rest of the exegesis will seek to describe a number of key learning experiences and reflections that influenced the evolution of my studio work in this project. These experiences, while somewhat episodic, informed each other, and are therefore presented sequentially. The experiences are presented as personal narratives to effectively capture my perspectives on the discoveries I was making at the time and what they meant to my evolving practice.

CHAPTER 3: Experimenting with Stanislavsky

"Remastered" by Stanislavsky – Adapting My Master's project

(February to August 2005)

In the early stages of my research, from February through to August 2005, I was busy gathering a range of ideas to transform into feature-length screenplays (my proposed studio work). This was a logical step for my unfolding career since a number of my short films had performed well at international film festivals, including *Stop* (Mullins 1999), which had been invited into official competition at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival, and *Rubber Gloves* (Mullins 2001), which had been invited into official competition at the prestigious Aspen Shortsfest in the United States. There were many ideas jostling for position and I felt confident the most compelling ones would eventually emerge.

At the same time, I was also reading about Stanislavsky's work and influence in the hope of better defining the practices I wished to explore and how they might be adapted into a screenwriting process. However, as the above discussion suggests, defining what Stanislavsky *actually* said and how actors *practically* used his ideas was a complicated investigation that would require more time than the few months I had reserved. It was soon apparent that Stanislavsky's work had reached me through a labyrinth of historical and cultural influences that would make defining the practices I perceived to be so similar to screenwriting very difficult. For example, soon after commencing my research, I discovered that the concept of a character's 'objective', which was commonly used by both actors and screenwriters in the West, was actually a subtle mistranslation of Stanislavsky's term *zadacha*, which meant an immediate task or problem rather than a future goal (as discussed above). I wondered whether I should use 'objective' or 'task'. I was concerned that these difficulties in precisely defining the concepts I was attempting to adapt could slow down my progress. As my focus was on how to adapt Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques to a screenwriting practice, specifically *my* screenwriting practice, I decided to commence work with a range of preliminary definitions of Stanislavsky's ideas, drawn from my readings and what I understood to be common understandings of them (as outlined above), and to continue to refine the definitions as I went along.

Using these initial understandings, I decided to apply them to a technique of screenwriting analysis I had developed during my Masters of Arts (by Research) project to see how it could be modified and applied differently. As mentioned above, in my Master's project, I called the technique a 'character-centred' approach to screenwriting (Mullins 2004a). Perhaps in anticipation of my growing interest in Stanislavsky and acting practices, the argument at the centre of my Master's thesis was that traditional screenwriting practice (i.e., the three-act structure) emphasised a description of plot over character and used a jargon-heavy language. My aim was to devise an approach that emphasised character in the description of the story's structure using plain English, and to apply the technique to my studio work, which focused on writing a feature-length screenplay. As discussed earlier, I drew on Thompson's (1999) observations to argue that a more 'character-centred' way to analyse a screenplay was to break the film up into character goals rather than assume a film automatically had three acts.

Like Thompson's, the model I eventually devised broke a story up into four parts: 1) Character; 2) Challenges; 3) Crisis; and 4) Change. I also separated the protagonist's journey through these stages into two parts – their *internal* life (the direction of their emotional choices) and their *external* life (the direction of the external events that impacted on them). I argued that the movement through these four parts of the structure was shaped around a series of 'commitments' (i.e., goals) the protagonist made to address a growing conflict, or 'gap', between their internal and external world. Essentially, as the story progressed, the gap between their internal and external world grew wider, creating conflict. Below is a diagram of the model (see Figure #1 below).

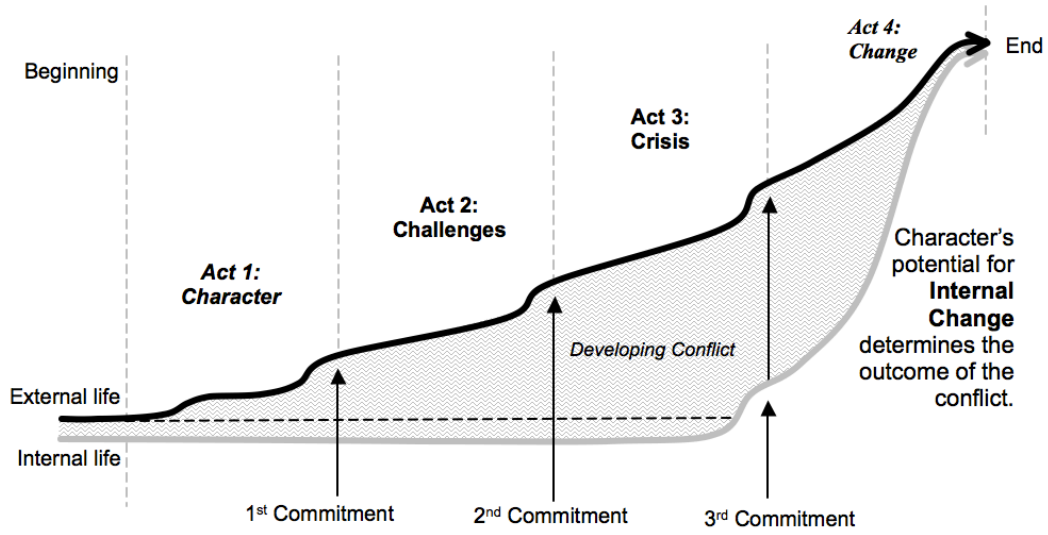


Figure #1: 'Character-centred Model of Screenwriting' (Mullins 2004)

There was much I liked about my model but it was not without its problems. First, the language used, while arguably easier to understand than concepts like Vogler's "Approach the Inmost Cave" (1992, 145), was just as jargon-laden as traditional screenwriting language. Second, there was an assumption that the narrative structure of films generally broke up into four parts, which was just as prescriptive as the assumption that they broke up into three acts. Finally, I argued that, generally, characters did not have the potential to 'change' until the last part of the story – that is, their internal values and qualities stayed the same through much of the story. Once again, in retrospect, this was an overly prescriptive analysis.

Drawing on my recent readings of Stanislavsky, I revisited the model and made a number of modifications. First, I reviewed how the large-scale 'units' of the story might be broken up by a series of major 'internal shifts' in the protagonist (i.e., a change in their internal goals, tasks, desires, beliefs, etc.). My aim here was to look at the structure of a film for what it was rather than assume a pre-determined number of 'acts' – whether three or four or something else altogether. Second, I wanted to more effectively illustrate how these internal shifts and the subsequent actions the character made throughout the story could reveal a great deal about their inner values and qualities. In this instance, I was thinking of Stanislavsky's (and Aristotle's) assertion that internal choice and external action reveal character. Third, I wanted to illustrate how these internal shifts altered the character's relationship to the unfolding conflict and, ultimately, determined the overall shape and outcome of the story. My hope here was to break out of the 'recognition' and 'change' pattern promoted in the traditional restorative three-act structure and describe more tragic or melancholic stories where the characters failed to recognise their mistakes and internally transform.

To do this modified analysis, I chose a number of well-known screenplays, some of which were routinely described in screenwriting manuals. The films included *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977), *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974), *Tootsie* (Pollack 1982), *Die Hard* (McTeirnan 1988) and *Insomnia* (Nolan 2002). My selection was also informed by the variety of different character arcs I perceived in the films. For example, *Stars Wars* obviously featured a traditional 'restorative' arc, while *Chinatown* was more tragic, and the others were variations from these.

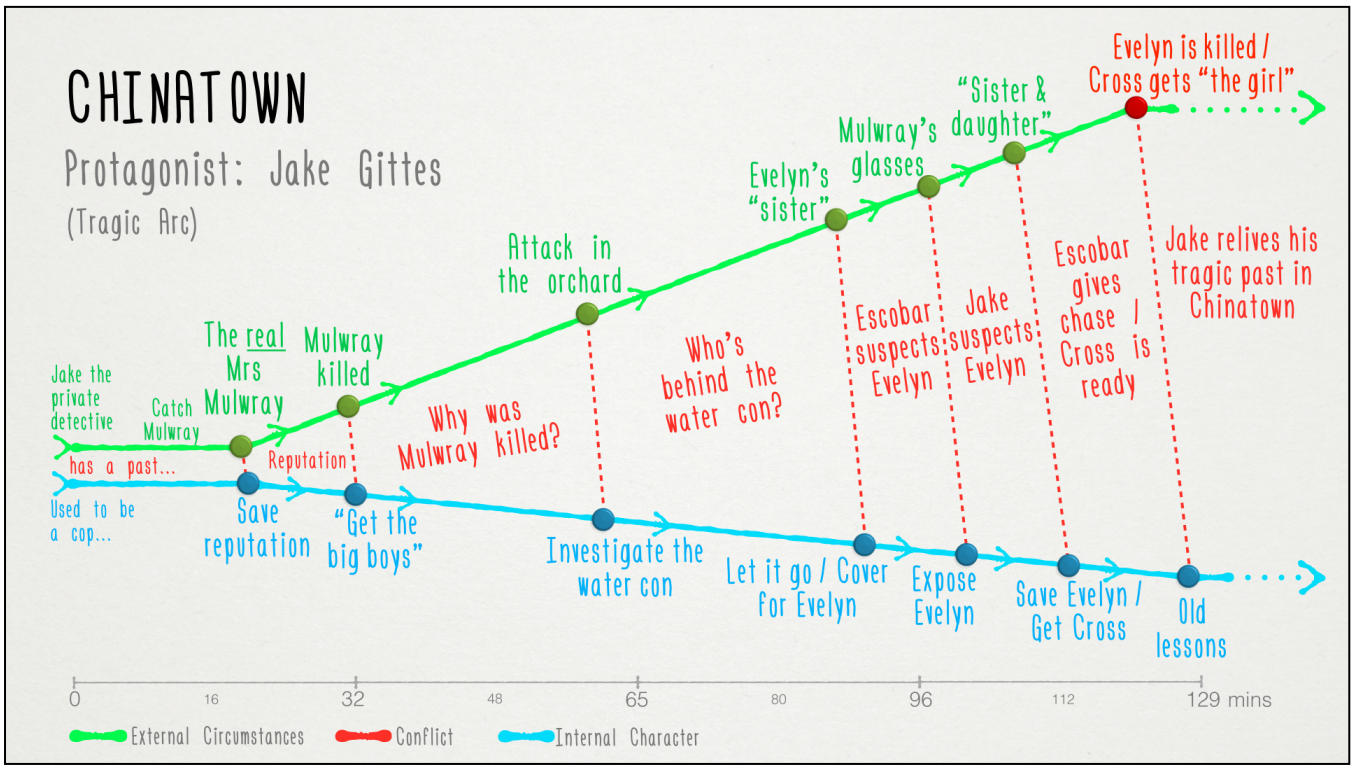
The revised analysis once again divided the protagonist's journey into two separate but interrelated timelines. The first timeline was the '*internal* character' of the protagonist – the

inner emotional choices, goals, tasks, desires and beliefs the character draws on throughout the story. I chose the term '*internal* character' because I perceived it would be able to take in a wider range of internal states than a term like 'objective' or 'goal', which, as discussed earlier, becomes problematic with more reactive or passive characters. Similarly, a term like '*internal* character' could also encompass Stanislavsky's idea of a 'task', which avoided many of these problems. The second timeline in the model was the '*external* circumstances' of the protagonist – the personal, social, natural and supernatural events impacting on the protagonist's world. This particular term draws directly on Stanislavsky's idea of the 'given circumstances' of the character, which is about the external forces surrounding the character that influence their choices and course of action.

As with the previous model, the conflict the protagonist experienced was determined by how far apart their internal character and external circumstances were throughout the story. Each time a significant event happened to the character, I would mark it on the '*external* circumstances' timeline and change its direction, depending on whether the event increased, reduced or left unchanged the character's conflict. Similarly, whenever the character made a significant choice or action, I marked it on the *'internal* character' timeline and changed its direction depending on if it reduced, increased or left the conflict the same. These internal/external events were mapped out in minutes on the model. Below is an example of the modified analysis using the film *Chinatown* (Figure #2).

One of the key features this revised analysis immediately revealed, when compared with a traditional three-act analysis, was a clearer appreciation of the interplay between the external events of the story and the internal choices of the protagonist and how these shaped the narrative. For example, *Chinatown's* protagonist*,* a private detective called Jake Gittes, makes a series of poor choices throughout the story that progressively increases the conflict in his life and the lives of those he cares for, particularly the character of Evelyn who eventually dies as a result of Jake's actions. Jake's choices are motivated by *external* events regarding an investigation gone wrong and his *internal* desire to save his already sullied reputation and be taken seriously as an investigator who can "get the big boys". The narrative is shaped around the interplay between these *external* and *internal* events, creating seven major 'units' (or 'acts'), which culminate with Evelyn's tragic death.

Figure #2: Revised 'Character-centred Model of Screenwriting' (Mullins 2006)



This I immediately felt was a more satisfying analysis than my initial 'character-centred' model, as well as Field's 'three-act structure' analysis of *Chinatown* as presented in *Screenplay* ([1979] 1994, 114-120). Field argues that *Chinatown* is made up of three acts separated by two major plot points. The first is the revelation that the woman who employed Jake was an impostor (Field [1979] 1994, 116). The second is when Jake finds Mr Mulwray's glasses in the pool at his house (Field [1979] 1994, 119). But anyone who is familiar with the story of *Chinatown* knows that it contains numerous twists and unexpected turns that would appear to "hook into the action and spin it in a new direction", as Field specifies ([1979] 1994, 115). Why isn't the end of act one when Mr Mulwray turns up dead; why isn't this a bigger development than the revelation of the imposter? Or what about the revelation that Mr Mulwray's "girl" is actually Evelyn's daughter, not her sister as she had claimed; why does Field insist the discovery of Mulwray's glasses is more significant than this dramatic revelation? Confusingly, as discussed earlier, Field ([1979] 1994, 120) also suggests there are ten other "plot points" in acts two and three of *Chinatown* but does not say why these do not result in a new act as specified by his definition. Interestingly, in his later publication *The Screenwriter's Workbook,* Field (1984, 131-145) introduces the concept of the 'mid-point'. This, Field says, is a scene in the middle of the screenplay that is effectively another 'plot point', which breaks the long second act in half but does not, for some reason, result in a

fourth act. Field argues that in *Chinatown*, the 'mid-point' is the scene where Jake discovers Evelyn is Cross's daughter. The scene in question is very quiet and Jake does not do anything with this revelation about Evelyn until some time afterwards; as defined by Field, this newly identified 'plot point' could hardly be said to "hook into the action and spin it in a new direction". So why does Field insist this is a crucial 'plot point' that shapes *Chinatown's* second act?

I believe that here Field is 'shoehorning' the structure of *Chinatown,* which was written well before *Screenplay* was released, into his three-act model. *Chinatown* is a master class in intricately plotted, multi-layered screenwriting that just doesn't fit neatly into the model that Field prescriptively specifies (i.e., Act One and Three are 30 pages long while Act Two is 60 pages long). My claim here is not to unfairly criticise Field, who evidently was still working out his innovative model, as his revision in *The Screenwriter's Workbook* suggests. However, I would argue that any screenwriting model that presupposes a set number of acts or sections in a film, like Field's 'paradigm' or my own earlier attempt at a 'character-centred' model, is bound to 'shoehorn' the structure of many screenplays into their rigid formulation, regardless of the evidence that many stories just don't fit this shape. However, my initial experiment, inspired equally by Thompson's inductive analysis discussed earlier, as well as Stanislavsky's approach to script analysis, suggests that this 'shoehorning' can be avoided if a set number of acts is not presupposed.

I will briefly summarise the most illuminating features of my revised 'character-centred' model in relation to *Chinatown, Star Wars, Tootsie, Die Hard* and *Insomnia* (however, a fuller breakdown of the technique discussed and an analysis of each film is available in the Appendix).

As discussed above in relation to *Chinatown*, the most revealing feature of the modified 'character-centred' model showed how the structure of each film could be examined via the interplay between the shifting '*internal* character' of the protagonist (i.e., their goal, objectives, desires, beliefs as well as Stanislavsky's 'task') in response to their changing '*external* circumstances' (a variation on the Stanislavsky term 'Given Circumstances). Using this technique, none of the films examined broke up into three 'acts' or units. *Stars Wars* and *Die Hard* broke up into four units (each with a short epilogue), *Tootsie* and *Insomnia* featured six, while *Chinatown* had seven.

Similarly, the model showed how the unfolding choices of the protagonist revealed crucial qualities about them and how these shaped the outcome of the story's conflict. For example, the protagonist in *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker, makes choices that gradually take him towards his internal goal of saving the princess and, more fundamentally, following in his father's footsteps. The goals that Luke chooses describe an internal transformation that eventually overcomes the conflict. In *Chinatown*, however, Jake makes a series of choices that only make things worse – they *increase* the conflict for him. Ultimately, Jake's various responses to the conflict see him relive an old mistake with tragic consequences. The conflict is not resolved because Jake's unchanging internal qualities – his pride and arrogance – prevent him from recognising his mistakes. Theoretically, the same process might be used to reveal hidden qualities in the secondary characters of a story (although I did not pursue this idea at the time).

Examining the five films using this modified model, informed by Stanislavsky's techniques, also seemed to reveal a unique 'shape' to their structures that differed from the one-size-fits-all approach of the traditional three-act structure. In some stories the character internally changed to conquer the conflict (*Star Wars* and *Tootsie*). In other instances, the character failed to recognise their mistakes in time to completely resolve the conflict (*Chinatown* and *Insomnia*). In one film, the model seemed to suggest the character resolved the conflict without fundamentally changing at all (*Die Hard*). From this, I tentatively observed five basic story 'shapes' based on the sampled films. These were as follows: 1) 'Simple Transformational Arc' – the protagonist makes choices that *gradually* resolve the conflict (e.g., *Star Wars*); 2) 'Complex Transformational Arc' – the protagonist makes choices that *eventually* resolve the conflict (e.g., *Tootsie*); 3) 'Ambivalent Arc' – the protagonist makes choices that only *partially* resolve the conflict (e.g., *Insomnia)*; 4) 'Tragic Arc' – the protagonist *does not* make choices that resolve the conflict (e.g., *Chinatown*) and 5); 'Static Arc' – the protagonist's *usual* choices resolve the conflict (e.g., *Die Hard*). While these five story shapes are not in any way exhaustive, the ability of the revised 'character-centred' model to illustrate variations seemed a particularly useful quality as it helped to underline the differences between these very different films, rather than imply they are all the same, as is the tendency with models like the three-act structure.

I offer these observations not to suggest that my modified 'character-centred' model is a thoroughly robust method of textual analysis – many more films would need to be examined

using this approach to make such a claim. Indeed, in designing the experiment, I failed to include films where the character could be classified as more passive or reactive, and so many of the 'internal character' shifts come across as fairly traditional changes in 'goal' or 'objective'. But as an experiment in applying a number of Stanislavsky's concepts, it offered encouragement. The model appeared to be more sensitive to the unique structure of each film, the varying qualities of each protagonist and, as a result, was able to embrace a wider variety of stories.

Of course, the question still remained of how to adapt all this into a screenwriting 'process', rather than a technique to analyse a finished film. This exercise had highlighted to me that approaches like the three-act structure, as well as Stanislavsky's script-analysis technique and even my modified 'character-centred' model, were not a process of creating new work – they were a lens through which to examine a finished work. This sort of analysis could, of course, be a useful part of a writing process, whereby a drafted script is broken down and its strengths and weaknesses examined in relation to the progression of the character's choices or objectives. But what about a story that didn't exist yet? How would the discoveries I was making inform and augment my screenwriting process to create a new work? I already felt I had a deeper appreciation of the strengths of Stanislavsky's techniques but I still had little idea of how to 'make' something with them. I needed to transform this technique of analysis, for 'thinking' about writing, into a process for actually 'doing' the writing.

Soon after this, I was given a very unusual opportunity to do exactly that.

Elvis Meets Stanislavsky – An Adventure in Documentary Writing

(October 2005 to February 2006)

In December 2005, just under ten months since the commencement of my research project, I found myself in a peculiar situation: I was about to direct a scene where none of the actors knew their lines. Actually, there were no lines – not written down anyway. And none of the actors were really 'actors'. Not one of them had any performance experience at all, except perhaps Alastair who had a well-known habit of belting out his favourite Elvis songs at parties after a few too many gin-and-tonics.

I was directing a documentary at the invitation of the broadcaster SBS. Having recently worked with SBS on an unusual docudrama about an obsessive video collector, *Escape From*

the Planet of the Tapes (Mullins 2004b), I'd taken leave from my doctorate project to work on this new, and equally odd, project. It was about an Elvis Presley festival that had, for thirteen years, taken over the small NSW town of Parkes every January. At the time of filming, the festival was a roaring success (and still is today), but in the beginning it struggled to gain support from the local community. Living in a quiet rural town, the people of Parkes saw the festival as a joke, an embarrassment they wished would go away. After researching the history of the festival, I told SBS that this initial struggle was the story I wanted to capture. Unfortunately, due to its unpopularity, there was very little footage from the first few festivals. Even the committee that organised it, a small band of Elvis devotees of various ages, had little in the way of useable images – they were too busy organising things to stop and record it properly. So the problem presenting itself was how to tell and visualise this largely undocumented story.

The solution I pitched to SBS was to recreate the pivotal scenes with the documentary participants. I'd pre-interviewed the festival organisers and they were all able to identify crucial moments, or 'turning points' as I saw them, in the history of the festival. And they were able to clearly articulate how these scenes played out in terms of what was said and who said it. The scenes usually took the shape of chance encounters in pubs, dinner party discussions or club meetings where ideas were raised. My rough plan was to interview the participants on camera to refresh their memories and then have them recreate the pivotal scene in a loose improvisation. I'd directed documentary participants in dramatic scenes before but I'd never used improvised dialogue. The participants were surprisingly receptive to the idea, perhaps because it felt in tune with the performative quality of the entire festival – grown men, dressed in skin-tight jumpsuits in forty-degree heat, doing their best Elvis impersonations as if their lives depended on it.

I knew, however, I couldn't really give the 'actors' lines as I was sure their performance would appear stiff and stagey. I could deal with a certain hammy quality to the performance (it was Elvis after all) but I couldn't have the participants looking uncomfortable. Having spent the last six months thinking about the crucial role 'tasks' and 'actions' play in dramatic structure, I decided to give each performer a clear and simple task in the scenes. Their task was based on what the participants had said in their interviews. I told them they could improvise their lines around this task as much as they liked as long as the general outcome didn't deviate too far from the original scenario they'd described to me.

The scene I was about to direct was the first one where I'd tried this approach. We were recreating a church committee meeting where the local Anglican priest, Reverend Tom Stuart, suggested to the gathering that they schedule an Elvis Presley–style mass during the festival. Reverend Tom knew Elvis was a passionate gospel singer and thought it would draw quite a crowd. Despite this, it was a very unusual request that was a long way outside the church's normal activities. There were four other committee members at the meeting and from their interviews it was clear they took a lot of convincing, particularly the chairperson, Alastair Welles. To set up the scene I gave Reverend Tom the 'task' to 'recruit the committee into the fun'. We came to this particular task because Tom remembered doing a lot of preparation in finding the right way to pitch the idea so it sounded like fun rather than work. The other committee members had other simple tasks based on their own recollections, such as 'tease Tom' or 'scrutinise Tom's reasons'. Everyone seemed to get the idea very quickly. We did a rehearsal, which I filmed, to clear everyone's nerves and then we started.

I remember feeling increasingly excited as we progressed through various takes. The energy in the room was very focussed, yet still relaxed, as the group played with the scene, trying different lines and reactions, and even throwing in some unplanned moments to keep things fresh. After each take, we'd briefly discuss how it went, I'd make some suggestions and we'd go again. It was exciting to watch them essentially writing the scene as they tried to achieve their agreed tasks. It seemed to be a confirmation of how useful this approach to dramatic structure was, given that unschooled performers like these could produce a very watchable scene using its most basic principles. It was also a relief that it looked like I was going to be able to recreate the history of the festival after all.

The experience was one of the first times since starting my research that I had consciously applied Stanislavsky's principles to the writing of a story. Granted, it was a documentary and the scenes were acted more than written, but it was nevertheless encouraging. A few simple tasks for the performers made it possible to improvise a range of dramatic outcomes and I started to consider once again what these might look like in a screenwriting process. Could scenes be 'improvised' in the writing process by giving each character a strong task and seeing what happened? Would this improvising be useful in discovering hidden qualities in the characters as they chose various psychological actions to pursue their task? Could these writing improvisations start to suggest through lines for the characters? In many ways, I

sensed that this is what writers routinely do when they are devising scenes and characters – they 'improvise' the story and characters reveal themselves. I had heard many of my colleagues describe it this way and had read variations of this idea countless times in interviews with professional writers. For example, in a recent interview with the *New York Times*, Greta Gerwig (in Sternbergh 2013, para 7, 8), the co-writer and lead in the award-winning *Frances Ha* (Baumbach 2012), described this sense of 'improvising' in her own writing process.

> The best ideas reveal themselves, you don't "have" them. For me, anyway. Whenever you have an "idea," as in a concept that you could explain to someone, like a hook or at worst a gimmick, that is a bad thing. It feels good, but it's not good. Let your characters talk to each other and do things. Spend time with them – they'll tell you who they are and what they're up to.

Gerwig does not indicate whether this "let your characters talk" approach to writing comes from her background in acting but it would not be at all surprising if it did. My professional experience at the time had taught me a little about how actors routinely use improvisation to explore a character in a less logical and pre-planned way in order to get beyond clichés or avoid over-intellectualising the character. Actor and writer Steve Coogan suggests this approach when speaking about the scripting of *Philomena* (Frears 2014) where he would often, literally, stand and improvise scenes as he was writing, using only a few broad ideas about the character to start with – "We have a rough idea of the concept and then we just start writing and we find our way" (Coogan in Burstein 2013). Indeed, as I would subsequently learn, Stanislavsky used a similar improvisational approach with his later experiments in 'Active Analysis' – but at this time I was unaware of these playful and dynamic techniques beyond the experiments I had done with the amateur actors of *Elvis Lives in Parkes*.

The film was received well by SBS, and was also unexpectedly invited to a number of international film festivals, including the prestigious Aspen Shortsfest where it was enjoyed as a documentary curiosity. At the post-screening interview, questions from the audience hovered around whether it was a "true" documentary because many of the scenes were so clearly recreated by the participants in a way that could only be considered loosely accurate. I offered up the possibility that the participants' performances were more about the memory of the events (how it *felt* to them at this distance) rather than the accuracy of the recreation – just like an Elvis impersonator's performance is less about accuracy and more about celebrating a distant and lost feeling. This generated a discussion about imitation, performance, memory

and oral history that lasted long into the night, suggesting the playful story we had improvised was far more effective at capturing the Elvis impersonators at the hearts of the film than a slavish recreation would ever have been able to.

I considered the experience of *Elvis Lives in Parkes*, an exercise in improvised writing guided by Stanislavsky's ideas, an intriguing success. I looked forward to trying out some of these discoveries on my planned feature film projects now that Elvis had left the building.

Lost in Stanislavsky's Logic – An Attempted Screenplay Process

(August to October 2006)

It was October 2006, and my partner, novelist Krissy Kneen, and I had been getting up early every morning for about two months. We would sit in the lounge of our apartment curled around coffees as the sun rose, and discuss her manuscript, *His Father's Son* (Kneen 2005), its unbound and unpublished pages spread across the low table, ready for dissection. Krissy had written the manuscript over the last few years, and it had been recently shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards for Best Unpublished Manuscript. It told the story of a fifteen-year-old teenager named Simon who goes to live with his long-estranged father, Rod, on Stradbroke Island, but their reunion is a reluctant necessity. Simon doesn't bond with his father or life on the island and soon falls into an affair with his father's forty-year-old ex-girlfriend, Nikki. The manuscript's prose was strange and beautiful and its premise I thought had potential as a low-budget feature. I was looking for feature projects to develop as a natural next step for my film career but also for my doctoral project. This story seemed like a good fit. And as Krissy was my wife, I had unprecedented access to the author.

Krissy and I had worked together before on documentaries and short films but not on a feature-length story. I had written a few feature scripts and, because I had started some preliminary research into Stanislavsky's techniques of script analysis, I suggested we approach it from this angle. My rationale was it might help sharpen up some aspects of the story that I thought needed work. The story was undoubtedly a great idea with lovely passages, but the motivations of its characters were sometimes very opaque, particularly the main character of Simon. Perhaps Stanislavsky's techniques could help make more sense of him. Similarly, when I looked at the manuscript through the prism of the three-act structure, the story lacked drive; it didn't build but rather drifted, much like the main character of

Simon. As my initial research question suggested, perhaps a combination of both approaches would address these 'issues', as I saw them, and help get the manuscript over the publication line. Krissy agreed to the approach but with some reservations. Firstly, Krissy didn't think the issues I was talking about were necessarily 'issues' – she liked that Simon was an aimless, brooding teenager whose motivations were mysterious and perplexing. That was part of the point – he was a typical, hormone-tortured teenager who didn't understand why he felt like this or acted like that. But Krissy did agree that my thoughts were in line with some feedback she had received about the story, including a potential publisher, so was willing to entertain a new way forward. The other reservation Krissy had about my suggested approach was that she had done an Honours degree in drama and was familiar with the script-analysis techniques I was exploring. She said they were useful sometimes but could be kind of "boring" and that they "took all the fun out of a story". I remember interpreting these responses at the time as 'draft fatigue'; Krissy had spent three years on this manuscript and, despite being shortlisted for a Premier's Award, was still struggling to find a publisher. I thought she was lost in the various drafts she'd written and was starting to wonder if she'd ever find her way out. Lucky for Krissy, she had Stanislavsky and I to help her out. Or so I thought.

Each morning, from September through to October, we would go through a new part of the story and try dissecting it using a rough combination of Stanislavsky's techniques and the three-act structure. I recorded the conversations and took notes about what we discussed and some of the ideas we considered. A lot of our discussions revolved around determining what the character's 'objectives' were in each unit of the story and how we could connect them into a 'through line' that was stronger and more dramatic. I had decided to use the term 'objective', rather than 'task' because this was the concept Krissy was familiar with from her drama degree. However, in the back of my mind I kept Stanislavsky's idea of an immediate 'task or problem' (*zadacha*) as I anticipated it might be useful for the main character of Simon who I perceived to be a fairly reactive character. There were only three major characters (Simon, Nikki and Rod), so it at first seemed manageable to examine each character's through line using Stanislavsky's techniques. The character of Nikki was highly energetic and motivated, and identifying her objectives throughout was generally useful. Similarly, the character of Rod could easily be examined using this approach. However, as we anticipated, the protagonist, Simon, was more challenging. He was an aimless character, who mostly reacted to the situations he wandered into, without much thought as to the

consequences of his actions or what he wanted. From Krissy's perspective, it was these qualities that helped characterise him as a fifteen-year-old boy and it was hard to argue with – Simon, despite his drifting, apathetic nature, was somehow recognisable to both of us, as well as many other readers, and I wanted to respect this.

To allow the audience access into Simon's world in the manuscript, Krissy had used a focussed, third-person narrator, allowing us to go 'inside' Simon's head, as the following example from the opening paragraph of *His Father's Son* demonstrates:

> His father isn't here. Simon has anticipated this. Standing on the rickety front stairs with his fist still stinging from a series of unanswered knocks, he wonders why he should feel disappointed. He held the note, worked through his mother's lazy scrawl; ferry times, bus times and – *if your father's delayed for any reason, use the key on the ledge above the door. Let yourself in. Keep the key*. Simon flattens the sweaty note against his thigh and reads it one more time. *Your father will not be there when you arrive. Your father was never there for you and he will not be there for you now. Your father is a selfish pig and you are just like him and you deserve each other and I am glad you're going to live with him*. This is not what the note says. He reads past his mother's intention. (Kneen 2005, 1)

Because Simon's life was so interior and his motivations largely opaque, it was difficult to establish his objectives in terms of the large parts of the story. This did not mean that it was not clear how the story progressed, as it was easily broken into three large parts in terms of plot development – 1) Simon arrives and struggles to bond with his father or find a place on the island; 2) Simon participates in an affair with Nikki, his father's ex-girlfriend; 3) Simon and Nikki are discovered, Simon finally rejects his father and leaves the island. But Simon was not the driver of these important story developments and how they unfolded – he was either passive or reactive, with Nikki's character playing the role of instigator in their relationship and affair, even though Simon was a willing participant. The problem, as I described it to Krissy at the time, seemed to be how to make Simon's interior world more 'filmic'. What I meant by this was how could we make Simon more active so we could see his actions and understand what he's feeling and what he wants in the unfolding story. This, for me, was very important if I was going to be able to adapt the story without resorting to pages of voice over.

After almost three months of waking each morning and talking about the story, we both started to sense we were losing our way. As Krissy had warned, the process of breaking down

the story into a series of character 'objectives', or even 'tasks' for that matter, was extremely laborious. It felt like we were spending far too long discussing each part of the story, trying to find the 'right' word to capture a character's objective, that we were in danger of losing the big picture. Krissy, in particular, found it counter-intuitive to the way she normally worked, which she described as an 'inside-out' process. This involved just starting to write the characters, with very little pre-planning, to see where they took her. The process of analysing and plotting a series of character objectives to create a coherent through line felt like the opposite of this to her. It was too 'logical' and systematic when Krissy's characters, particularly Simon, were often illogical and erratic. Trying to impose this logic on Simon's character only seemed to distort and change him in ways that rippled through the whole story. As a result, it was becoming a different story and we weren't sure how we felt about that.

Despite these setbacks, the detailed approach we were taking did uncover some revelations for Krissy as she started to recognise the problems that Simon's character imposed on the unfolding story. Not only was Simon passive, reactive and drifting, but he could also potentially be seen as a victim in his affair with Nikki – something Krissy definitely wanted to avoid. After three months of analysis and discussion, we made the decision to put the adaptation aside while Krissy attempted another draft of the manuscript, taking the lessons we'd learnt into account. The resulting re-draft, a year-and-a-half later, featured a more active Simon character with a clear 'through line' that involved Simon choosing to return to living with his mother. Even more positively, respected Melbourne publisher Text Publishing greeted the revised draft with positive feedback and began discussing with Krissy another draft based on some of their notes. Unfortunately, by this stage, Tim Winton's novel *Breath* (2008) was about to be released and featured a similar storyline involving an affair between a teenager and an older woman in a beach community. As a result, Text Publishing passed on *His Father's Son* but has since published four of Krissy's novels.

Despite this somewhat disappointing outcome, I gleaned a number of useful insights in relation to my research question from the experience. In particular, I started to sense some potential drawbacks with Stanislavsky's script-analysis approach. I knew the model of the three-act structure had its own limitations and could also, at times, place an over-emphasis on the 'logic' of the story rather than the subtler, less tangible, qualities of the characters. But it seemed Stanislavsky's process also had its own pitfalls when it came to imposing logic onto the characters, as well as having the added disadvantage of being a lot of work. Normally, in

a theatre rehearsal, the entire cast of actors, guided by a director, would work together to determine each character's objectives (or tasks) throughout the story. Here it was just Krissy and I – and Krissy was reluctant. And I too, finally, had to admit it wasn't fun. I couldn't imagine why a writer would look forward to a process like this. While sometimes illuminating, it mostly felt like taking medicine. It also seemed to slow down the flow of the development process as we searched for the 'right' words to capture the character's objective – "Is Simon trying to 'punish' Nikki or 'exploit' her here?" Often by the time we had decided what the right action or objective was, we had lost track of where we were in the story. Maybe the broad brushstrokes of the three-act structure were a better way of working after all. When it's just the writer, the task of articulating every beat of every character's story seemed like an imposing mountain to climb. And we already had a story to work with. How would it work when the story was less developed or the characters less formed? Or, when the end of the story may not even be known?

Of course, I had circled around these questions during my initial experiments modifying my 'character-centred' screenwriting technique. I had also considered them when I was able to productively employ objectives to improvise the stories of *Elvis Lives in Parkes* with the documentary participants. However, in the ensuing months, during which I was compiling my doctoral confirmation essay, I seemed to have fallen prey to doggedly imposing the logical structure of objectives and actions over the stories I was trying to develop. I had to admit that the process seemed to be stifling the creative process of not only *His Father's Son* but also a growing list of other writing projects I had considered along the way but had abandoned. The demand to 'know' rather than gradually 'discover' what the character wanted at each stage of development appeared to be throttling the ideas with logic. Even when a story was already developed, like *His Father's Son*, the imposition of the demands of Stanislavsky's techniques seemed to distort it into a story we no longer recognised as the one we wanted to pursue in the first place. This was a worrying development, and I started to perceive some significant obstacles to adapting Stanislavsky's techniques into screenwriting practice.

Of course, as a method of script *analysis*, the approach had already offered up useful insights that I was incorporating into my way of understanding a story. During this time, after watching a film, I would routinely break it up into the major objectives of the protagonist (of which there were almost always more than three). I would also examine secondary characters

in this way, looking for the patterns of actions and choices that informed their unique qualities. This way of seeing a story was becoming second nature to me by this stage.

However, when it came to using these techniques to *create* a new story, the whole process quickly became stalled in an overly logical quagmire of jargon as I searched for the 'right' words to express my ideas. In fact, this felt similar to the frustrations I had experienced with the pre-fabricated demands of the three-act structure (e.g., three acts, turning points on particular pages, an active protagonist, etc.). When it came to developing a new story, it was like there was a long list of forms to fill in, each with associated checkboxes to tick before I could move on and actually do some writing.

Stepping back a little and comparing Stanislavsky's approach and the three-act structure, I started to see more similarities than I had originally sensed, not just in terms of broad concepts, but also in terms of the context and purpose of each technique. Stanislavsky was a director, not a writer, and, as discussed above, the purpose of his technique of script analysis was to breakdown an existing play into a series of 'bits' in order to enable his cast to grapple with their specific role within the overall structure. It was from this understanding of the pre-existing material that the cast and director would begin to make their own interpretations to create an original production of the play. Similarly, as evidenced by their biographies in the introductions to their numerous publications, Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee all worked as script consultants before developing their theories about the three-act structure. None of them could be described as working regularly as writers in film and television, with McKee credited as writer on one television movie and four television episodes, (IMDb.com 2013a), Field on three television episodes (IMDb.com 2013b), Vogler on one feature film (IMDb.com 2013c) and Seger possessing no screen credits as a writer (IMDb.com 2013d). This observation is not to diminish the above authors' insights into the techniques of film and television storytelling, of which they all contributed much, but rather to contextualise their theories. That is, a context where the works they were analysing already existed as written screenplays, not as emerging works with much more nascent qualities. In the key screen manuals discussed above, all four authors focus exclusively on existing screenplays that had already undergone several drafts, had been produced and had often won various awards for writing. But what about a screenplay that has not yet been written, one where a writer, like myself, has only an idea? How does the three-act structure help in this situation? Field ([1979] 1994, 157-179) and Seger (1994) do spend significant time discussing the process of

writing a screenplay but it is always using existing films to provide examples of three-act concepts, such as 'first act turning point', 'mid-point crisis', the 'second act'. Like Stanislavsky, the starting point in these screenwriting manuals is not '*what* is the story?' but rather *how* the story fits, or doesn't fit, the prevailing paradigm being utilised. This common quality, I was beginning to suspect, had a deadening effect on the process of generating new material because the demands of both paradigms quickly dismissed any emerging options that did not fit their exacting specifications. In fact, I seemed to be doubling this stifling influence of the three-act structure by augmenting it with Stanislavsky's equally restrictive technique. Indeed, I started to wonder if, despite its wide influence, many actors viewed Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques with the same contempt as many screenwriters view the three-act structure – as a clunky, restrictive and ultimately limited approach to creative storytelling.

I felt like I was reaching a stalemate because of Stanislavsky's techniques. Perhaps I should have heeded the repeated warnings I had received from colleagues before embarking on this research – *"Stay away from Stanislavsky."* Uncomfortably aware of the growing pile of discarded script ideas lurking in my project folder, I started to wish I'd listened.

CHAPTER 4: Adapting with Stanislavsky

Stanislavsky Finds Another Way

(February to October 2006)

Throughout 2006, including the time I was working on *His Father's Son* with Krissy, I had continued reading about Stanislavsky's 'System' and the various ways in which it had been interpreted by a myriad of theorists and practitioners over the years. Among them were Bernard Beckerman (1970), Melissa Bruder et al (1986), Sharon Carnicke (1993, 1998, 2009), Jean Benedetti (1998), David Mamet (1998, 2002), Bella Merlin (2000, 2001, 2003), Brandilyn Collins (2002), and, of course, re-reading Stanislavsky himself (1977, [1937] 1986, 1981). Unfortunately, this didn't provide me with a clearer picture of Stanislavsky and his practices. As indicated earlier, it seemed much of his work had been lost in a perpetual process of translation and adaptation, and I wondered whether this fact was destabilising my creative process. I felt like I had spent a significant amount of time just trying to define what it was I was trying to examine and adapt. Each time I felt like I was closer to a definitive definition of what Stanislavsky meant by a certain concept, I would uncover another interpretation, or worse, a contradictory definition by Stanislavsky himself. Actors and teachers had used so many interpretations and practices over decades it was difficult to decide which ones were relevant to my process.

Carnicke (1993, 1998, 2009) was one of the authors who provided the most insight into the difficulties of interpreting Stanislavsky. Using access to Stanislavsky's previously unavailable notes and original drafts, as well as her fluency in Russian, she had assembled a wide range of new insights into the process by which Stanislavsky developed and refined his 'System' over many years, and the various ways in which the 'System' had been interpreted by others, particularly American teachers like Strasberg. Much of this work was captured in her book *Stanislavsky in Focus*, first published in 1998 and reprinted in 2009. Other authors, particularly Benedetti (1998) and Merlin (2000, 2001, 2003), offered potentially more accurate insights into the full range of Stanislavsky's practices over his entire career and how they might be used in rehearsal.

From reading these authors' work, I realised that Stanislavsky himself had problems with the tendency for some of his practices to lead to an overly logical interpretation of the text,

particularly his 'round-the-table' method of script analysis. As Carnicke (2009, 194-95) explained, Stanislavsky, after twenty years of working this way, complained that "The actor comes on stage with a stuffed head and an empty heart, and can act nothing." This resonated with me: while my attempts to experiment with Stanislavsky's techniques had undoubtedly sharpened my analytical toolkit, it had slowed my barely formed ideas down with logic to the point that it became difficult to remember why I had initially found them interesting. I had encountered this problem before when trying to apply concepts of the three-act structure early in a writing process where far too much time was spent trying to fashion the perfect 'first act turning point' rather than just getting the first draft finished. Now, combined with Stanislavsky's approach, it was like I too was carrying around a "stuffed head and an empty heart" for the ideas I was exploring. Fortunately, Stanislavsky, ever the experimenter, had a response to this problem, which he called 'Active Analysis' (Carnicke 2009, 194).

Carnicke (1998, 2009) describes that late in Stanislavsky's career and life, around 1936, he embraced a radically different approach to script analysis and rehearsals that encouraged actors to discover the text not with their heads but with their bodies. Like Aristotle, Stanislavsky had always argued that theatre was different from other art forms because it was a presentation of actions. This new approach literally embodied this idea. Stanislavsky believed that by calling on the actors to perform the actions of the play as early as possible, before they had time to think about it in detail, the actors would naturally *experience* the dynamics of the story in their bodies. In this way, Stanislavsky emphasised that the play was not just the words the actors said, but a structure of actions as well (Carnicke 2009, 194).

As usual, there is conjecture between scholars like Merlin, Carnicke and Benedetti around exactly what 'Active Analysis' looked like in practice, and indeed, how it was different from other techniques developed by Stanislavsky, particularly the 'Method of Physical Actions' (Merlin 2007, 196). Merlin (2007) gives perhaps the most concise description of the technique, filtered through her own training in Russia in the 1990s. According to Merlin (2007, 197), the essential structure of the 'Active Analysis' process was as follows:

1) The actors read the scene;
2) The actors discuss the scene;
3) The actors improvise the scene without further reference to the script;
4) The actors discuss the improvisation, before returning to the script;

> 5) The actors compare whatever happened in the improvisation with the words and incidents of the actual text.

The process is repeated until the actual words and actions of the script are arrived at.

Carnicke (1998, 2009) explores the process in more detail by arguing that the discussion at the beginning of the process centred around agreeing on the actions and counter-actions the characters perform on each other within a given section; i.e., *punish*, *seduce, reject,* etc. The actors could then improvise the scenes in their own words, using the agreed actions as a guide. Stanislavsky believed that freeing the actors from the words and allowing them to explore the text with action and improvisation would naturally connect them to the emotional subtext of the material. In other words, the *action* created the *emotion*. The whole process had a certain anarchic quality about it that placed it a long way from the laborious process of 'round-the-table' analysis that had dominated his work for decades. And because it came so late in Stanislavsky's career, 'Active Analysis' was, until recently, largely unknown in the West (Carnicke 2009, 192).

These discoveries intrigued me because they seemed to respond to the core problems I was facing in adapting Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques, but also more broadly with using analytical tools like the three-act structure, to the screenwriting process. Both approaches emphasised a process of being able to analyse and 'know' certain things about a story at the beginning of a process (i.e., the 'goal' of the main character, or the 'first act turning point') rather than 'discovering' it by actually doing the creative work, whether it be writing or acting. Because of the highly structured process of both approaches – one that demanded a great deal of thinking before action could take place – the artist's impulse to create (in this case, *my* impulse) was hindered by what Schön (1983, 280) describes as an "infinite regress into thinking". But, as Schön (1983, 280) points out, practitioners routinely find ways to avoid this sort of stasis by using moments of 'surprise' to generate a dynamic interplay between reflection-in and -on action that keeps the creative process moving forward. It is worth recalling Schön's previously mentioned words here:

> It is a surprising result of action that triggers reflection, and it is the satisfactory move that brings reflection temporarily to a close... Continuity of inquiry entails a continual interweaving of thinking and doing. (Schön 1983, 280)

In other words, in order for a story to move forward, there must be something unknown left to discover (the 'surprise' of the process). The idea led me to recall Alfred Hitchcock's famous lament after dividing up the script and shot list for *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960): "The picture's over. Now I have to go and put it on film" (Rebello in Kolker 2004, 54).

For Stanislavsky, the solution to this sort of creative problem was 'Active Analysis', which encouraged a playful sense of discovery that was led by *action* (i.e., loose improvisations), and strictly managed the amount of time available to *think*. This solution resonated with me, and allowed me to confront particular issues with the creative writing process I had been experiencing in my doctorate. Like Stanislavsky's unshackled actors in 'Active Analysis', the process of writing a new work is, in many ways, like a solo improvisation, in which the writer plays every character simultaneously, placing them in situations they barely understand, with no pre-planned dialogue to say, and seeing what they *do*. What does John *do* to Jane when she is late home again? What does Jane *do* to John when he accuses her of neglecting him? What does John *do* to Jane, and so on. Sometimes, discovering what a character *does* involves seeing what they say and how they say it – or what they *don't* say. Other times, it's how they move around the room, the subconscious physicality they express to get what they want. Maybe these actions are embedded in a conscious goal they are actively pursuing. Or perhaps their desires are less conscious for the character, as well as writer, as they move through the ever-changing story, trying to find its dramatic shape and how the characters fit into it. This was the sort of 'inside-out' approach Krissy and I had spoken about, which involves discovering the story in the characters, rather than the characters in a story. Furthermore, this type of solo improvisation seemed far more aligned with how I perceived writers (including myself) *begin* a story than the rigid checkboxes of the three-act structure or Stanislavsky's round-the-table analysis. Of course, it was easy to demonstrate how both these approaches were useful once a story had been fashioned and how they were excellent tools for sharpening its structure in rewriting. But, it seemed, they were unhelpful at the beginning of a writing process.

I was intrigued to see if there was a way to take the spirit of 'Active Analysis', if not some of the actual techniques, and adapt them to my screenwriting practice to create new work – something I had largely failed to do for almost a year-and-a-half.

Stanislavsky Attacked by Hoodlums

(September 2006 – December 2012)

In September 2006, I was offered a six-month contract to write an interactive 'web experience' for Brisbane-based production company Hoodlum. The web experience was an extension of a long-running English television soap opera called *Emmerdale* (1972 - .); I would be writing online and interactive content that paralleled the storylines playing out on the show. Sometimes, this would be an exclusive 'web-only' scene between the characters, other times an interactive game based on events unfolding on the television series. Unlike now, in 2006, this was an unusual writing assignment, since multiplatform storytelling was still a new field in film and television production and not a lot was known about how to tell stories seamlessly between traditional television and the new online platforms. Fortunately, I had a bit of experience, having previously written for Hoodlum's 2003 interactive television show, *Fat Cow Motel* (Mayfield and Robertson 2003). The creative challenge of *Fat Cow Motel* was enormously stimulating and there was still a lot to learn about multiplatform storytelling, so I was immediately tempted by Hoodlum's offer. By this stage in my doctoral project, most of the feature film projects I was writing had stalled (although *His Father's Son* would continue until October) and I was frustrated with my attempts to adapt Stanislavsky's techniques. I felt that a break would be a reinvigorating creative process, and I decided to join the Hoodlum team for the six months. However, this eventuated into a six-and-a-half-year adventure in storytelling.

After completing the contract for *Emmerdale*, and following nominations for both an International Emmy Award and a BAFTA for our work, I was offered the position of Creative Director at Hoodlum. My job would involve being the lead writer and director of a wide range of interactive television projects the company was being offered as a result of our success with *Emmerdale*. Because this was an emerging area of television production, we were uncertain how to describe what we had done on *Emmerdale* so we called it a 'multiplatform extension' – a digital extension of an existing television property that allowed the audience to go online after each episode and interact with the show and, where possible, play a part in the story. The shows requesting the "Hoodlum treatment" included the successful BBC spy series *Spooks* (2002-11) and what many considered the biggest show in the world at the time, the genre-bending survival drama from ABC US, *LOST* (2004-10). These high-profile international projects were calling our pokey little office in Brisbane,

Australia, to ask us to help them tell their stories in a completely new way. As an emerging writer/director, I felt like this was the chance of a lifetime, and so I took the job.

In my time as Creative Director at Hoodlum, I wrote and directed multiplatform extensions for a wide range of American, British and Australian television shows, including *LOST* (ABC US Abrams 2004-10) Season 3 and 4; *Spooks* (BBC UK Wolstencroft 2002-11) Season 6; *Primeval* (ITV UK Haines 2007-11) Season 3; and *Flash Forward* (ABC US Braga 2009-10) Season 1. At Hoodlum, we also had the opportunity to produce multiplatform extensions for a number of high-end US movies, including *Salt* (Noyce 2010) and *The Bourne Legacy* (Gilroy 2012), on which I was also lead writer and director. The work we produced received numerous international awards, including two BAFTAs for Interactive Content (2008), a Primetime Emmy for Interactive Television (2009), and an International Emmy for Best Digital Program (2008). It was a wonderful creative experience that was challenging and highly stimulating, not least because of the innovative and novel area in which we were working.

Despite often being in unfamiliar territory, I still found myself able to draw on a range of fundamental skills in storytelling, including the three-act structure and, to my delight, Stanislavsky's techniques of script analysis. Here it is worth mentioning two particular experiences at Hoodlum where I was able to explicitly employ Stanislavsky's techniques to solve unusual creative problems. I will also outline a new area of screenwriting I found myself working in at Hoodlum that had a surprising number of parallels to the improvisational and collaborative spirit of Stanislavsky's 'Active Analysis' – that of television drama development. The experiences discussed here, as well as many others I had while working at Hoodlum, represent a significant development in my screenwriting craft as well as the emergence of Stanislavsky's ideas as a permanent feature of my ongoing practice.

Find 815
(2008)

In late 2007, Hoodlum was introduced to Damon Lindelof and Carleton Cuse, the 'showrunners' – the lead writers and producers – of *LOST*. The show was about a group of survivors from a plane crash, Flight 815, who were stranded on a strange island with mysterious qualities. The show was a significant success for ABC (US) and was, at that time,

concluding its third season. In previous seasons, Lindelof and Cuse had initiated a number of community-building experiences online that offered fans further insights into the mysterious world of *LOST*. This usually involved a range of interactive activities in the form of puzzles accompanied by webisodes that featured characters who did not appear on the television show. These experiences were extremely popular with the 'hard-core' fanbase of *LOST*, and Lindelof and Cuse, along with ABC Marketing (which was paying for the digital production), wanted to continue this strategy. Having seen Hoodlum's work on *Emmerdale* and *Spooks*, they contacted us.

The brief Lindelof and Cuse provided to Hoodlum was to create a multiplatform experience that would set up a key plot point for the upcoming season: the discovery of a plane wreck at the bottom of the Sunda Trench, off Indonesia. We were told the plane wreck was a faked replica of the ill-fated Flight 815 that was at the centre of the series, and had been put there by an international conspiracy headed by one of the *LOST* characters, Charles Widmore. This was all the upcoming story information they could provide us with at the time, since they were still writing the series. My job, as writer, was to devise an interactive web series that could lead up to the discovery of the fake Flight 815 in the television show. I was appointed a producer and staff writer to guide the development of this material.

The story I pitched back to the *LOST* team and ABC Marketing centred on an aviation mechanic, Sam Thomas, whose girlfriend, Sonya, was a flight attendant on the lost Flight 815. One night, Sam, who is desperate to find Sonya and Flight 815, receives a coded email from something called "The Maxwell Group". The code in the email points to a large area in the Sunda Trench, off Indonesia. Sam bargains his way aboard a scientific expedition heading for the Trench, led by a secretive man by the name of Oscar Talbot. Sam discovers Talbot may (or may not) be working for The Maxwell Group. Sam eventually uncovers a series of coordinates in Talbot's room and, with the help of the ship's captain, Ockham, follows them to find, what he thinks is, Flight 815.

After a number of suggestions from the *LOST* team and ABC marketing, I was given permission to start writing an interactive web series (featuring six five-minute webisodes) around this storyline that, it was decided, would be called *Find 815*. Lindelof and Cuse were still in the process of devising the series arc for Season 4, and I was therefore, understandably, given no more information about exactly how the story I was writing would

fit into the overall series. This did not trouble me greatly but it did pose some challenges for the development of one of my characters in particular – the enigmatic Oscar Talbot.

In the story, it was implied Talbot was connected to The Maxwell Group, which may (or may not) have been involved in orchestrating the fake plane wreck of Flight 815. In writing the scripts, I tried at various times to clarify with the *LOST* team exactly what Talbot's connection to The Maxwell Group was and what the nature of his mission could be. Overtly, Talbot says he's looking for a sunken shipwreck called *The Black Rock* (another significant *LOST* reference). But is the *Black Rock* expedition a sham, with Talbot secretly trying to find the plane wreck of Flight 815? Or does Talbot know the plane wreck is a fake and is, instead, trying to lead Sam to discover it? In the script I was developing, any of these possibilities were plausible, which was what the *LOST* team wanted – it was important for them that the mystery remained tantalisingly open-ended. This was one of the things I loved (and many others hated) about *LOST* as a series, and I relished the opportunity to design these sorts of dynamics into a script. To date, mysteries have not featured heavily in Australian film and television, and thus I was receiving a unique opportunity to be involved in such a formidable project within the genre.

However, this approach led to certain challenges; in particular, directing the actors from my script. I knew they would have questions, particularly the actor Aden Young, whom I had cast as Oscar Talbot. I started to wonder what I would say when Aden asked me the inevitable questions about who Talbot was, who he worked for, how he ended up on this ship, and exactly what he was trying to do. Moreover, what would I say if he asked me what Talbot's *objective* or *through line* was? Since I had worked with Aden before on a short film, I knew he was a very thoughtful actor so it was not inconceivable he would ask these questions. But, of course, I couldn't really answer them. Not definitively anyway. As the writer, *I* couldn't say for sure I knew what Talbot's objective was. How would Stanislavsky deal with this scenario?

At this time, I was generally only starting to employ Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques once a rough outline had been written, rather than before – and even then, only lightly. I was wary of becoming stuck in over-analysis, especially when I had a constrained deadline. Surprisingly, however, as I wrote the various drafts and consulted with my American colleagues on the finer details, of which Talbot's motives were deliberately excluded, I found

myself intuitively breaking up the script in my mind into a series of objectives around the main character of Sam Thomas. Sam's motivations were much easier to read than Talbot's because he was driven by the desire to find out the truth about what happened to Sonya and Flight 815. This structure of character objectives made it easy to track a through line for Sam across the episodes as he became increasingly desperate to find answers. This framework of objectives was also reinforced by the necessity that this had to be an interactive experience where the audience would require very clear *game* objectives to move the story forward. Thus, in each scene, I applied a character objective for Sam's character (e.g., gain Ockham's confidence), coupled with an objective in an interactive game (e.g., repair Ockham's broken chart plotter). By achieving the game objective, the character/player achieved their psychological objective and the story moved forward.

When it came to Talbot's mysterious objectives, however, I took a slightly different approach that took its cue from Stanislavsky's use of the term '*zadacha*' (a task or problem requiring action). I decided that in the scenes where Talbot came into conflict with Sam, his overall through line would not be referred to; rather, the emphasis would be on simply what he wanted in the current scene. During rehearsals, I explained this strategy to Aden, who agreed it was a sensible approach given the situation with Talbot's character. For example, in episode three of *Find 815*, Sam searches Talbot's room and discovers some confidential information about the Maxwell Group, but is caught by Talbot before he can escape. From memory, the idea I had about this scene was that Talbot should protect his mission from Sam's ignorance, which I imparted to Aden. For an added dimension, I suggested to Aden that 'the mission', whatever it was, was something that Talbot had made a significant personal sacrifices for. We left it at that and shot the scene. To my delight, the combination of simmering fury and contempt that Aden projected in the scene was suitably unsettling and kept us all guessing about Talbot, with his mission now appearing to have a personal dimension to it. Of course, none of us knew exactly what it was or how it would play out but it was 'there'. I never asked Aden what he was thinking about in the performance, although it is possible he used a personal substitution technique like Stanislavsky's exercises in 'affective memory'. We continued this approach throughout the shoot with great success.

I found the general approach liberating, and was fascinated by how we were able to create a strong and coherent antagonist in Talbot using a series of 'tasks' that were not consciously connected into a through line. Of course, it is possible that Aden was modulating this

approach with his own techniques or ideas about Talbot's motivations, but he never indicated this at the time (or subsequently). Our focus was simply on what Talbot was trying to do in that particular moment. The essence of this process seemed to parallel Stanislavsky's efforts with 'Active Analysis', particularly the technique of choosing a task or action, without over-analysing how it might be connected to the scene before or after, and seeing what happened. It allowed a freedom to imply the deeper motives of a character only through their actions, and seemed to give us permission to go on a storytelling journey without necessarily knowing the destination.

SoapStar
(2009 to 2012)

As discussed earlier, my approach to script analysis was, by this time, taking on a particularly Stanislavskian quality, whether I was writing a video diary monologue, such as on *Emmerdale* (Hoodlum 2007a), or breaking down the latest episode of *LOST* in order to turn it into an interactive game, as with *Find 815* (Hoodlum 2007b). Never was this more overt than in the social game *SoapStar* (Hoodlum 2014), an interactive soap opera released by Hoodlum on mobile in 2014.

SoapStar was an idea suggested by one of my colleagues, Lucas Taylor. The basic pitch that Lucas presented to me was to create an interactive story where the reader 'performed' a series of characters in a soap opera and made choices at various points to move the story forward in different directions. The reader's performances would be presented in short, comic-book style speech bubbles accompanied by character art, which would create an effective sense of 'playing' the characters. Since this was a great idea with huge potential to expand onto social platforms, including Facebook, the entire company embraced it. However, there were still a lot of questions: How would the story play out? Could the reader change the story completely? Or would they be on pre-determined 'rails' that limited the possible directions the story could take? How would the stories be shaped so they were both dramatically engaging but also a meaningful interactive experience where the audience felt they had agency over their characters? It was part of my role to come up with the answer to these questions.

After discussing a range of approaches with Lucas and the team, I proposed a basic narrative structure that the game could be built around. Its essential form was nothing particularly radical – a traditional branching narrative through which the reader regularly made choices about which direction the story would go in. There have been endless variations of this basic idea in game design (I was inspired by the 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books I had collected as a child). However, where *SoapStar* was perhaps different to many interactive branching narratives was how it subtly guided the reader's 'performance' of their character while allowing them to maintain a suitable level of agency over their actions. How *SoapStar* did this was significantly influenced by Stanislavsky's assertion that a story is a "score of actions" (Carnicke 2009, 211). To illustrate this, I will briefly describe the structure of a typical episode:

1) Each episode of *SoapStar* is structured around four characters. Players are presented with a brief biography of their character before commencing play. In it, a number of important story relevant details about their character are established – e.g., "Lucy is penniless and needs money – fast!" (Stanislavsky would call these biographical details the character's 'given circumstances', although I did not call them this in the game.)
2) The episode begins with the reader presented with a short passage of exposition to establish where they are in the story – e.g., "Lucy and Danny's embrace is interrupted when Jeremy opens the door." The exposition ends with a focus on one of the characters who would be impelled to take the next action – "Jeremy enters, slowly closes the door and turns to the two lovers." Stanislavsky might call this the 'impelling action' of the scene.
3) The reader is then presented with two different 'actions' for the character to perform. For example, "Jeremy fearlessly challenges Danny" or "Jeremy diplomatically questions Danny". These options are always presented to the reader in the following format – ACTIVE CHARACTER + ADVERB + VERB (ACTION) + PASSIVE CHARACTER. Each option has a different quality due to the combination of the 'adverb' and the 'action' taken (e.g., "fearlessly challenge" or "diplomatically question").
4) The reader chooses an action to perform, after which they are presented with a line of dialogue that captures the chosen action – e.g., "Remove your arms from my fiancé or

I will remove them from their sockets!" might be a line of dialogue presented for the action "Jeremy fearlessly challenges Danny".

5) When they have done this, a new piece of exposition describes how the story continues – e.g., "Danny releases Lucy and turns to Jeremy".

Each of these cycles is called a 'beat' in the story (once again, inspired by Stanislavsky). Play continues in this fashion until the episode has ended (after approximately ten 'beats').

As can be surmised from the above, the reader could not change the outcome of each episode, but they could significantly change *how* the scene played out. The confrontation between Jeremy and Danny could be played as a brawling riot of insults or an awkward comedy of manners, depending on which actions the players chose to 'perform' and how they interpreted them based on the exposition. Fortunately, when tested with a group of readers, the range of colours a scene could take on gave the test readers a satisfying sense of agency over the proceedings. And it was all based on Stanislavsky's insight about drama being a score of actions and counter-actions.

Of course, there were some negative aspects to this approach as well; for one, the episodes were extremely difficult to write, particularly when it came to ensuring all the various actions flowed coherently into each other. Effectively, each scene had to be written in several different ways to accommodate a variety of performances and pathways, a demanding task for even the most experienced writer. Additionally, the process of choosing the 'right' words to capture a suitable variety of actions in an episode was laborious. We couldn't just have characters 'challenge' or 'appease' each other all the time – there needed to be adequate variation so the players did not feel like the beats were all the same. The other writers on the project, including Lucas, could appreciate how effective the right words were in compelling the players to perform, but they found the process of selecting them challenging. In many ways, this struggle to find the 'right' words reminded me of my difficulties in breaking down *His Father's Son*.

Despite this, *SoapStar* confirmed the usefulness of Stanislavsky's techniques in dramatic problem-solving and its emergence as an increasingly permanent feature of my practice. These techniques, particularly my understanding of Stanislavsky's later experiments in

'Active Analysis', were about to be exposed to a new area of my work at Hoodlum that would both complement and influence this evolving practice: television development.

Developing and Writing Television at Hoodlum
(2010 to 2012)

Television producers Tracey Robertson and Nathan Mayfield founded Hoodlum, and many of their senior staff, including me, are from film and television backgrounds. As a result, Hoodlum was always looking for ways to develop original projects beyond our slate of 'fee-for-service' projects like *LOST.* But this activity became a major focus of the company with the appointment of Leigh McGrath as Hoodlum's Head of Television. Leigh was a writer who had worked in the drama department of the BBC as well as on a range of Australian television serials. While my focus as Creative Director was predominantly Hoodlum's digital work, I had the opportunity to work alongside Leigh on the development and writing of a number of television projects, including *The Strange Calls* (Mayfield and Robertson 2003), created by Brisbane writer/director Daley Pearson.

During this process, I began to recognise how a range of our development strategies, which were based on fairly traditional 'writer's room' approaches in Australia and the United States, also paralleled much of the spirit of Stanislavsky's 'Active Analysis', particularly in terms of what I saw as a collaborative style of improvisational brainstorming. Typical writer's rooms used on television drama series in the United States, and increasingly adopted here in Australia, involve putting together a writing team and brainstorming a range of ideas for a new television show concept or, alternatively, an episode of an already established show. Teams in Australia typically consist of a lead writer (called a 'script producer'), a number of show writers (generally one to five, depending on the scale of the show), as well as a junior writer whose role is usually to take notes. Show producers and executives also join the writer's room at various times to receive updates on progress. Depending on the show, the process of brainstorming generally revolves around discussions of the show's broad premise, themes, series arcs, episode breakdowns and character biographies. Of these, episode breakdowns are generally the most time consuming. The work schedule for a writer's room depends on how developed the show is. For example, meetings around a new concept might involve a one-to-three-day meeting between the producers and potential writers to explore the premise, characters and story ideas. The ideas generated are then written up as a broad 'pitch'

by one of the team for reflection and feedback before the next meeting. Once the idea for a show is established and it is in full development, the focus of the writer's room shifts to breaking down the plot details of each episode of the television series, a process that might take two to five days per episode. The structure of Hoodlum's writer's room reflected many of these standard practices.

As I worked across a range of projects, some entirely new, some already developed by a writer outside of the company, I started to appreciate the dynamic structure of the writer's room process and its ability to efficiently 'test' a wide range of ideas quickly in search of a creative solution. They were generally loose discussions around whatever 'problems' Leigh, as the story producer, had set for the session. Anyone could contribute, and Leigh would collate the ideas on a whiteboard for further interrogation. Over the course of the session, the range of options was gradually narrowed down to a shortlist or a clear decision. Of course, I had run similar processes with the team in my role as Creative Director at Hoodlum, but the creative problems presenting themselves in multiplatform production were not always about storytelling, and we often had to manage technical and design problems as well. The 'problems' being explored in the writer's room were always of a story nature and, as a result, it was easier to see parallels to the ideas I had been exploring in my research, particularly around 'Active Analysis'.

I started to recognise how the writing team were essentially 'improvising' the structure of scenes or qualities of the characters and how this was a way of testing how they worked, whether they felt 'right' and to consider how else they could be done. It was an extremely playful and often rowdy environment (not least because of Leigh's energetic style of facilitation) where the writers would suggest lines of dialogue, character actions, or sequence descriptions, taking stimulus from each other's suggestions – often talking over each other but always trying to find a way to either build on the ideas or, when an idea was exhausted, suggest a different approach. From the description I had read of Stanislavsky's 'Active Analysis' techniques, I imagined his rehearsals were not quite as chaotic as this, as there was already a script to guide actors. But, due to Stanislavsky's deliberate technique, it was a looser process than his earlier round-the-table approach, with the script still largely unknown to the actors who were often discouraged from reading it outside of rehearsals. The parallel I was finding was an emphasis on circular discovery and impulse, rather than linear planning or knowing exactly what happens next. This, of course, was because the story world of a new

television show is largely unknown. But even once the characters were 'known', or the format of a show's episodes established and set, the sense of play and improvisation did not leave the writers' room – it was the fuel that kept the team inventive and productive. Since, this time, I have had the opportunity to work with many other producers and writers in story conferences that featured a similar sense of playful improvisation to the sort I experienced at Hoodlum.

I identified the key creative features of these collaborative writing sessions as such:

1) The process naturally created many iterations of any problem/solution, since the team 'tested' for the right approach in the unfolding circumstances;
2) The process encouraged improvisational brainstorming, where the team would 'perform' rudimentary examples of dialogue, character action and scenes, in a spirit of play and exploration;
3) Pre-script documents (e.g., pitches, one page proposals, character breakdowns, etc.) were generally produced very quickly, from a matter of hours to a maximum of a few weeks, which ensured the ideas were summarised, reflected upon and reiterated quickly and efficiently;
4) New projects were progressively developed from various drafts that ranged from very short documents (one paragraph/page pitches), through to medium-sized documents (episode summaries, character breakdowns) into detailed full presentations (series bibles and full draft scripts), allowing the regular retesting and reiteration of ideas;
5) The process was highly collaborative, involving teams of four to twelve individuals (sometimes more), inputting feedback into the story.

This sort of creative process is very different to a feature film writing process. In feature film writing, it is typical, in both Australia and the United States, for a writer to conceive of and produce a draft of a screenplay over a long period of time (from a few months to several years), during which time they would be working largely alone, without any input from potential partners in the intended film, or for any income at all. This sort of script is called a 'spec' script because it is speculative and requires the writer to invest large amounts of unpaid time in an idea that may never be translated into reality. Writers routinely describe it as a process that is isolating, slow, frustrating and difficult to maintain. I have equally found it a process that is very difficult to maintain for long periods of time, either due to creative

fatigue or, if projects do not reach fruition, the growing pressure to spend less unpaid time devoted to writing screenplays.

My experience at Hoodlum in developing television highlighted these differences starkly. Before this, I had spent many years, including parts of this doctorate, developing various unproduced, as well as many unfinished, feature film screenplays that were written in isolation from the regular input of other writers. When combined with the extremely linear structure of practices like three-act structure, as well as Stanislavsky's plodding 'round-the-table' techniques, the opportunity to engage in a playful and iterative process was limited, and resulted in a number of my writing projects becoming stalled. The collaborative, fast-moving and evolving creativity required in my work at Hoodlum (and implied, I would argue, in Stanislavsky's 'Active Analysis' techniques) offered a far more productive, rewarding and fun way of working than these previous approaches. The surprising combination of these complementary approaches to storytelling seemed to coalesce many things I had been considering in my doctorate, including not only how to augment an existing screenwriting practice like the three-act structure but also a better appreciation of the environment and processes I require as a writer to be able to pursue the full range of ideas I was interested in. This is not to say that I am disappointed with my output in general. On the contrary, my creative output has grown significantly across the span of this doctorate, particularly during the years I spent at Hoodlum. However, reflecting now, it is easier to identify the reasons why a number of feature film screenplays I embarked on failed to reach first draft.

Moving On

At the end of 2012, I resigned as Hoodlum's Creative Director. Equipped with the lessons I had learnt from the various projects my collaborators and I had grappled with, I felt ready to revisit my solo practice and discover some new ways of working and writing. Three of the television projects I pursued after leaving Hoodlum make up the culminating studio work for this doctorate, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Together, the scripts and project bibles for these represent the current state of my writing practice, which, despite its ongoing evolution, continues to feature many insights and techniques adapted from Stanislavsky.

CHAPTER 5: Stanislavsky in a Screenwriting Practice

At the time of writing this chapter, it is a year since I left my role as Creative Director at Hoodlum. These twelve months have been productive: I have written the pilot episodes and full project bibles for four television drama series, as well as 'mini-bibles' (a style of pitching document) for another four television drama concepts. Of these eight projects, three have been optioned and further developed by high-profile Australian television producers. At the same time, I have been engaged as a story consultant on another six projects, ranging from television documentary, drama and interactive media, as well as regularly lecturing in screenwriting and multiplatform storytelling. All, except one, of these projects I have developed and written on my own, without the support and energy of a 'writer's room' team structure, making this the most productive period of writing in my career so far. Part of the reason for this level of productivity, I believe, is due to my continued reflection on the questions and insights raised by this doctoral project, and the opportunities I had to implement its ideas in my work, particularly during my time as Creative Director of Hoodlum.

Screenwriting Techniques Adapted from Stanislavsky

(January 2013 to January 2014)

To demonstrate this, I will outline a number of screenwriting techniques inspired by this doctorate that have become an ongoing feature of my creative practice in the generation of new screenwriting works. All of the techniques draw on aspects of Stanislavsky's work in their design, including his script-analysis techniques as well as 'Active Analysis'. The purpose of these techniques is to *augment* my existing screenwriting practice, which, as discussed, is largely built on traditional screenwriting practices like the three-act structure and professional insights drawn from experiences like those in the Hoodlum writer's room. Where appropriate, I will indicate where and how my augmented practice may differ from traditional film and/or television screenwriting practices.

To describe these techniques, I will use three major studio works that I have developed since leaving Hoodlum, which embody the essential ideas at the centre of this doctorate and

represent the culmination of the numerous studio experiments, works-in-progress and professional experiences I have embarked upon since 2005.

I will outline the three studio projects before discussing the range of techniques I employed in their creation and how these techniques relate to Stanislavsky's ideas.

The three studio works are as follows:

> ***Kelly Country*** (Television series / Crime drama)
> *Optioned and developed by Matchbox Pictures (producer Penny Chapman)*
> Synopsis: An ex-criminal and his family are forced into witness protection. But instead of being resettled in Miami, USA, as they requested, the family find themselves living in the quiet rural community of Toowoomba, Queensland. They now go by the surname 'Kelly' and they feel like very big fish in a cow paddock. But to avoid unwanted and very dangerous attention, this unusual family have to appear as normal as possible. It's going to be a steep learning curve.
>
> ***Saviour*** (Originally titled *Children of the Evolution)* (Television series / Science-Fiction)
> *Optioned and developed by Essential Media (producer Ian Collie)*
> Synopsis: Life in a small town in North-West Tasmania is unsettled when four of its children appear to develop hyper-cognitive abilities – they can read at phenomenal speeds; they can memorise everything; and perceive tiny details others miss entirely. What's happened to them? What caused it? What can be done? It is soon discovered the children have experienced a mutation that has far-reaching evolutionary implications. A power struggle starts to unfold that has consequences for not only the future of the town, but humanity itself.
>
> ***Starting Over*** (Television series / Relationship drama)
> Synopsis: Marty and Alison McEwan have just finalised their divorce after a year of separation – the most difficult year of their life. It couldn't get any harder could it? But Marty and Alison find that hitting the dating scene for the first time in almost twenty years is a little more complicated than they could ever have imagined. And sharing the care of their four children doesn't make it any easier. *Starting Over* is a bitter-sweet drama about two people discovering what else, and who else, life has to offer them.

All projects have been developed to include a third draft pilot script with a creative bible. In the case of *Saviour*, there are two additional creative bibles included, which have been produced as part of an ongoing development process with producer Ian Collie of Essential Media who has optioned the project.

Due to the solo nature of these works, the discussion of the techniques used to produce them should be viewed as most relevant to contexts where a writer is working alone (like myself) through most of the development and writing process. As discussed earlier, this is a common experience for many writers and can have many negative aspects. It is hoped (but is in no

way guaranteed) that the techniques discussed below might assist solo writers to overcome these obstacles and satisfactorily move their projects through the various stages of development and drafting. Of course, many of these techniques are also relevant in large group processes and are, in many cases, inspired by the dynamic and collaborative environments of the typical 'writer's room' as well as Stanislavsky's ideas about script analysis and 'Active Analysis'.

The techniques described below are presented to indicate how my practice has evolved as a result of this doctoral project. I do not propose these techniques as a 'one-size-fits-all approach' to screenwriting or even as an essential addition to established practices, such as the three-act structure. Just as Stanislavsky eventually conceded that his 'System' needed to provide "various paths" for actors (Stanislavsky in Carnicke 2009, 173), the evolution of this research has shown me that there must also be "various paths" for writers. These are some techniques that have worked for me in the past and may, or may not, help in the future. One of the appeals of models like the three-act structure is that they offer writers a common language to describe what it is we think we are doing, which in itself is a very remarkable and worthwhile achievement. But no model, not even one with the immense complexity of Stanislavsky's 'System', can ever be comprehensive.

At this point, it would be instructive to read the pilot scripts for each of the studio works (see Major Studio Work #1-3) before I discuss some of the Stanislavsky-inflected techniques I employed in their creation. It may also be illustrative, but not essential, to read the creative bibles that accompany each script (see Major Studio Work #1-3). The techniques are presented in an order I believe they are most easily understood, rather than by any personal preference or perceived effectiveness.

Technique #1: Fast Drafts

A creative strategy central to Stanislavsky's practice of 'Active Analysis' is the rapid iteration of ideas with built-in restrictions around the time available to analyse and plan. The actors discover the story and characters through improvisation, with very little preparation before rehearsal, and short structured times during which they analyse their discoveries before improvisations begin again. This radical approach to performance rehearsal

emphasises the process of doing and discovering, rather than planning and knowing, and directly inspires what I call in my writing practice 'fast drafts'.

A 'fast draft' encourages spontaneous 'improvised' discovery by using limited timeframes to work through a number of rapid iterations of a draft, each of which are separated by short periods of reflection in order to note the most valuable discoveries before the next iteration. The amount of pre-planning required as well as the exact timeframes and number of iterations depends on the writer. The resulting draft will ideally contain a range of both pre-planned and spontaneously improvised ideas that have been considered and reworked a number of times based on their effectiveness for the overall project. In other words, the writer must do multiple versions of the draft, forcing them to adopt spontaneously improvised solutions for unforseen or unplanned problems in order to complete the version within the prescribed timeframe.

As discussed earlier, a typical first draft feature film can take from three to six months to create, while television first drafts can take from five days (for half-hour serials) to six weeks (for a one-hour series). The danger with any timeframe is that the drafting process fills the time available, allowing little, if any time for significant iteration. Another problem is that material can become stale as the writer slowly inches forward, revising scenes as they go rather than reaching the end of a full draft where they can get a sense of the 'big picture'. This is particularly true of new concepts where progress can be slowed because so much is still unknown about the characters or the ultimate direction of the story. My exploration of Stanislavsky's technique of 'Active Analysis', as discussed above, suggested a way around these issues by dictating a writing timeframe that demanded multiple iterations of a draft, separated by short reflection cycles. This process may be used as a means to explore a new concept quickly or, alternatively, efficiently reinvigorate a stale concept by testing a new direction. The crucial aspect to a 'fast draft' is the writer gets to know the new material by actually writing and discovering details along the way, rather than doggedly pre-planning every last nuance. Once the writer has made a range of useful discoveries about the characters and story, the re-drafting process can be slowed to allow the writer to select which discoveries are most useful and determine how to refine them into a presentable shape for distribution to other project partners.

For example, the three projects outlined above were all structured around variations of the following timetable; one-page pitch (one day); three-page pitch with characters (two days); one page episode outline (two days); fifteen-page episode treatment (five days); first draft screenplay (five days). The draft could then be put through a series of similarly rapid reiterations to further refine the discoveries made in the first pass. This meant that with each of these projects, I was able to conceive and write them up to a first draft script stage, potentially consisting of a number of iterations, within approximately three to four weeks. While not necessarily ready for distribution to potential project partners within that timeframe, they had been refined through a number of iterations at each document stage and were, I felt, ready for a sympathetic (and trusted) reader. Inviting a reader in at such an early stage had, I found, the potential to open up new perspectives on the material at a time when I was starting to run out of ideas, having already gone through a number of iterations very quickly. It also opened the process into a collaborative discussion at a relatively early stage that was very welcome and provided valuable insights and new ideas for further drafting.

Apart from the high level of productivity this approach offered, it also encouraged what I believe was a more intuitive and playful way of evolving the material. Because of the speed required with a 'fast draft', the process necessarily emphasised active writing over planning or analysis. There was very limited time to stop and analyse why something was or was not working, and problems simply had to be worked through. This was not a stressful restriction, however, because the process timeframe allowed for multiple iterations to 'fix' a problem or further polish the strongest aspects of the material. I also found that the narrow timeframe had the added advantage of increasing the chance for unplanned, but valuable, discoveries about the story or characters. In the rush to meet the established timeframe, sometimes wonderfully spontaneous insights and new ideas emerged. For example, in the treatment for the pilot episode of *Kelly Country*, I made a significant (and happy) discovery about one of the characters that had not been planned in the episode outline. In the scene, the main character of Shane, an ex-criminal in witness protection, is applying for a job at a local council. While I knew that his interviewer, Locky, the head council gardener, would become an important character in the series as Shane's boss, at the time I didn't know very much about Locky. He didn't even have a name when I started writing the treatment; he was just 'Shane's boss'. As I outlined the scene for the first time, Locky was being particularly friendly to Shane, displaying what I thought might be typical country friendliness. At one point, Locky asks Shane if he has kids. Shane does, and talks briefly about them (while

desperately trying to remember all the details of their new, forged identities). Locky shares a photo of his wife and new baby daughter. Shane politely nods and says Locky's daughter is beautiful. Locky looks lovingly at photo and says, "Isn't she. Praise Jesus." It was at this point that Locky's character 'clicked' for me – he was a devout Catholic, bright-eyed, deeply earnest and charmingly naive. At this point in the script, Shane suddenly 'gets' Locky too, understanding why he's so nice. Over subsequent drafts, Locky, with his unswerving and slightly unnerving, optimism emerged as one of the characters readers most loved. The transformation of Locky from simply 'Shane's boss' to a more rounded character was due in part, I would argue, to the 'fast draft' process I had undertaken that circumvented over-planning or over-analysis of the story and characters. Fresh new details could be discovered and refined on the way through one of numerous drafts.

While most screenwriting manuals, including those by Seger (1994), Field (1984, [1979] 1994), and McKee (1999), strongly advocate writers rewriting their screenplay numerous times before submitting them, few discuss how to best design a writing schedule or how a strategy like 'fast drafts' might be an effective way to quickly (and playfully) explore a new concept or efficiently rework a stale one. Additionally, from the sorts of questions these manuals ask (e.g., "What's the first act turning point?"), a significant amount of pre-planning appears to be assumed, with the essential shape of the story already known but with little indication of how the writer is meant to arrive at this informed stage.

Technique #2: Getting the Characters 'on their Feet'

The following technique is similarly inspired by Stanislavsky's 'Active Analysis' and involves discovering the specific qualities of a character by getting them 'on their feet'. Whereas Stanislavsky required actors to improvise a scene before they even knew their lines or discussed their character in depth, this process requires the writer to write the character into a scene, which may or may not be a part of the overall story, in order to actively explore and 'discover' their unique qualities. I have found this approach useful during early development of a character where only a few broad ideas have been written into a one-to-two-paragraph character biography. Character biographies are an essential part of a television series bible and give producers and executives a quick sense of the character without having to read a script or scene (which may not exist in early development). They are also useful to

the writer during development when considering a character's history, but are less helpful in exploring the nuances and unique idiosyncrasies of a character in advance of actually writing the script. This is because a character biography generally provides only the broad brushstrokes of a character and does not typically contain dialogue or action.

When creating new characters, and attempting to compile a compelling biography for them, I have found it useful to write the characters into a range of typical scenarios in order to explore their unique qualities. These scenes may become part of the eventual script or may simply be isolated scenes with no connection to the developing story. For example, when developing *Starting Over* (Mullins 2013d), the story featured fourteen-year-old fraternal twins, Paul and Danielle. I had never written twins before, and their relationship intrigued me, particularly in the situation at the heart of the series – a family adjusting to the divorce of the parents. I started playing with a fairly random scene where Danielle is making a cake for the family. She needs condensed milk, and I decided that Paul had eaten it all in a teenage sugar craving. From this initial setup, I played with the scene and discovered Paul harboured a great deal of resentment towards Danielle who, I was learning, was a high-achieving young teenager (hence her baking skills). As the scene played out, I decided Paul ate the condensed milk on purpose, knowing it would aggravate Danielle. A bitter argument ensues, during which I decided Paul and Danielle no longer lived in the same house – Paul lived with his father, Marty, while Danielle lived with their mother, Alison. They were twins who *hated* each other (like many other teenage brothers and sisters do). It was an interesting discovery that emerged from getting the characters 'on their feet' where their actions and choices could tell me something about who they were and how they related. This scene eventually made it into the pilot episode.

I believe that screenwriters commonly use this sort of improvised writing activity when drafting a script treatment, a mid-point document between a concept synopsis and a full draft. It requires that scenes be summarised in chronological order into their essential plot and character beats. This technique allows screenwriters to simultaneously examine the 'big picture' structure of a television or feature film script, while still being specific about the action, dialogue and context of each scene. Because scenes are summarised and relatively brief, there is excellent potential to produce multiple versions of them as the writer explores (or improvises) the dynamics of the scene and how it flows from one scene to the next. However, I would argue, the emphasis with treatments is usually on expanding upon details

of the story structure to refine the flow of action, rather than loosely exploring a character's individual quality or dynamic with other characters. It is about building on what is already 'known' about a story's structure rather than discovering an 'unknown' character quality.

Like Stanislavsky's (and Aristotle's) conviction that action is at the heart of character, and like his 'Active Analysis' rehearsal techniques, the process I have developed with 'getting the characters on their feet' is a way of improvising a character's responses to a situation in order to discover the sorts of choices they might make. After the writing 'improvisation' is complete, the scene can be examined for patterns of behaviour and action, and analysed for what it reveals about the character. Similarly, like the dynamic interplay of multiple ideas in the structure of a television writer's room, the evolving scene allows for a range of options to be explored in a dynamic process, where various actions and choices can be tested for how they 'feel' with the character until the most interesting ones emerge.

Because most screenplay manuals are predominantly interested in structure, including the three-act format, much less space is generally devoted to specific techniques designed to explore character. While I have not encountered any screenwriting manuals that suggest a process like 'getting the characters on their feet', it is possible there are manuals that advocate this approach or something like it. My claim here is not that 'getting the characters on their feet' is an entirely unique approach, as it was obviously inspired by Stanislavsky's approach to 'Active Analysis'. Instead, I would simply argue that such a technique is, at the very least, uncommon among models of screenwriting dominated by the three-act structure and may, as a result, be useful to screenwriters in the same way it has been useful to me.

Technique #3: Inner Monologuing

Inner monologues were a technique used by Stanislavsky, particularly in the improvised environment of 'Active Analysis', to enable actors to explore the subtext of a character's actions and dialogue. Instead of just saying a line of dialogue, an actor was sometimes required to improvise the words that might be in the character's head as well, thus revealing the hidden meaning behind the spoken dialogue. For example, a simple line like "What is it?" (the dialogue) could be infused with a deeper subtext by adding "But don't expect help from me" (the subtext). This sort of exercise was used throughout Stanislavsky's entire career,

including his later experiments in 'Active Analysis', and is still commonly used by actors today as they explore the potential actions and subtexts behind the dialogue.

Screenwriters use a similar technique in discussions where the drama of a new scene is being first conceived with various lines of dialogue and action being freely improvised. I have regularly witnessed writers not only improvise lines of dialogue but also add an explicit subtext to the line (e.g., "So Douglas turns to Susan and takes her hand and says 'What's happened?' [the dialogue] like he's saying 'Trust me, I'm your father, I can help' [the subtext]"). Others times, screenwriters might use an inner monologue in an actual script to describe the quality of an action (e.g., "Jane goes to speak but Peter cuts her off with a glare – don't you start [the subtext of the glare]"). Having read Damon Lindelof's scripts for *LOST* while making *Find 815*, I know he uses this approach. However, screenwriters unevenly practice inner monologues. Generally, it seems to be discouraged in feature film writing but is commonly employed in television, where shorter writing and rehearsals times sometimes require writers to suggest the subtext of a scene for time poor producers, directors and actors.

In my practice, I have found inner monologues useful in exploring a new scene or character, sharpening the subtext of a script for a reader, or analysing a scene for redrafting. For example, when roughly laying out scenes using the 'fast draft' techniques discussed above, I have often used an approximate line of dialogue combined with an inner monologue as a placeholder when a particular exchange is proving difficult. This allows me to get the intention of the dialogue down on the page with a clear idea of what was intended so I can move on and come back to it later. Similarly, when I am working through a draft, some details call for extra sharpening without resorting to wordy descriptions. In these instances, I have used a type of inner monologue to capture the subtext of an action or line of dialogue. For example, in the pilot script for *Saviour* (Mullins 2013c, 11) (see Major Studio Work #2), Frank receives news that Rayna won't be home. The action text says "Frank isn't impressed – heard it all before", thus adding a deeper subtext to his general disappointment. In the pilot script for *Kelly Country* (Mullins 2013a, 1) (see Major Studio Work #1), Liz insists Shane practice playing their new identities. The action text of "Shane is reluctant. Liz gives him a look – do it" helps to capture the fierceness of Liz's request as well as establishes her as a determined woman. Sometimes, I have also used these 'tags' on the end of actions to capture the subtext of a line of dialogue, as in the following excerpt from the pilot script for *Starting Over* (Mullins 2013d, 44) (see Major Studio Work #3):

ALISON considers whether to be open – she dives in.

ALISON
I got divorced yesterday and, you know...

The tag of "she dives in" helps to capture Alison's discomfort with what she is about to reveal.

Similarly, screenwriting makes use of parenthetical information contained immediately before the dialogue to provide explicit directions about a line, including its delivery or an action to accompany it, as in this example from *Kelly Country* (Mullins 2013a, 30) (see Major Studio Work #1):

SHANE
(cocky)
Sorry. Got lost in the fog.

A certain amount of subtext can be captured in parentheticals but, I would argue, they tend to be more straightforward and less nuanced than inner monologues, as the above example suggests.

Mindful of this, it is vital that techniques that highlight the subtext of a scene, like the ones discussed, should be used strategically and infrequently in drafts for distribution. I have found them to be extremely useful in early drafts that are to be presented to people not familiar with the project (i.e., prospective producers, executives, agents, etc.). This is because the techniques make it very clear how the story can (but not necessarily will) be realised, and help create an explicit flow of dramatic energy through the narrative. However, when presenting the script to actors and directors, whose job it is to find these subtexts themselves, it is advisable to consider removing these additions. Nevertheless, I have frequently been thanked by actors for incorporating inner monologues and parentheticals in a script since they clarified my intentions and provided a potential starting point for adaptation into performance.

In *Story*, McKee (1999, 152-179) offers an intriguing chapter on "writing from the inside out" where he briefly mentions Stanislavsky and uses the concept of 'inner monologues' to

Pages 91-94 redacted due to commercial development

explore their ideas. However, where my approach may differ is in its focus on exploring the potential actions and counter-actions between characters as inspired by Stanislavsky's experiments in 'Active Analysis'.

Technique #5: Through-lining

As discussed, Stanislavsky used the concept of a 'through-line of action' or 'through-action' to unify all the smaller objectives and actions of a character into a coherent logical progression. In my experience, I have heard many screenwriters also use the term 'through line' but they tend to use it in a slightly different way to Stanislavsky by conflating it with a character's 'arc', which describes the 'psychological transformation' a character undergoes throughout the story. As outlined in the literature review, any discussion of 'arcs' in this way invites problems with characters who resist change or, as is the case with many television characters, do not significantly change. For example, it could be argued that, despite everything that happens to the character of Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos* (Chase 1999-2007), and after all the therapy he goes through, Tony does not psychologically change. He still has the same anxieties, flaws and delusions he had at the very beginning of Season 1 – which is, in many ways, the point of the series. Therefore, to talk about Tony's 'arc' is potentially misleading and/or confusing. However, I assert that talking about Tony's 'through line' is potentially more appropriate as it allows the discussion to revolve around what happens to Tony and how he responds to it (action/counter-action). As a result of this doctorate, the way I have started to work with these concepts is to make them two separate ideas – a 'through line' is what the character is working towards in the story (the direction of their objectives and actions, as Stanislavsky proposed), while their 'arc' is how they are 'psychologically transformed' by the events of the story. However, when working with other screen professionals, I continue to conflate these two ideas where appropriate or necessary.

As discussed earlier, feature film screenwriting models like the three-act structure tend to emphasise the protagonist's through line or arc, while other characters are rarely given the same sort of attention. However, in television writing, as well as Stanislavsky's approach to dramatic analysis, attention must be paid to the through lines of all characters. In television writing, this is because any given character can become the protagonist of a developing story line and must, therefore, be examined to ensure their through line is psychologically coherent

across the series. In Stanislavsky's approach, each actor must examine every moment to determine their objective and resulting action, and to ensure these work with all the moments before and after, to create a coherent through line and performance.

In developing the studio work under discussion, I have adapted my own approach that considers each character's through line and, where possible or useful, explicitly states it in a short, memorable sentence. For example, in the creative bible for *Kelly Country* (Mullins 2013b, 2) (see Major Studio Work #1), I spell out that the protagonist Shane "really does want to start again. To give his family a better life than the one he's given them so far", thus giving the reader a clear sense of what Shane's goal / through line is and how this might influence his actions. Later in the character biographies of the same proposal (Mullins 2013b, 6) (see Major Studio Work #1), I restate Shane's through line in a very similar way – "Shane wants to change. It's taken him a long time to get to this place but he's here now – and he wants things to be different." I also provide all the other major characters with an explicit through line. For example, Liz wants to keep to herself (7), Cleo wants the very best for herself (8), and Max wants everyone to like him (9). Even the through lines of secondary characters are stated where appropriate; Mel wants to give her clients the best chance possible (10); Alan wants to be there for his ill wife Katherine (11); Locky wants to share his optimism (11); Brendan wants revenge (12). These initial through lines were revised a number of times as the concept was redrafted and more details were discovered about the characters.

As indicated above, I also, where useful, conflate the concept of a character's 'through line' with their 'arc' in order to present ideas to collaborators, such as producers and executives, who often use them interchangeably (e.g., "What's Shane's arc, what's his through line?"). In *Kelly Country*, I brought these terms together in a document I presented to television executives who were interested in discussing the project. I called the document "Draft Series Arcs", as requested by the producer, but predominantly described the through line for each major character and, eventually, how the situations they faced in the story had the potential to change them. For example, for the character of Liz, I opened with:

> Liz would really just like to lay low. She understands the danger they're all in and knows they need to stay under the radar. Besides she's used to being a loner. But Liz is going to discover what friends are for. (Mullins 2013b, 14) (see Major Studio Work #1)

The rest of Liz's section outlined the various ways in which she would struggle to "lay low" (her through line) and, towards the end of the first season, how this would gradually change how she approached her new life (her 'arc').

Admittedly, the through lines as expressed in these early stage documents are broad, but they are designed to be specific enough to give a sense of the character's desire and how this will affect their choices moving forward. In my experience, readers, particularly producers and executives, need to be able to identify a clear sense of direction in each character; a common question they ask is "Where are they going?" As a concept develops, these short descriptions of each character's through lines can be revisited and refined as further discoveries are made but, even in this basic form, they are a useful way to picture a character.

Indeed, I would argue that one of the key features of a strong through line is that it not only creates a sense of the character's future direction across a number of episodes or seasons but, if it is effectively refined, also guides what the character will do in the immediate present of any given scene. Knowing that Shane in *Kelly Country* "wants to change" informs what he will do in the *present* as well as the *future*, and being able to draw on this clarifying detail helps to guide his continuing characterisation. In this way, a strong and specific one-sentence through line is far more useful than a detailed ten-page backstory (a common technique used by screenwriters). This is because a well-crafted through line sets the character in motion in a particular direction. Just as Stanislavsky argued the focus of an actor should be "here, now, today" (Merlin 2003, 35), placing the focus on the present actions the character is trying to achieve, rather than their past, pushes the writer to provide clarity to the scene in question. Of course, a through line can be coupled with a backstory to explain the motivations behind the character's actions but the emphasis, in my experience, should predominantly be on what they want in the present, not the past. For this reason, I usually dedicate no more than a half of a character breakdown to 'the past'. Using the through line as a base, I am much more interested in stating what the character wants in the present and what he or she will do to get it.

Technique #6: Script Analysis

I offer this last technique with some trepidation. Despite the central role Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques have played in this doctorate, and how a working knowledge of them has, I would argue, sharpened my own practice, I do believe there are a number of cautions that should accompany any close application of them. First, as discussed above, Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques are extremely detailed and, as a result, may have the unintended effect of stifling a new concept with over-analysis if applied too soon in a writing process. Second, even if applied to a drafted script, these techniques are, in my experience, somewhat laborious, requiring much time and energy to apply across a story and all its characters equally. This can have the unintended result of stifling a process with analysis. As a result, I would suggest that these techniques be seen as tools of a 'surgical' nature, which are intended for a specific problem that requires precision analysis (e.g., a single scene, sequence or character). Stanislavsky eventually had his own reservations about 'stuffing his artist's heads' with analysis and, given my own experience of this on *His Father's Son*, as discussed above, I believe this warning should be heeded.

Nevertheless, Stanislavsky's approach to script analysis has been very useful in designing the broad structure of each studio work as well as the associated character's through lines. As outlined above, approaching a story as a series of character tasks or objectives helps to sharpen each character and how they inter-relate to create the drama of the story. Similarly, as outlined in the earlier discussion in Chapter 3, his techniques offer a more precise way to examine the structure of a feature film that does not presuppose a three-act structure.

However, I have been less eager to apply Stanislavsky's analysis when breaking down individual scenes, as opposed to the broad structure of an act or episode. In the studio works discussed, I have not used Stanislavsky's script-analysis technique to closely examine any specific scene or character principally because they have not been required so far in development. My feeling was that applying this level of analysis could run the risk of over-analysing the material and slowing what has been an extremely productive screenwriting process thus far. However, this level of analysis may be required at a later time on any of these projects, or others. If so, I would not hesitate to use the technique discussed below to more closely examine a narrative problem, such is my belief in their effectiveness. In fact, it is possible that the reason the technique has not been required is because Stanislavsky's principles of drama, his dynamic analysis of action/counter-action exchanges, has been intuitively incorporated into my writing to the point where they are an embedded practice.

Stanislavsky's way of seeing drama now has a significant influence over my practice as a result of this doctorate, but it is perhaps best for others to decide how well (or otherwise) I employ his principles.

Mindful of these observations, I will now demonstrate my adapted use of Stanislavsky's script-analysis techniques to breakdown a scene from *Kelly Country* (Mullins 2013a, 20-23) (see Major Studio Work #1).

The 'Given Circumstances' of the Scene

In the scene, the Kellys are attempting to settle into their new life in Toowoomba. The broad 'given circumstances' for the family are that Shane has secured a job at the local council, Cleo and Max have just been on a dismal shopping expedition, and Liz, formerly a canny investor, suspects the family's finances are in very poor shape. Coming into the scene, we find Cleo, Max and Shane trying to construct a cheap, mass-produced bed for Cleo (which will easily be the cheapest bed Cleo has ever slept in).

Beat #1

The beat initially unfolds around Cleo's punishment of Shane for the lame bed she has to now sleep in. Liz enters and queries Shane about how much he earns in his new job.

Shane's task*:* Settle Cleo into her new room
Liz's task*:* Determine the facts about their finances
Cleo's task*:* Punish everyone for her situation (particularly Shane)
Max's tasks*:* Impress everyone with his furniture assembly skills

NOTE: Ideally, tasks are stated as 'actively' as possible – e.g., Cleo's task is to punish (action) everyone for her situation.

The beat ends with Liz announcing they will all have to make sacrifices to make ends meet (which changes Shane, Cleo and Liz's tasks significantly).

Beat #2

The beat unfolds around Liz explaining the sorts of sacrifices everyone needs to make, Cleo rejecting the demands, Shane trying to calm everyone down, and Max, unfazed, continuing to make the bed.

Shane's task: Calm everyone down
Liz's task: Lay down the law about spending
Cleo's task: Defend her entitlements
Max's task: Finish the bed (as before)

The beat ends with Cleo insulting Max ("He doesn't need a mobile because he doesn't have any friends") and Max storming out (Shane and Liz's tasks change while Cleo's stays largely the same).

Beat #3
This is a short beat where Shane attacks Cleo's selfishness only to have Liz unexpectedly announce he will have to give up his cable subscription.

Shane's task: Attack Cleo's selfishness
Liz's task: Defend her demands
Cleo's task: Defend her entitlements (as before)

Beat #4
In this beat, Shane tries to convince Liz to reconsider, Liz refusing to budge and Cleo wishing Shane had gone to jail after all.

Shane's task: Beg Liz to reconsider
Liz's task: Refuse all further negotiations
Cleo's task: Blame Shane for everything

The beat ends with Cleo storming out, and Liz, in fury, calling Cleo by her old name (Shane and Liz's tasks change).

Beat #5:

In this beat, Shane tries to reassure Liz everything, including their finances, will be OK, while Liz levels with Shane about their finances.

Shane's task: Reassure Liz
Liz's task: Level with Shane

The beat ends when Cleo screams from the next room.

End of Scene

As can be observed from the above analysis, the scene breaks easily into 'beats' or units, each marked by a significant change in one or more of the character's tasks. This sort of analysis is particularly useful for revealing the choices that characters make when faced with adversity – Cleo's persistent attacks, Shane's guilt-laden reassurances, Liz's no-nonsense declarations, Max's eager-to-please acceptance. This ability to breakdown a scene helps to examine the character's actions up close and allows the writer to consider if the actions they are taking are consistent with their broader through line and character history. Of course, there are other ways of interpreting what is happening in the scene, and the actions the characters are performing. For example, in Beat #2, Shane's task could be to 'dismiss Liz's anxiety', thus making his action here sharper and colder. But, I would argue, this is inconsistent with the guilt Shane feels about their situation and his broader through line to change and give his family a good life again. Similarly, Max's task in this scene (i.e., impress everyone with his assembly skills) could be made psychologically stronger with an objective like "win Cleo's approval", but this risks focussing the scene on Max and Cleo's relationship when it is really about Shane and Liz trying to make their new life bearable.

It should be noted that I have not devised an overall 'scene task' for each character that ties all their beat tasks together as Stanislavsky's techniques might suggest (depending on how his techniques are interpreted). While this is possible to do, I have found that this approach can produce frustratingly vague results as well as be time-consuming. Determining the 'right' words to capture a multitude of actions and emotions is no easy task, and can lead to a spiral of over-analysis. Rather, I would suggest that the technique of establishing and refining a broader 'through line' for each character, as discussed earlier, is more useful. If further breaking down is required, I find that thinking in terms of larger units, likes 'acts' and

'sequences', is more effective. For example, in the pilot episode of *Kelly Country*, one way to think of Shane is that he wants to get a better deal for his family (his task). This task plays out in his negotiations with Mel (his case worker); with his attempts to get fired by Locky so he can get a better job; with his interest in Alan's tobacco crop; and, as revealed in the scene above, in his attempts to negotiate with Liz on their finances.

As discussed earlier, screenwriting manuals focussing on discussions of the three-act structure, like the ones examined in this doctorate, rarely examine ways to break down a scene in detail. The exception to this is McKee's *Story* (1999, 257-287), in which he discusses scene analysis using terms like 'beat' and 'action' in ways reminiscent of Stanislavsky but without directly acknowledging him.

This approach to script analysis interpreted from Stanislavsky, I would argue, has a great many strengths if approached with caution and a motivation to explore the deeper layers of a cast of characters and how they inter-relate to shape the drama of a story. It is a 'surgical' tool that, I suggest, should be used selectively on persistently difficult areas within a script to get a closer look at the potential problem. I believe this is where it excels as an analytical tool and offers a level of precision that is rare among traditional screenwriting tools and models. It also has the added advantage of being widely understood by the artists who will eventually bring the screenwriter's words to life – actors.

An Evolving Process

The techniques outlined above represent particular aspects of my current screenwriting practice that are infused with the insights provided by this doctorate and its exploration into Konstantin Stanislavsky's various approaches to acting and script analysis. These techniques have been developed alongside a wide range of professional experiences that gave me the opportunity to test my ideas and, most importantly, reflect on the creative outcomes of their application and adjust my approach. As discussed earlier, the outcomes were not always what I intended or hoped for, and my assumptions about both the effectiveness of the techniques being adapted, as well as the stability of my own creative practice, were frequently challenged. But, for the moment, these techniques seem to work for me and have helped me produce (what I consider to be) some of my best work during one of my career's most productive periods. Perhaps I will continue to use them into the future to produce even more

work; however, given the fluid creative journey I have been on throughout this doctorate, I wouldn't want to state anything definitive. My practice may change again, and others may embrace the qualities of the techniques I have presented here and apply them to their own screenplays. Alternatively, they might adapt the techniques into some entirely new and unique process that works for them. I would be happy with either scenario, as I think Stanislavsky would be.

Conclusion

At the time of writing this conclusion (June 2014), *Saviour* is in its third iteration, having explored a range of possibilities offered up by my pilot script and creative bible. Each time, the themes and characters have shifted around the original premise of a small country town where the children appear to evolve beyond their parents. And each time, the process I have undertaken has offered up new possibilities that only enrich the idea. Along the way, I have found myself repeatedly drawing on the processes and techniques explored in this doctorate, each one inflected by Stanislavsky's ideas but also, at the same time, very much my own way of understanding the unfolding story we are creating. My creative practice has evolved to a point where I find it useful, productive and complementary to the processes of my collaborators. It's a nice feeling.

In hindsight, I can now assert that when I started this doctorate, I made a number of assumptions about not only Stanislavsky's techniques, but also about their relationship to the three-act structure and my creative practice in general. What I was trying to investigate was whether incorporating Stanislavsky's techniques of script analysis could augment my creative screenwriting practice, which was, at the time, significantly informed by the three-act structure. I felt this would address a number of limitations in the three-act model I had become increasingly aware of over the years and, I assumed, had the added advantage of being a technique that many actors, the professionals that would eventually perform my scripts, were familiar with. And so, employing a reflective practice mode of investigation, I embarked on a process of defining and adapting Stanislavsky's techniques in order to write an original feature-length screenplay (my planned studio work).

However, when I started to scrutinise Stanislavsky's work, I quickly realised I had assumed his techniques were somehow fixed and definable, that they were written down somewhere, methodically, comprehensively, and were able to be examined up close, taken apart, and put back together. I also thought the same about my own creative practice – that a list of ideas and techniques were shaping my work, like the three-act structure, and that, once I'd listed them, I'd be able to put them together with Stanislavsky's ideas in a fairly straightforward way to devise a new set of reliable techniques that could make me a 'better' screenwriter.

But the process was not as simple as this. Defining exactly what Stanislavsky said or didn't say was fraught from the very beginning. As discussed, there are mistranslations of key concepts like 'task' (*zadacha*) by Stanislavsky's English publishers; a misleading overemphasis by American theatre practitioners on early experiments like 'affective memory'; chaotic methods of documentation by Stanislavsky himself; and a tendency to

constantly experiment, change and contradict his previous approaches. All of these factors made his 'System' appear less than systematic to me from my distant vantage point. furthermore, these confusions made it more difficult to define the concepts I was adapting in order to augment my own practice – should I be talking about 'objectives' or 'tasks'? And was this really the same as the screenwriter's concept of a 'goal'? It wasn't clear. Eventually, in order to progress, I simply had decide on a definition based on my readings and apply it to see what would happen to the work.

But even as I tried to establish definitions, there was the arduous process of actually applying Stanislavsky's ideas to my stories when I was working as a solo screenwriter, rather than with a large ensemble of actors – is the character's task here to 'reprimand' or 'chastise' (and did it really make a difference)? The whole process was extremely laborious, time-consuming and tended to overwhelm the delicate seed of an idea that motivated the story in the first place. It appeared Stanislavsky's techniques, while certainly more precise for analysing an existing script, were no more effective than the three-act structure in nurturing a new story from a raw concept to a first draft script. Despite discovering and adapting more and more concepts from Stanislavsky and immersing myself in the creative process of using these ideas to create new and 'better' stories, I unhappily found myself blocked, unable to follow through on even the simplest screenplay idea. It was not a nice feeling.

I had unwittingly discovered Stanislavsky's technique of script analysis and the three-act structure have more in common than I suspected. Certainly, there is a connection between Stanislavsky's 'task' and the 'goal' that Syd Field and others discuss. But it is more than just the concepts that mirror each other. For me, both techniques appeared to work best when used as an *analytical* tool to break down an *existing* script, rather than as a method to realise a *new* story. And, in retrospect, this is what I should have expected, given the context in which each technique had been developed.

In the case of the three-act structure, it is reasonable to assume that skilled script consultants, like Field, Seger, McKee and Vogler, refined their theories using *existing* scripts they were asked to consult on or had seen as finished films. While Seger and Field both explored the steps to creating a new screenplay, it was invariably done with the pre-determined demands of the three-act structure in mind (i.e., three acts, fixed act proportions, turning points, etc.). My experience of this approach tended to result in many creative options in the early stages of development being halted because they did not fit the requirements of the three act paradigm. This frequently resulted in script ideas not making it to first draft.

Similarly, Stanislavsky, as a director rather than writer, developed his technique of script analysis using *existing* plays rather than creating new ones from scratch. His approach

insisted on a set of rigid and highly structured methods of breaking down a script that were clearly very popular throughout the twentieth century but were not without their detractors, including Stanislavsky himself. While very precise and far more detailed than a technique like the three-act structure, Stanislavsky's 'round-the-table' approach to script analysis was also extremely cumbersome, requiring sometimes weeks of concentration from a large cast of actors. Stanislavsky realised the technique was blocking the creative flow of his cast, many of whom could not remember the details when they were on stage. As a result, I suspect it is possible that many actors and directors found Stanislavsky's approach to script analysis just as frustrating as the three-act structure is to many modern day screenwriters. While this question is beyond the scope of this doctorate, I have a lot of sympathy with its premise after some of my experiences discussed here.

Of course, as discussed above, Stanislavsky revised his technique to incorporate more intuitive and improvisational methods of acting that eventually became 'Active Analysis', a technique only just being discovered by modern performance practitioners. In fact, these late career experiments by Stanislavsky offer a new perspective on his ideas that, many argue, have a continuing contemporary relevance. Indeed, the main thrust of Carnicke (2009) and Merlin's (2007) re-evaluation of Stanislavsky's 'System' suggest his techniques fit comfortably alongside more postmodern forms of performance. Always the reflective practitioner, Stanislavsky was able to adjust his early experiments to incorporate new ideas that would refresh his output. And it was precisely these insights by Stanislavsky that suggested the sorts of re-evaluations I needed to make of my own creative practice in order to progress satisfactorily.

Reading about Stanislavsky's late-career experiments in 'Active Analysis' offered another way through, not so much in their precise application, but in their playful spirit of experimentation and discovery. This approach was about creatively discovering the work by actually *doing* it, rather than *knowing* everything about it before beginning it. This is what the three-act structure seemed to demand of writers and what Stanislavsky's own 'round-the-table' process of script analysis also forced upon actors. But, as all reflective practitioners intuitively understand, when something is as unstable as the first draft of a screenplay, the first rehearsal of a theatre production, or any new work of art, it is usually by *doing* the work that the artist comes to *know* it. This was the solution I needed to move forward, and, combined with the novel and challenging experiences offered by my work as Creative Director of Hoodlum, I found my creative practice entering a new and highly productive phase.

At this point in my practice, I am now better able to appreciate that any attempt to formalise a generalised and repeatable process of art making, be it Stanislavsky's 'System' or Field's

'Paradigm', runs the risk of simplifying the emerging idea into a series of predetermined conventions that diminish its potential before it has even taken shape. It is with this in mind that I have watched with interest over the years of my doctorate as new screenwriting paradigms emerged on the scene to challenge the dominance of the three-act structure, among them Blake Synder's "Beat Sheet" (2005); John Truby's "22 Steps" (2008); Paul Joseph Gulino's "Sequence Approach" (2012); Michael Hauge's "Five Turning Points" (2010). All of these approaches have their own terminologies and structures, most of which closely mirror the shapes of the classic three-act structure and make similar claims that they describe the "universal" shape of screen stories. Interestingly, with the critical and commercial success of cable dramas like *The Sopranos*, there has also been a concurrent and growing interest in the techniques of television screenwriting that, as I have discussed here, challenge many of the conventions of feature film structure. Recent and notable TV writing manuals I have encountered include *Craft TV Writing: Thinking Inside the Box* (Epstein 2006), *Writing the Pilot* (Rabkin 2011), *Inside the Room: Writing Television with the Pros at the UCLA Extension Writers' Program* (Bingeman et al. 2013) as well as the Sundance Channel's chat show about television writing, *The Writers' Room* (Bishop et al. 2013).

And of course, there are the new digital forms such as those I grappled with in my time at Hoodlum, which are creating new demands on the structures of their stories as they engage with audiences in innovative new ways. Story forms are forever changing and, as this doctoral project argues, it is debatable that they were ever really fixed in the ways the three-act structure might have suggested. This is not to dismiss the brilliant work of writers like Field, Seger, Vogler and McKee. Paradigms like the ones they promote have their place and, in my experience, are perhaps most often helpful when they are used as a lens to examine the rough edges of a semi-developed story in order to refocus it and distil it into a coherent, conventional whole. Or not. Maybe the story being told is something else, its own thing, outside of the norm, trying to find its own, complex and unpredictable way into the world. It all depends.

With my focus now on television drama, I am far more aware of the techniques I am employing to develop new work and, most importantly, am able to identify when they are thwarting my process. Even if it can be argued I have not faithfully adapted Stanislavsky's exact techniques (whatever they were) into my own practice, it is his way of seeing and understanding drama, as well as his restless spirit of experimentation and exploration, that I hope remains with me long after this doctorate has been completed.

I have refashioned Stanislavsky's way so that it is now *my* way and this, I think he would agree, is as it should be.

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APPENDIX: Adapted Character-centred Model of Screenwriting

A note on the following material

The following is an expanded description of the revised 'Character-centred' model of screenwriting using principles drawn from Konstantin Stanislavsky as discussed in Chapter Three.

The text of this description was originally written as part of the intended materials for a screenwriting course I was teaching at Griffith University (although, due to revisions I wanted to make, it was never presented to students). A number of the terms were modified to make it more accessible for students.

The modified terms are;

1) '*External* Circumstances' becomes 'External World' – the protagonist's family, friends, enemies, their career, society, the natural world, etc.
2) '*Internal* Character' becomes 'Internal World' – the protagonist's hopes, fears, dreams, goals, tasks, beliefs, their history, etc,

I have also added the term 'Choice' to mark the major internal shifts (or 'turning points' in the protagonist's emotional journey.

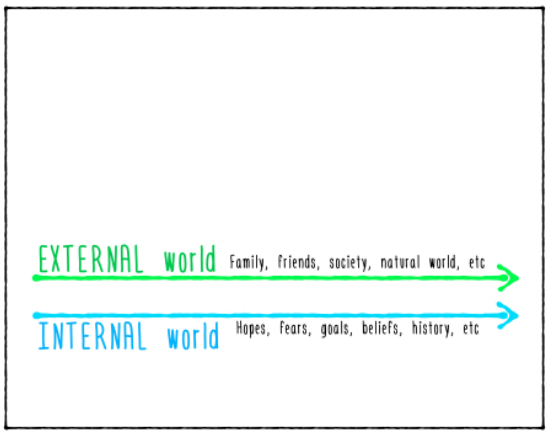
As a result of the intended educational context of the material, the tone of writing is markedly different from the rest of the exegesis. Despite this, the essential principles of the screenwriting model are effectively demonstrated using the same examples discussed in Chapter Three.

Introduction to Character-centred Model of Screenwriting

Almost every storytelling lesson will at some point refer to the 'rising action' of the story. In other words, the action in the story grows as the story progresses - things become more tense, more dramatic.

But what's missing from this picture?

What's missing is **CHARACTER**. How does the protagonist respond to the growing tension? What does it reveal about who they are and the sort of story this is?

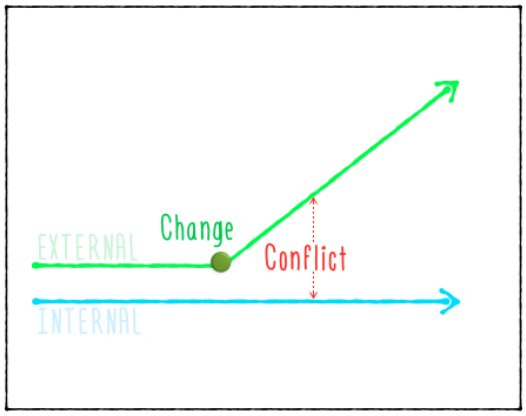


So, what would it look like if we included character in this picture?

This would give us **TWO** lines to describe the story. The first one represents the **EXTERNAL WORLD** of the protagonist - their family, friends, enemies, their career, society, the natural world, etc.

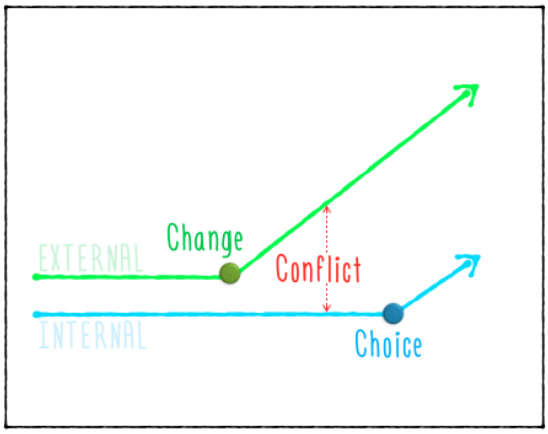
The second line describes the character's **INTERNAL WORLD** - his or her hopes, fears, dreams, goals, beliefs, history, etc, all the intangible things that shape how the character responds to their external world.

So now we have a more rounded picture of who the main character of the story is.



But how does this help us describe the progress of the story?

As circumstances **CHANGE** in the external world of the character, **CONFLICT** will arise in their life.

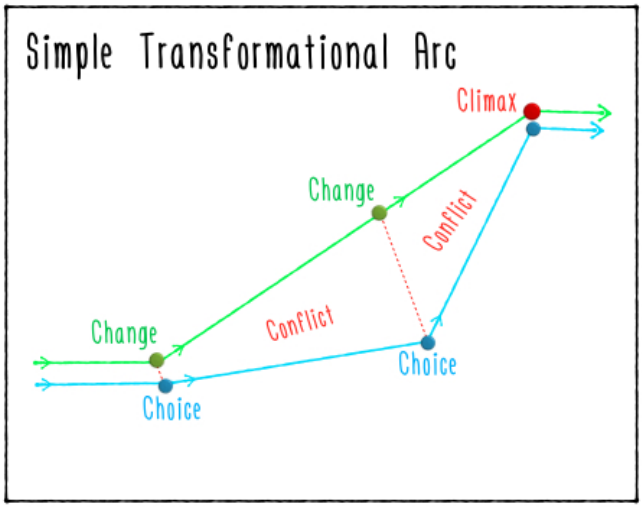


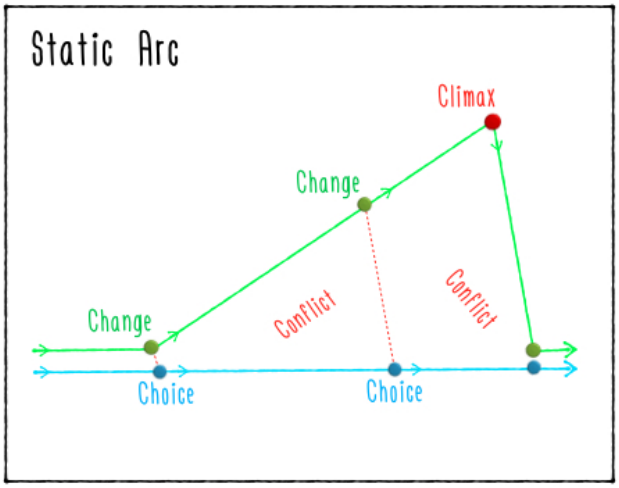
CONFLICT is the gap between the character's EXTERNAL and INTERNAL world. It is the difference between <u>how the world is</u>, and how they <u>want it to be</u>.

But there's one final part to this picture…

The **CHOICES** the character makes in response to **CHANGE** and **CONFLICT** captures the sort of character they are AND what type of story it is.

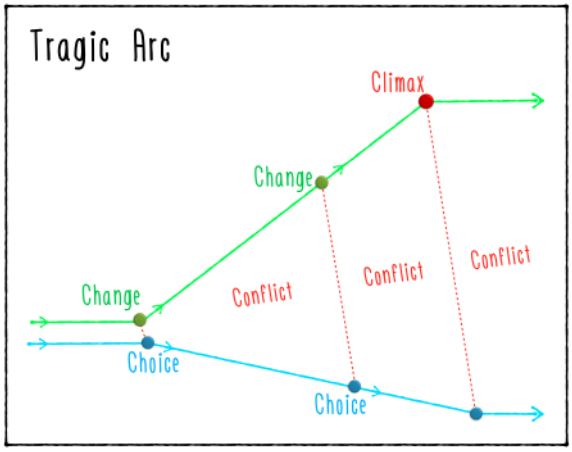
Maybe it's a story of **PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION** (so popular in Hollywood) where the character's choices gradually overcome the conflict (think Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars: A New Hope*).





Or maybe it's a gutsy tale of **UNSWERVING RESILIENCE** where the character's usual choices, their 'tried and true' habits and behaviours, are able to resolve the conflict (think John McClane in the original *Die Hard*).

Or maybe it's a **POWERFUL TRAGEDY** where the character is not able to recognise their choices are only making matters worse and, as a result, never resolve the conflict (think Jake Gittes in the screenwriting classic *Chinatown*).



By revealing the important **CHOICES** the character makes in response to major **CHANGE** and **CONFLICT**, we start to see the unique shape of the story and how it works.

Simple Transformational Arc

In this sort of story, the character's choices **GRADUALLY** reduce the conflict - by and large, they're **always heading in the right direction**.

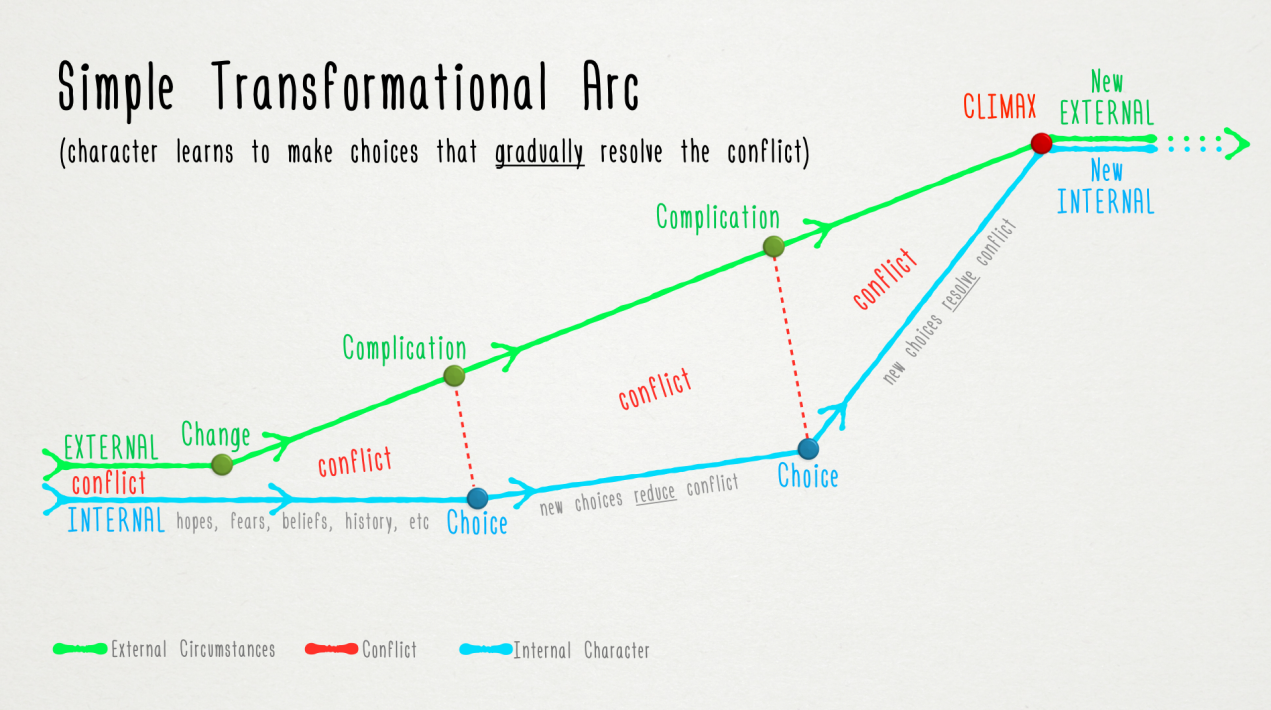
At the beginning there is a **CHANGE** to their external world. This creates **CONFLICT** with the character's internal world.

In some stories the character will respond to the conflict immediately and make a **CHOICE** about what to do. In others, the character will delay making a choice until a **COMPLICATION** makes the conflict grow significantly.

The character's early choices will send them in the right direction, but they will not keep pace with the external changes - the conflict will grow and becomes more increasingly complicated.

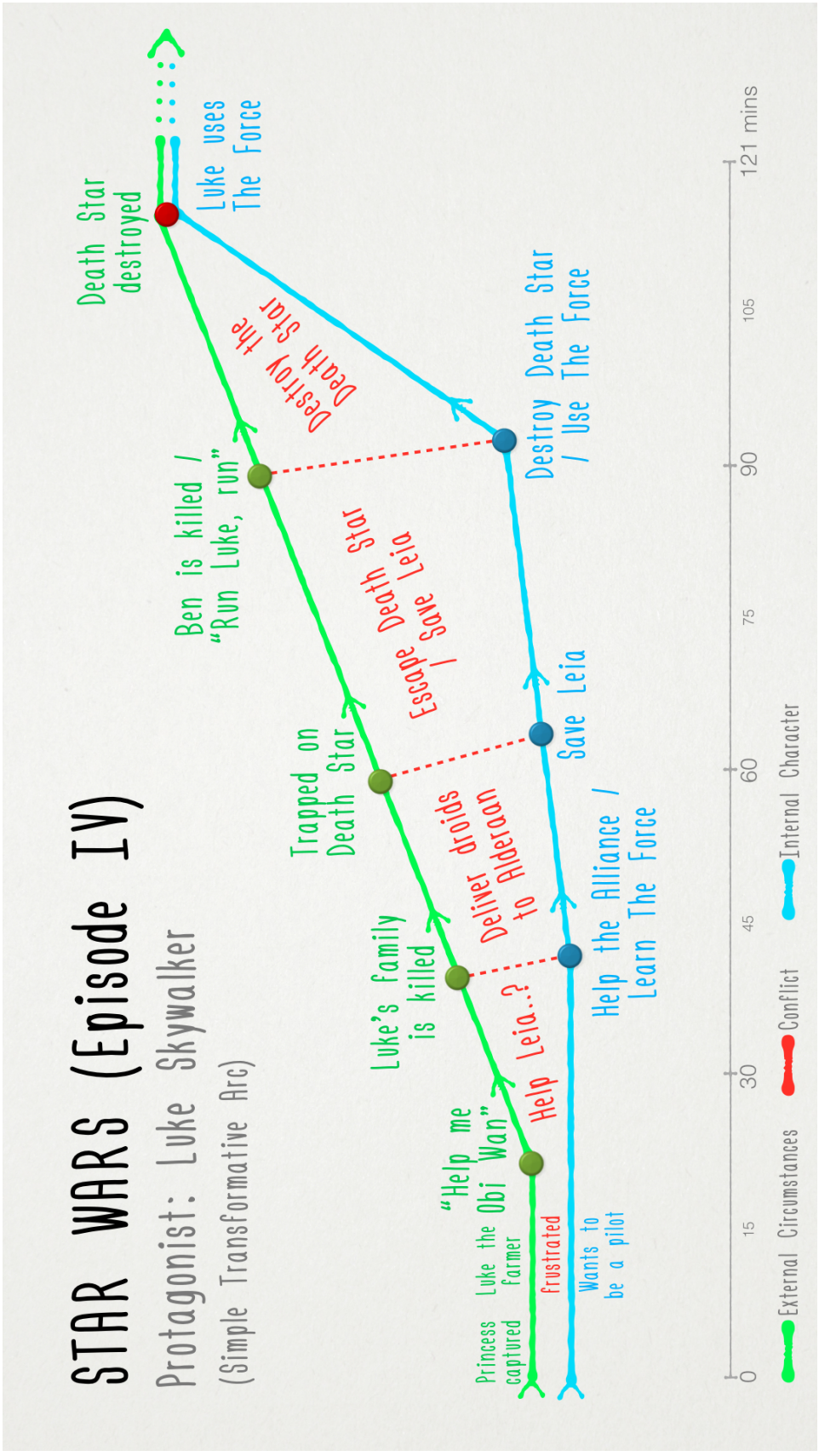
Towards the climax of the story, however, the character will **choose a new approach** that will ultimately resolve the conflict.

The character has gone through an internal 'transformation' that has seen them **gradually** learn how to overcome the conflict.



Example of Simple Transformational Arc – *Star Wars: Episode IV* (1977)

Original screenplay written by George Lucas



Complex Transformational Arc

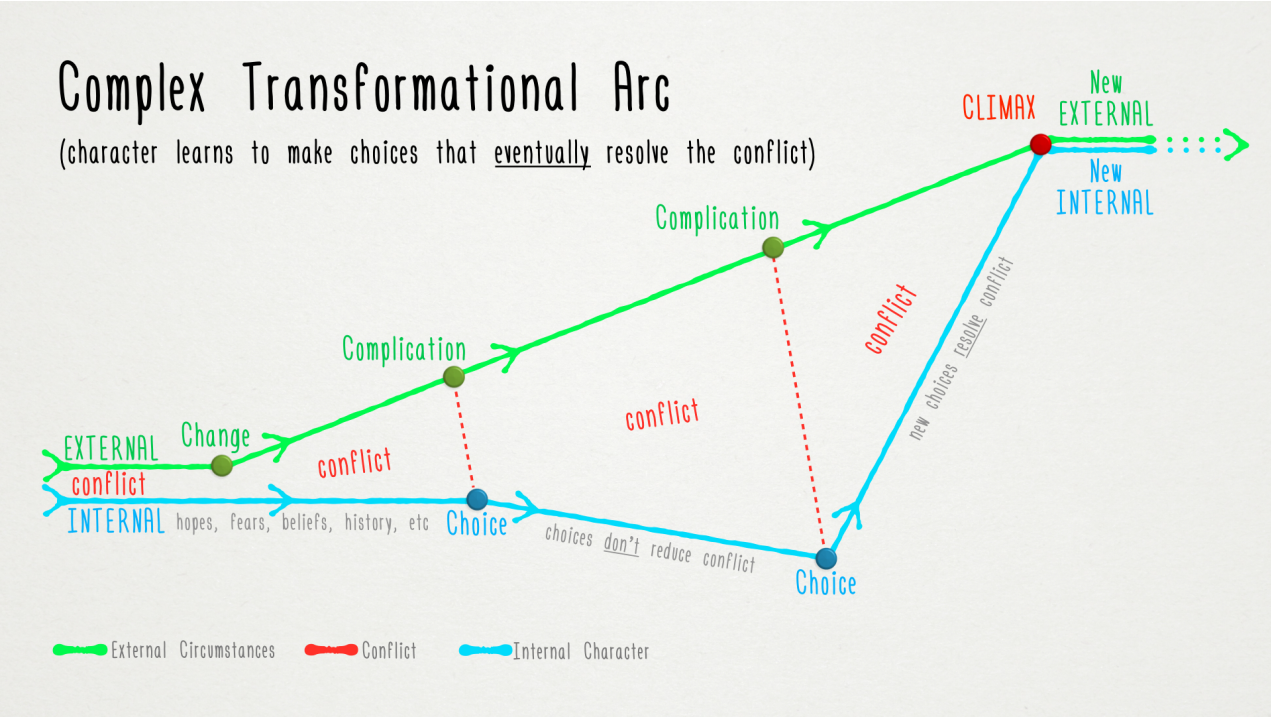
In this sort of story, the character's choices **EVENTUALLY** reduce the conflict - **at first their choices only make things worse**, but they learn and **eventually make the correct choices** to resolve the conflict.

At the beginning, there is a **CHANGE** to the character's external world, which creates **CONFLICT** with their internal world.

The character eventually makes a **CHOICE** about what to do, sometimes following a major **COMPLICATION**.

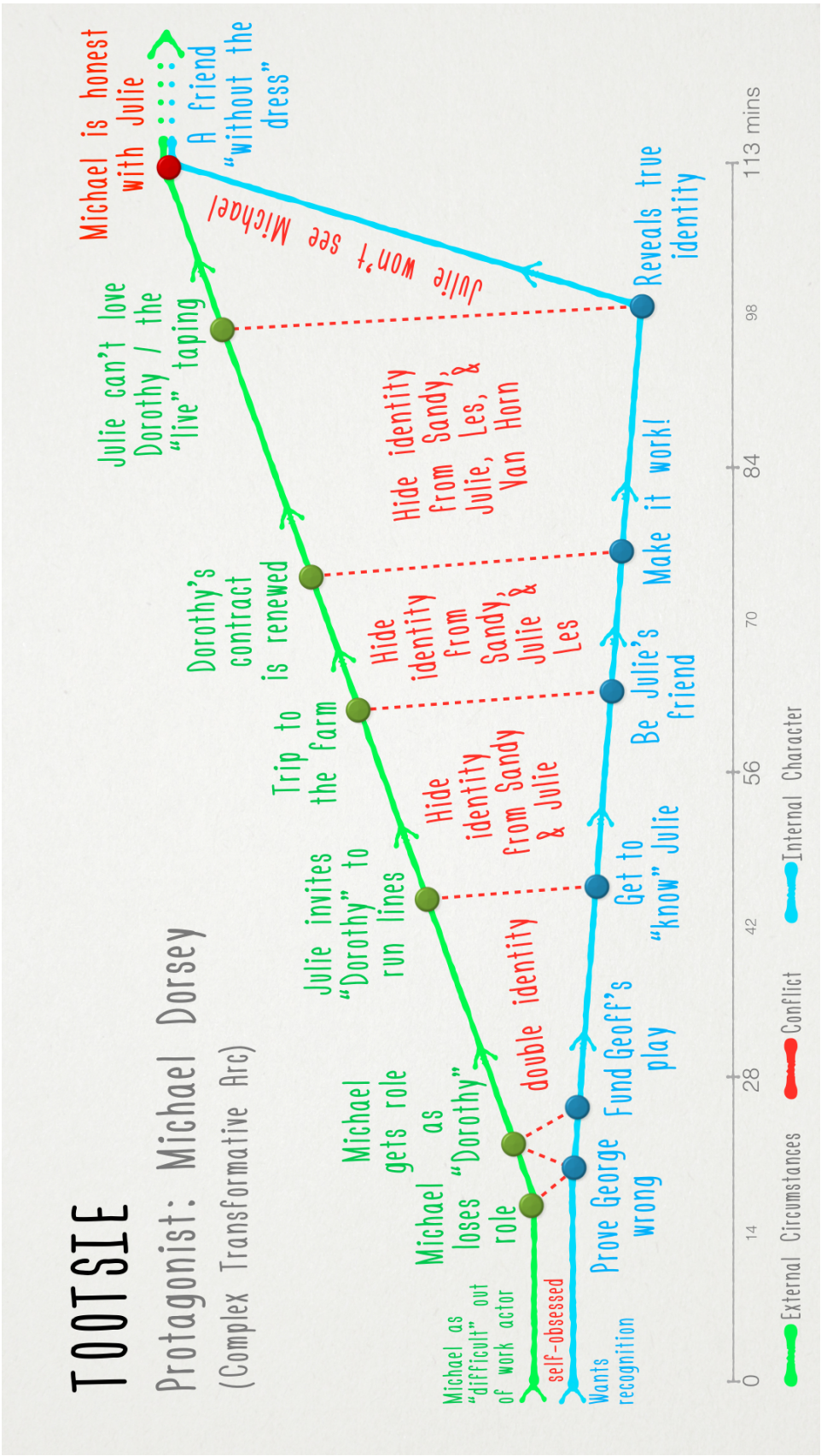
But the character's early choices DO NOT make things better and the conflict only grows. However, following another major complication towards the last part of the story, the character recognises their mistakes and **chooses a new approach.** This enables to them to resolve the conflict.

So, after making many mistakes, the character has gone through a major internal 'transformation' that has seen them **eventually** understand how to overcome the conflict.



Example of Complex Transformation – *Tootsie* (1982)

Original screenplay written by Murray Schisgal, Barry Levinson, Elaine May and Robert Garland



Ambivalent Transformational Arc

Sometimes, the character's choices only **PARTIALLY** resolve the conflict - they make a lot of **poor choices,** eventually **realise their mistakes** in time to change direction **but it's not enough** to completely resolve the conflict.

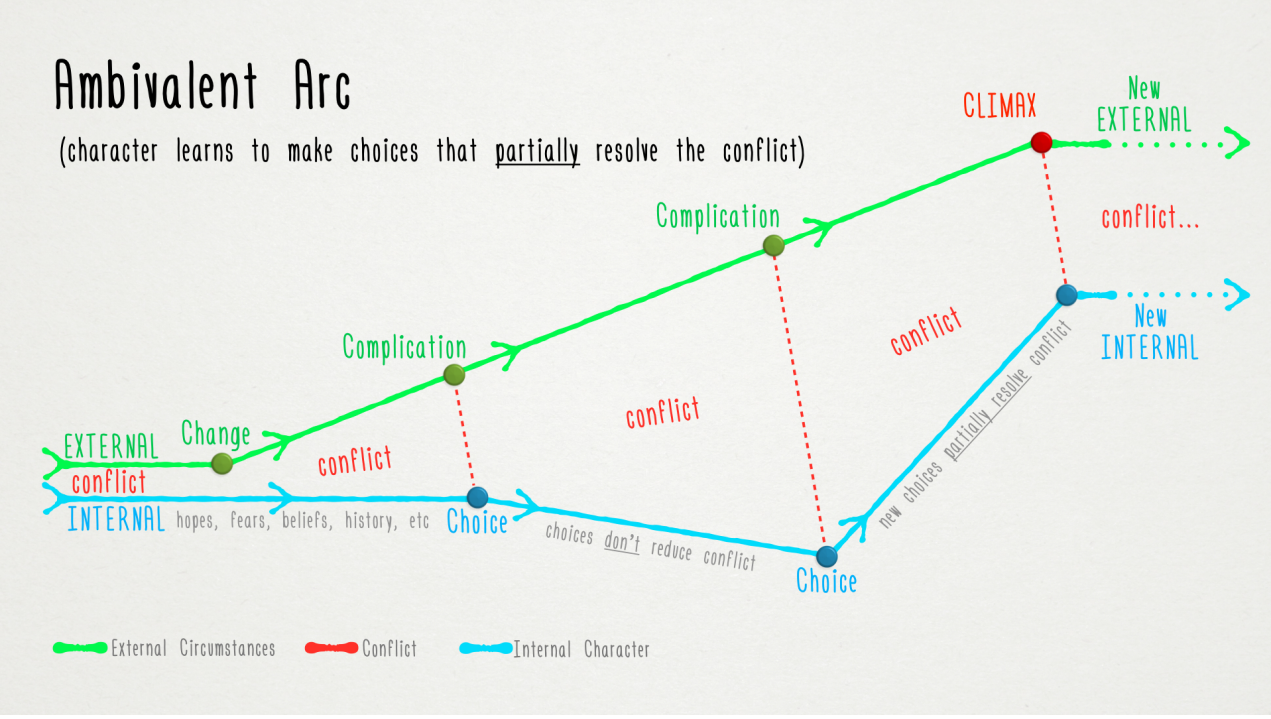
At the beginning, there is the usual **CHANGE** to the character's external world, creating **CONFLICT** with their internal world.

The character makes a **CHOICE** about what to do, sometimes spurred on by a major **COMPLICATION**.

But the choices the character makes at the beginning DO NOT help the situation and the conflict only grows.

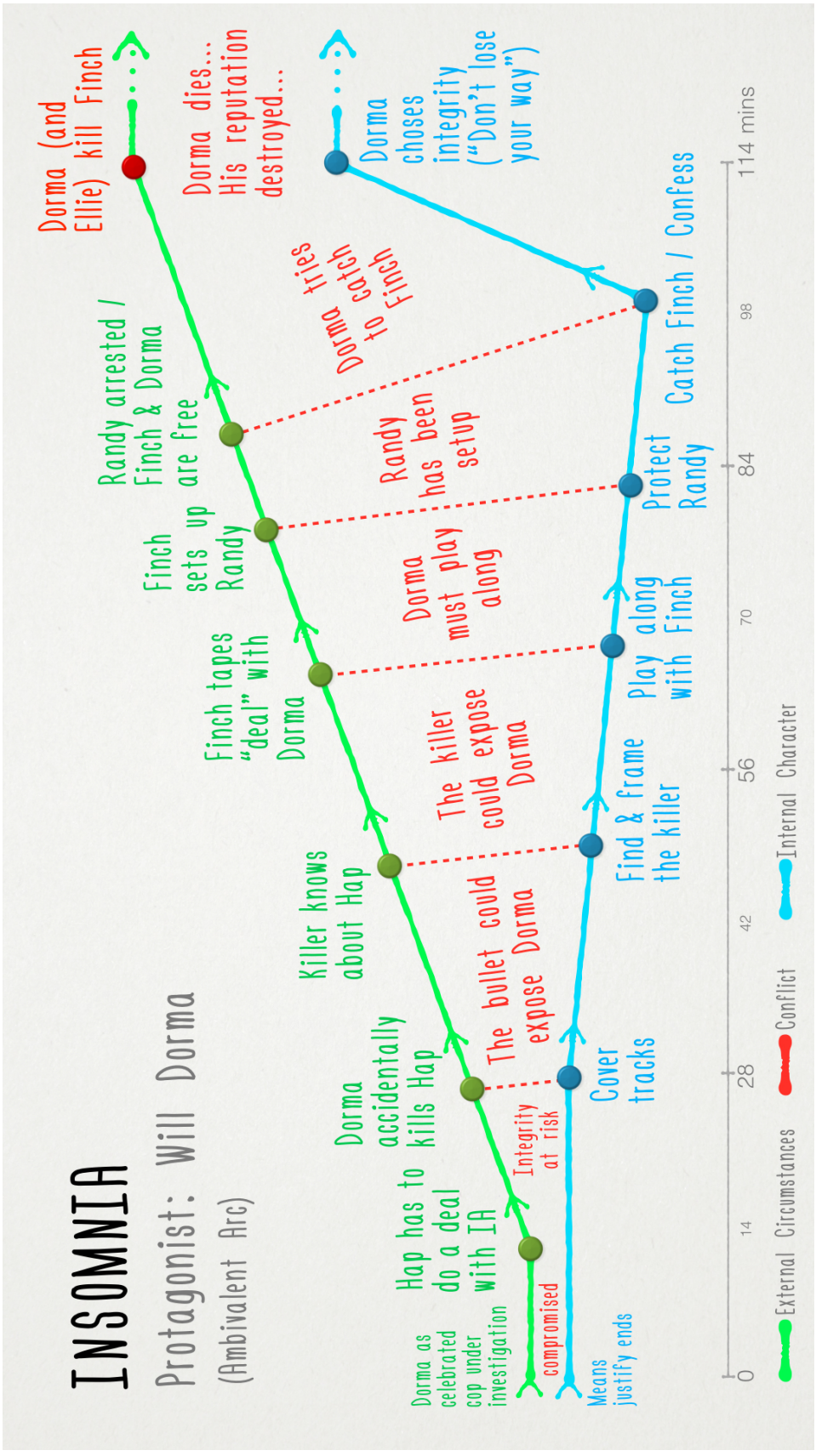
However, often after a major complication towards the end of the story, the character **chooses a new approach**. Things get better but **it's not enough to resolve the conflict completely**.

At the end of the story the character, having recognised their mistakes, has **undergone a major internal 'transformation'** but there is **still lingering conflict** that may, or may not, ever be resolved. This sort of story often has a **bitter-sweet quality** about it.



Example of Ambivalent Transformation Arc – *Insomnia* (2002)

Original screenplay written by Hilary Seitz



Tragic Arc

In a tragic arc, the character's choices **DO NOT resolve the conflict**. In fact, their choices generally **make things worse** and, tragically, they **don't recognise their mistakes** until it's **much too late** to do anything about it.

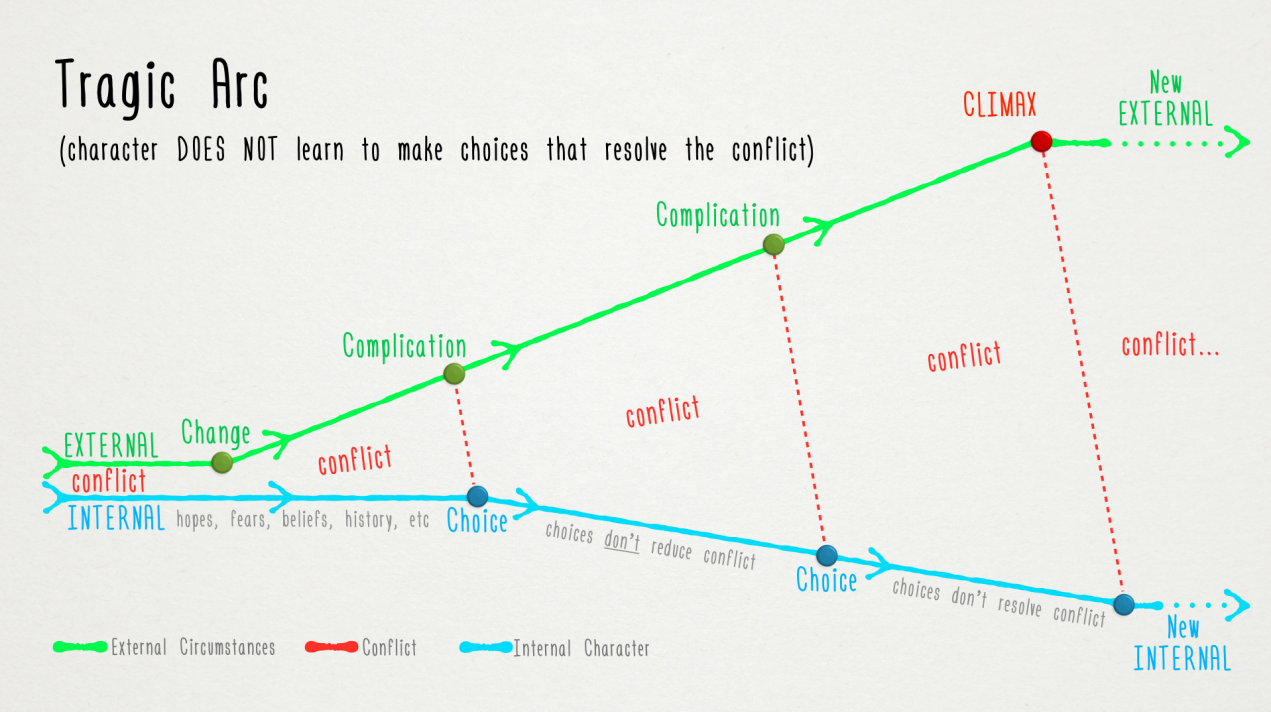
As the story begins, a **CHANGE** occurs in the character's external world to create a **CONFLICT** with their internal world.

The character makes a **CHOICE** about their course of action, perhaps following a major **COMPLICATION**.

But the character's choices throughout the entire story **DO NOT reduce the conflict** - even when they think they're doing the right thing. They just can't see, or don't care about, how they're contributing to the unfolding conflict.

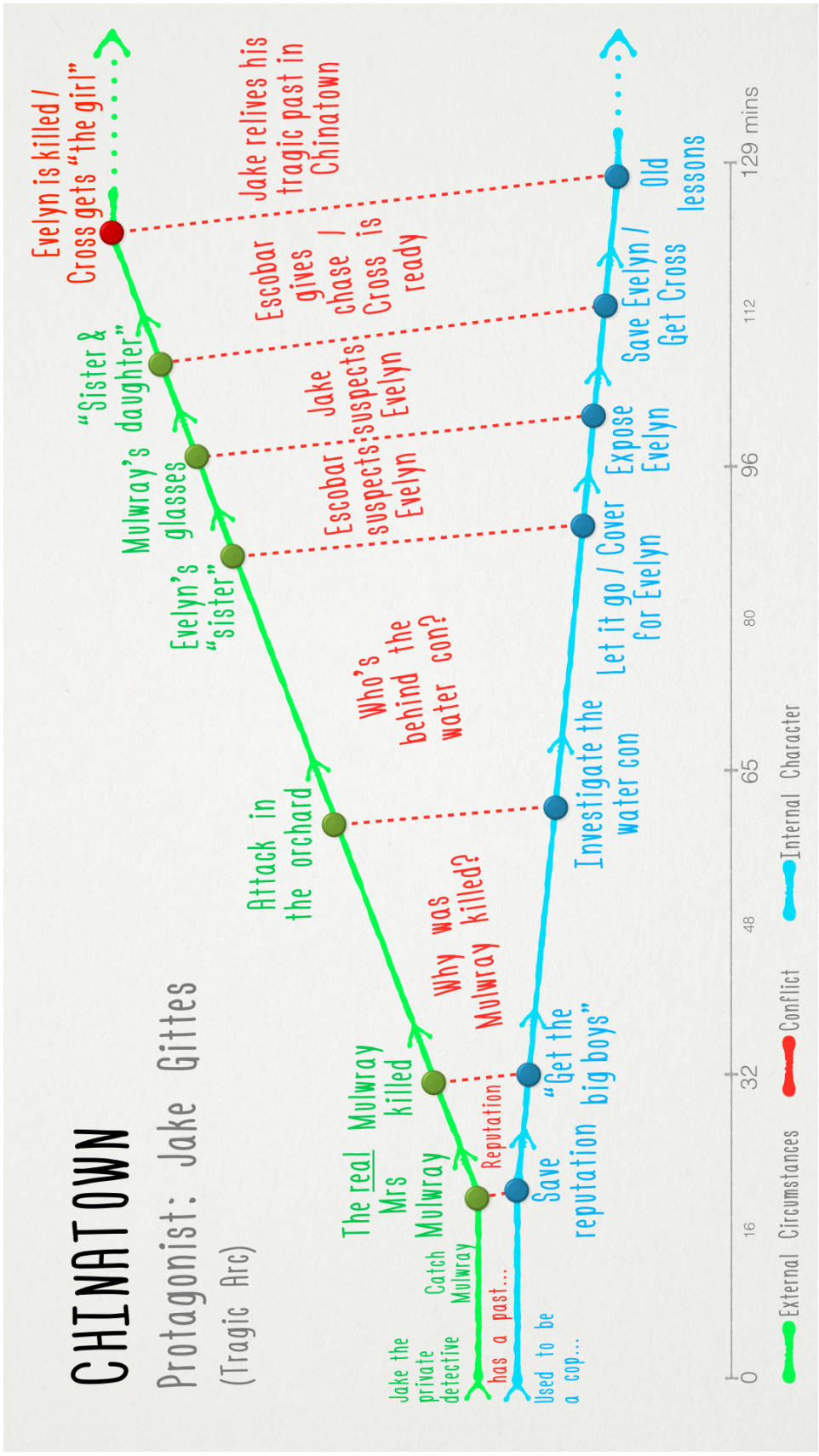
The story concludes with the character facing **on-going conflict** - perhaps forever.
In this sort of story, the character **may or may not go through an internal transformation**.

Either way, they fail to make choices that would have resolved the conflict. Often times this is because of an **unresolved conflict, or flaw, in their past**. Other times it's because they were **simply unprepared** for the conflict they faced in the story.



Example of Tragic Arc – *Chinatown* (1975)

Original screenplay written by Robert Towne



Static Arc

Some stories are shaped around a character with a 'static arc' - in others words, they **DON'T transform at all.** Their **USUAL choices,** informed by their existing internal goals, beliefs, values, etc are enough to overcome the conflict. These are characters of **great resilience**.

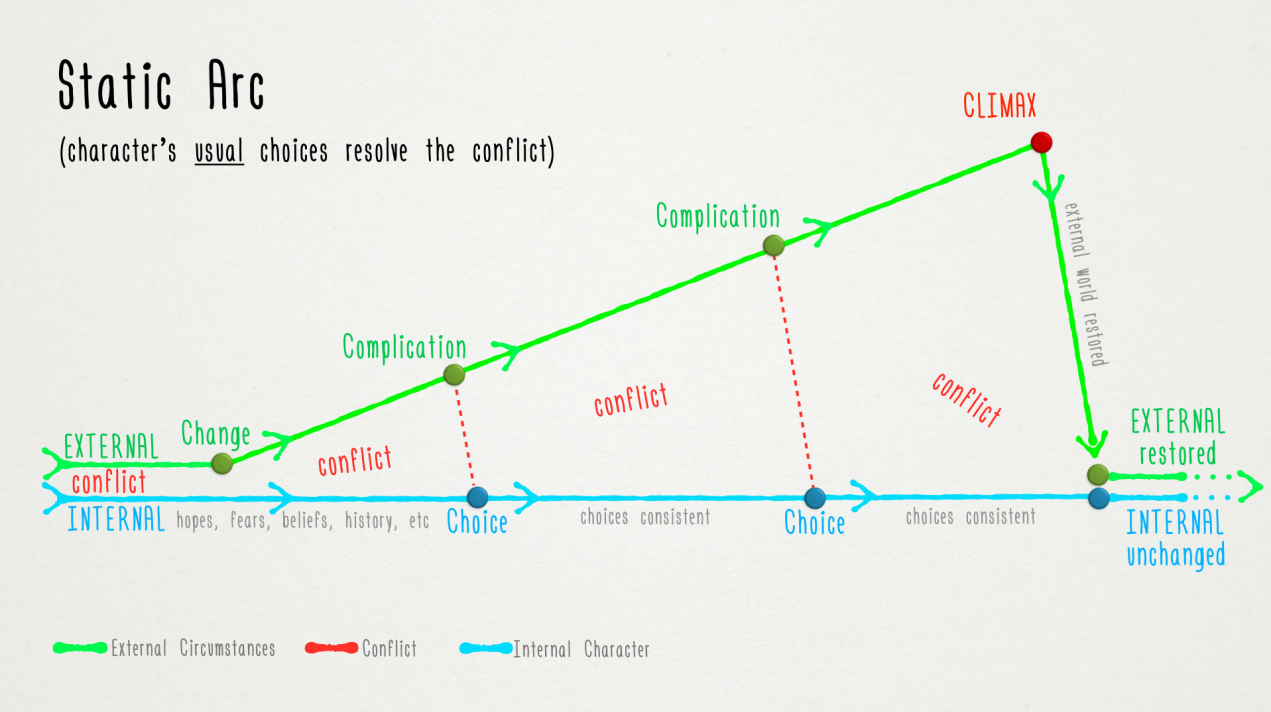
As with the beginning of most stories, a **CHANGE** occurs in the character's external world to create a **CONFLICT** with their internal world.

The character makes a **CHOICE** about what to do, sometimes following a major **COMPLICATION**.

But the character's internal choices from this point are **much the same as they were BEFORE the conflict**. They feel and understand the conflict but it **does not change the character internally.**

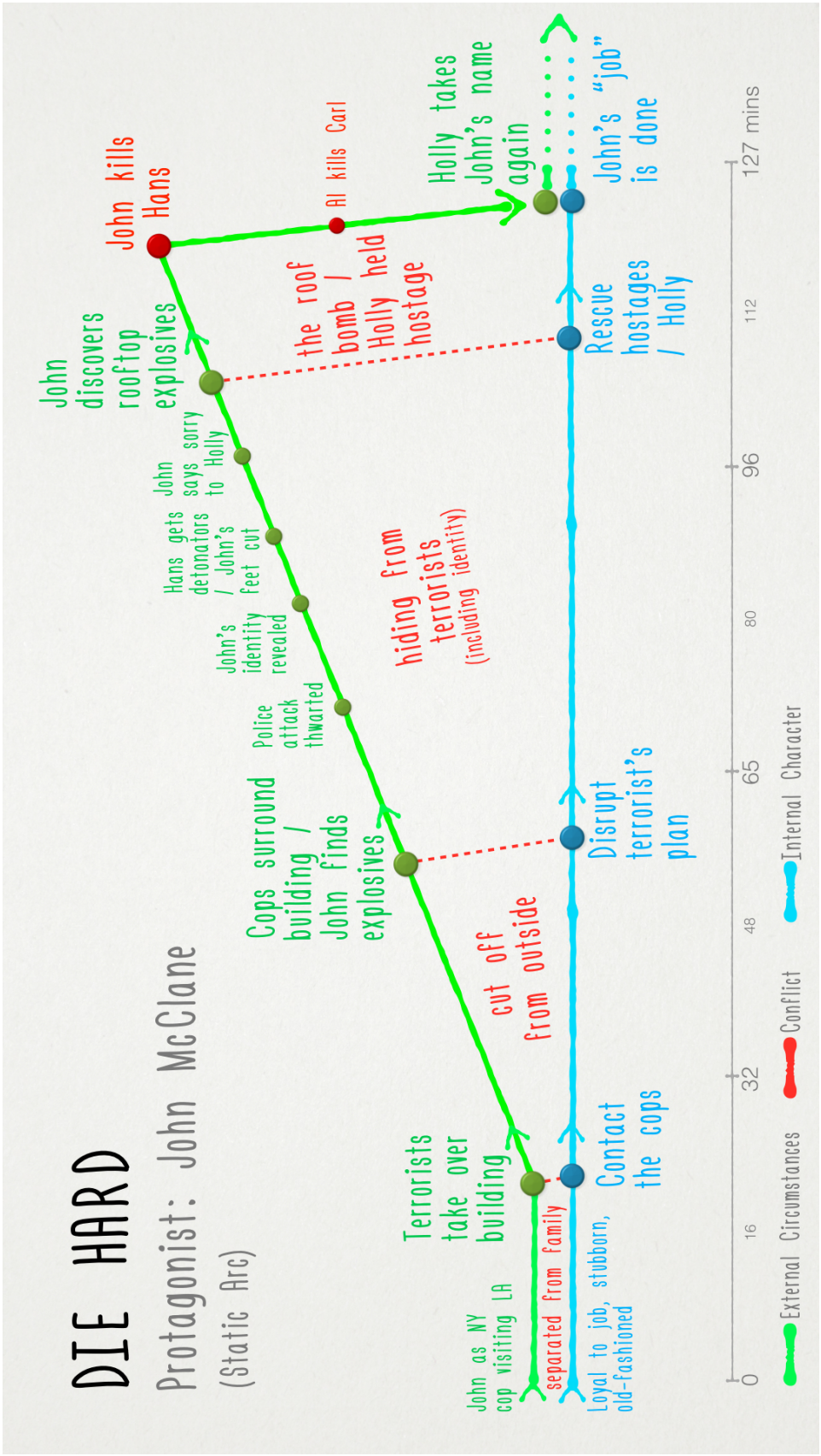
As the situation gets more complicated the character has the opportunity to go about things in a different way - **but they don't**. And eventually, **their resilience pays off**. The conflict is overcome and the way things were before is restored.

The external threat in a story like this is usually very big (i.e., global disaster) to make up for the **lack of change** in the character's inner life. Early James Bond films (pre-Daniel Craig) are good examples of this sort of story.



Example of a Static Arc – *Die Hard* (1988)

Original screenplay written by Steven E. de Souza and Jeb Stuart



Screenwriting with Stanislavsky

Major Studio Work #1: *Kelly Country*
(Television Series Pilot Script and Creative Bible)

Anthony Mullins
Bachelors of Arts (Media Production) – Griffith University
Masters by Research (Screenwriting) – QUT

Queensland College of Art
Arts, Education and Law
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree
Doctorate of Visual Arts

November 2014

MAJOR STUDIO WORK #1

KELLY COUNTRY
TV Series

EPISODE 1

Created and Written by
Anthony Mullins

January 2013

SERIES SYNOPSIS:
The Kelly family embark on a very unusual tree change.
Nothing will be the same again.

contact@anthonymullins.com
61 433 784 823

1 EXT. MOTEL - EARLY EVENING 1

A highway zooms past a cheap motel. It looks mostly empty, a few vehicles scattered around the carpark.

2 INT. MOTEL - EARLY EVENING 2

A WOMAN (mid 30s) rolls off a MAN (late 30s) and slumps onto the bed with post-coital satisfaction. They lie and catch their breath. This is SHANE and LIZ. SHANE's a tall, thickly built alpha. LIZ is all womanly curves. It looks like a typical motel love affair. LIZ snuggles closer.

LIZ
So, what's your name?

SHANE
What? Now?

LIZ
Sure. Tell me about yourself.

SHANE is reluctant. LIZ gives him a look - do it.

SHANE
OK. My name is Shane Kelly...

LIZ
What's your middle name?

SHANE
Michael.

LIZ
Age?

SHANE
37...

LIZ
Birthday?

SHANE
Uh, 20th of July, 1974.

LIZ
No it's not.

SHANE
Yes it is.

LIZ
(disparaging)
20th of June, 1974.

SHANE realises he's made a mistake.

SHANE
June. Got it, June.

LIZ
Keep going.

SHANE, indifferent now, like reading a shopping list.

SHANE
Grew up in Blacktown. Parents Dennis and Fiona. Shit at school, kicked out of a trade, worked in security on and off for 20 years. So, yeah. That's it.

LIZ
That's it?

SHANE is distracted, he's looking for something.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Where's the rest of the story?

SHANE
Where's the remote?

SHANE throws a dressing gown on and searches.

LIZ
Are you married? Kids? C'mon, you've gotta get this!

There's a knock at the door. SHANE opens the door. A couple of teenagers, CLEO (17) and MAX (13) casually walk in.

CLEO
I want my own room. Max was wanking in the toilet.

MAX
I was not!

SHANE keeps looking for the remote. LIZ covers up.

CLEO
Were you having sex?

LIZ gives a flirty look. CLEO is horrified.

CLEO (CONT'D)
Mum! UGH!

MAX
I was just reading in there. It wasn't anything dirty.

CLEO
I want my own room!

LIZ
You can't have your own room.

CLEO slumps dramatically on the bed.

SHANE's found the remote and turned on the TV - reception is terrible. Through the fuzz an AFL game is just starting. SHANE slaps the side of the TV.

SHANE
Piece of shit.

LIZ
(to CLEO)
I'm not buying it Cleo. We'll be living a lot closer together now - get used to it.

MAX
It was a scuba diving brochure! It was in the room!

Another knock at the door.

SHANE
Jesus! Anyone else want to join us?

SHANE opens the door to find a HUGE MAN in a casual suit waiting - this is MILLER.

SHANE (CONT'D)
What?

MILLER waits. SHANE sighs and reluctantly steps aside. MILLER enters and closes the door.

MILLER
We're on the move again, first thing in the morning.

SHANE
Where?

MILLER
Toowoomba.

SHANE
Where?

MILLER
You'll have a house this time. If it works out, you'll stay.

SHANE
What happened to Miami?

MILLER
Be ready to leave at 6.30.

MILLER abruptly opens the door and leaves.

CLEO
Where's Toomba?

MAX
Toowoomba. It's in Queensland. It's...

CLEO
Shut up.

SHANE and LIZ exchange a look. SHANE - not happy.

3 EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT 3

The motel sign lights up - "Air-Con, Pool, Restaurant".

4 INT. MOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT 4

CLOSE on a large plasma screen. An AFL game in progress. A player lines up a mark but is king hit by an opponent.

COMMENTATOR (O.S.)
And that's high. Yes, it's a penalty.

SHANE watches the game from a restaurant table, engrossed.

SHANE
Soft.

The rest of the FAMILY are across from SHANE. The restaurant is cheap. Apart from them, its empty.

LIZ and CLEO are reading menus. MAX has a smartphone.

MAX
(reading)
"Toowoomba is famous for its flower shows, beautiful churches and sprawling green farm lands. It's called the Garden City but it's aboriginal name means 'reeds in the swamp'".

MAX finds this weirdly funny.

CLEO
Why are you laughing? It's a swamp.

LIZ
It's not a swamp.

MAX
Hey Dad. 'Reeds in the swamp'.

SHANE
(at the TV)
Kick it ya clown!

LIZ
Shane, show some interest - we're going to live there.

SHANE
We're not going to live there, they said it'd be Miami. And you don't have to call me Shane.

LIZ
I do have to call you Shane, Shane. We've all got to get used to this sooner or later.

The game cuts to a news report.

NEWSREADER
Melbourne crime lords, Brendan and Lon Deminsky, have been found guilty of the murder of three rivals...

The whole family turn and watch the screen, transfixed.

ON SCREEN: Police photos of the Deminsky brothers - cold, dead eyes.

A sharp look from LIZ to SHANE - TURN IT OFF! SHANE is up and looking for the power switch on the TV.

ON SCREEN: The Deminsky Brothers are lead to a police van. BRENDAN, turns to camera and fixes it with a chilling gaze.

SHANE glances at the screen, unnverved - it's as if BRENDAN DEMINSKY can see him through the screen.

NEWSREADER (CONT'D)
The conviction comes after a lengthy trial made possible by...

And the way SHANE pulls the power from the wall suggests he had a LOT to do with making the trial possible.

He sits down, picks up his menu. The mood is fragile.

SHANE
Right. What's everyone having?

CLEO
I'm not hungry.

SHANE sees everyone's stress. He clocks a cake display.

SHANE
Well I’m just gonna have cake.

LIZ
(disbelieving)
Shane...

SHANE
Who’s with me?

MAX looks furtively between Mum and Dad - commits.

MAX
The triple choc! I want that.

SHANE
Yeah, me too.
(turns to CLEO)
What about you?

CLEO smirks, tempted.

SHANE (CONT’D)
Three slices!

LIZ laughs.

SHANE (CONT’D)
Four! Stuff it, bring the whole thing.
(to OS waiter)
Garcon!

MAX
Garcon!

SHANE
Bring cake. All of it!!

They all laugh - the tension broken. This is a family.

5 EXT. TOOWOOMBA ESTABLISHER - DAY 5

Seen from above, a winding road curls up the range and into the bustling town.

A main street of old world arcades and modern shopping centres. A few cowboy hats are dotted through the crowds.

A spectacular council garden explodes with vibrant flowers.

6 EXT. KELLY HOUSE - DAY 6

An aging Queenslander - on stumps, wrap around verandah, tin roof. Tons of charm but it’s seen better days.

A mini van pulls up in front. The KELLYS pile out, followed by MILLER. SHANE and LIZ look at the house, unimpressed.

MILLER
(reading their minds)
This is the place.

On SHANE - no way.

7 INT. KELLY HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY 7

Sunlight pours in through a broken window. The walls are peeling paint, the floorboards are weathered. No furniture.

A rattle in the front door - it swings open. MAX rushes in and starts looking around from room to room.

MAX
Wow, it's like a haunted house.

SHANE and LIZ enter, followed tentatively by CLEO. No one's happy. LIZ tries to be positive.

LIZ
It's got a certain...
(gives up)
I don't know.

CLEO
It's a dump. A dump in a swamp.

CLEO spins on her heel and stomps out, narrowly avoiding a WOMAN coming up the front steps. She's dressed sharply in a suit, neat shoulder length hair. She's all business.

SHANE and the WOMAN clock each other.

WOMAN
Shane?

SHANE nods, wary. The WOMAN holds out her hand.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Melanie Cook. I'm your relocation officer.

SHANE shakes her hand. LIZ appears.

LIZ
Hi I'm Liz. Liz Kelly.

MELANIE nods, acknowledging what Liz called herself.

MELANIE
Melanie.

They shake. An awkward silence.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Welcome.

MELANIE gestures around the drab house. She picks up on SHANE and LIZ's disappointment.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
I know it doesn't look much right now but we can help with that...

SHANE
What happened to Miami?

MELANIE
Miami is no longer an option for...

SHANE
I was told Miami wouldn't be a problem.

MELANIE
US immigration rejected your application.

LIZ
Why?

MELANIE
They don't have to say.

SHANE
But our interview went really well. They said we fitted the criteria.

MELANIE
Did they ask what you could offer the American way of life?

SHANE
Yeah.

MELANIE
And?

SHANE
(smirking)
I said I could teach their footballers to harden up a bit. Wear less armour.

MELANIE nods. LIZ groans. SHANE can't believe it.

SHANE (CONT'D)
I was joking!

LIZ
No you weren't.

MELANIE
Like I said, they don't have to say why but...

SHANE
Bullshit.

MELANIE
We should get started - we've got a few things to go through.

MELANIE heads in the kitchen. LIZ eyeballs SHANE - Later!

8 INT. KELLY HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY 8

CLOSE on a passport - it's SHANE's. He looks pretty grumpy.

SHANE places the passport on the kitchen bench amongst a series of other passports, licenses, birth certificates and ID documents for the whole family.

MELANIE
All good?

SHANE nods. The reality of the situation is setting in.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
OK, I need you both to sign this to say you received the documents.

SHANE goes to sign and hesitates - he doesn't like this.

LIZ
What's the matter?

SHANE
You jacks are all bloody liars.

MELANIE
What are you talking about?

SHANE gestures around the run down kitchen.

SHANE
This isn't what we were promised.

MELANIE
No one lied to you, this is exactly what you were promised.

SHANE
What? Swap everything that we had, <u>everything</u>, for this shithole?

MELANIE
You were promised a safe place to live, a job, a car and your freedom. I know this isn't much right now but don't forget to add 15 years of your life to it. Minimum.

SHANE seethes but he knows it's true.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Now you don't have to sign these form. It's your choice if you want to become Shane and Liz Kelly. But I can't help protect you if you don't.

LIZ looks at SHANE, worried. MELANIE sees her stress and, almost imperceptibly, softens.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
I know, this is hard. So what do you want to do?

SHANE stares at the form. He turns to LIZ.

SHANE
I'm sorry about all this love.

LIZ shakes her head with infinite acceptance.

LIZ
We're in this together.

SHANE picks up a pen and signs the form. LIZ puts her arm around SHANE. She signs it too. MELANIE takes the forms, checks them.

MELANIE
OK. It's done. You're now Shane and Liz Kelly with two children, Max and Cleo.

SHANE
Right.
(beat)
So do I kiss the bride?

SHANE and LIZ kiss. MELANIE looks at her watch.

MELANIE
S'pose. Be quick. You've got a job interview.

On SHANE - Huh?

9 EXT. KELLY HOUSE - DAY 9

MELANIE leads SHANE, now neatly dressed in jeans and button up shirt, towards an old Ford Falcon (2001ish model). LIZ is close behind.

SHANE
So it's a security job?

MELANIE
It's with council. Just tell them the story you've been prepping.

MELANIE throws SHANE some keys and points to the Ford.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
You drive.

SHANE
Bullshit. I only drive Holdens.

MELANIE
Not anymore. You love Fords now.

SHANE - Not happy. MELANIE hands LIZ a credit card.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
This has some money for furniture. Take the kids shopping.

LIZ
Great!

MELANIE
Be careful. It's not endless.

MELANIE climbs in the car. SHANE starts it. LIZ waves and turns to the house.

LIZ
Hey kids, let's go shopping!

10 EXT. TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY 10

The Ford drives past - it wobbles on the road a little.

11 INT. SHANE'S CAR - DAY 11

SHANE jerks the steering left and right, testing it.

SHANE
This steering's sloppy.

MELANIE
I think we got off on the wrong foot.

SHANE
Fords are shit.

MELANIE
I want you to know I don't lie to clients. I'll always tell you how I see it. Straight up. No bullshit.

SHANE ignores MELANIE - she'll have to try harder.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Look this is going to be the hardest thing you've ever done, I shit you not, but I reckon you're ready for it.

SHANE throws MELANIE a filthy look.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
I've heard the tapes. You've wanted out for years.

SHANE
I was happy to do the time. It was Lizzy's idea.

MELANIE
You're full of shit.

SHANE
And what the fuck would you know?

ON MELANIE - she takes it as a challenge.

MELANIE
Footscray under 19's. They call you "Crunch". Steve "Crunch" Cosser, the big hitting centre half-forward.

SHANE's cagey - he didn't see this coming.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
You're headed for the league, it's yours for the taking. <u>The dream</u>. Then you start missing training. Word is you're hanging out with the Deminskys. Within a season...gone. No one understands, your team, your mates. No one. Seems like you threw it all away. All that potential.

SHANE glowers at the memory. MELANIE continues, relentless.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
But if they heard those tapes, they'd know, like <u>I know</u> - you didn't have a choice.
(MORE)

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Your big hits were legendary. Made grow men shit their pants. That's why the Deminskys wanted you. And you don't get to say no to the Deminskys, do you?

SHANE looks straight ahead, his eyes fixed on the road.

12 EXT. SHOPPING CENTRE - DAY 12

The KELLYS and MILLER pile out of the minivan. LIZ, now glammed up a little, heads for the entrance. MAX runs ahead while CLEO sulks behind. As LIZ approaches the door an OLDER COUPLE catch her eye, they smile.

ELDERLY MAN
Morning.

LIZ, a little thrown.

LIZ
Er, hi.

They keep walking. LIZ gets to the door at the same time as a YOUNG GUY (20's) wearing an Akubra. He stops to let her go first, tipping his hat.

YOUNG GUY
Good morning.

LIZ enters, smiling awkwardly - why's everyone so friendly?

13 INT. SHOPPING CENTRE - DAY 13

LIZ at a teller machine swiping the card MELANIE gave her. The balance says $6000. LIZ turns to MILLER.

LIZ
Mel's given me the wrong card.

MILLER
That's the right card.

LIZ
It's only got six grand on it.

MILLER
That's correct. That's your budget.

LIZ is astonished.

LIZ
I've had coffee tables that cost more than that!

MILLER just shrugs.

On LIZ - welcome to your new life.

14 EXT. COUNCIL CAR PARK - DAY 14

SHANE and MELANIE pull up. MELANIE hands SHANE a piece of paper.

MELANIE
You're from Sydney, you've been working in security, you know the story.

SHANE
What happens if I don't get the job.

MELANIE
You'll get the job.

SHANE
What if I don't want the job.

MELANIE
Deal's off.

SHANE
Just like that?

MELANIE
Just like that. We're not your personal employment agency.

SHANE, unimpressed.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Look Shane, you had a shit sandwich to eat no matter what. My personal opinion, which I guarantee you won't hear very often, is I think you made the right choice. My professional advice, however, is you should shut the fuck up and eat your shit sandwich. Yeah?

SHANE frowns at MELANIE's pep talk. He nods, knows she's right - he appreciates the brutal (and graphic) honesty.

15 INT. COUNCIL OFFICES, FRONT DESK - DAY 15

The sliding doors open and SHANE enters. A YOUNG COUPLE who are leaving smile at him.

YOUNG MAN
G'day.

SHANE is thrown - were they talking to him? He heads for the front desk and hands the piece of paper to the FEMALE CLERK.

CLERK
(very friendly)
Hi there. How are you today?

SHANE
Er. Fine.

CLERK
(looking at the paper)
What have you got here?

SHANE
It's for a job...

CLERK
Of course! Follow me.

The CLERK ushers SHANE through a door. SHANE smiles to himself - what's with all this friendliness?

16 INT. SHOPPING CENTRE, BED SECTION - DAY 16

LIZ, MAX and CLEO stroll through rows of beds. LIZ is concentrating hard and writing things down on a notepad. CLEO looks utterly glum until she sees an elaborate four poster bed. She jumps on it and rolls around extravagantly.

CLEO
Look Mum! It's just like my old one. I want it!

LIZ looks at the price tag - $4000. Her look gives CLEO the bad news.

CLEO (CONT'D)
What? How pov are we now?

LIZ
C'mon.

LIZ walks away. CLEO flops onto the bed, sighs loudly for the whole store to hear. LIZ doesn't look back.

17 INT. COUNCIL OFFICES, MAINTENANCE GARAGE - DAY 17

A group of men in dirty overalls are playing hacky-sack by a line of ride-on-mowers. They laugh loudly amongst themselves. The CLERK leads SHANE through and knocks on an office door.

18 INT. COUNCIL OFFICES, LOCKY'S OFFICE - DAY 18

A neatly dressed MAN in short sleeves and a tie works at a desk. This is LOCKY.

CLERK
Locky. Your interview is here.

LOCKY gets up and enthusiastically offers his hand to SHANE.

LOCKY
Shane isn't it?

SHANE
Yeah. Shane Kelly.

LOCKY
You come highly recommended.

SHANE
Great. So I've got the job?

LOCKY laughs boisterously, a little too much.

ON SHANE - bemused.

LOCKY
Not just yet Tiger. C'mon let's have a cuppa, tell me about yourself. Whataya have?

19 INT. SHOPPING CENTRE - DAY 19

MAX lands in a HUGE beanbag - it almost swallows him whole.

LIZ walks past. MAX, a huge smile on his face, turns to her.

LIZ
Nope.

LIZ keeps walking. MAX's smiles disappears. CLEO walks past.

CLEO
This is the most depressing shopping trip ever.

MAX turns and sees something else - his eyes light up. He leaps off the beanbag and is gone.

20 INT. COUNCIL OFFICES, TEA ROOM - DAY 20

ON LOCKY, listening intently, a coffee cup in his hand. SHANE telling his story...and he sounds convincing.

SHANE
The late nights didn't worry me so much, you get used to that in security, but it just didn't pay enough for us to afford a house in Sydney. I mean, you know what the prices are like there...

LOCKY
Oh yeah, HUGE!

SHANE
Anyway, it was one rent hike too many and we were like, this is it, time for a tree change. Lizzy always wanted to live in the country and it's a great place to raise the kids.

LOCKY
Kids? How many?

SHANE
Two. Max is 13, Cleo's 17. She's the handful.

LOCKY pulls out his wallet and opens it - a photo of a WOMAN and BABY BOY. SHANE looks.

LOCKY
These are mine.

SHANE
Yeah, beautiful.

LOCKY
Aren't they. Praise Jesus.

It clicks for SHANE - LOCKY's a Jesus freak.

SHANE
Beautiful.

LOCKY is lost in the photo for a second. He snaps out of it.

LOCKY
So, how are you with early mornings?

SHANE
No probs. And like I said, I'm happy to do the night shifts too.

LOCKY
(bemused)
Well we don't get a lot of late night calls but duly noted.

LOCKY puts out his hand to shake.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
Start tomorrow? 6.00am?

SHANE
No probs.

SHANE is surprised how easy it was.

21 INT. COUNCIL OFFICES, MAINTENANCE GARAGE - DAY 21

LOCKY leads SHANE out the door.

LOCKY
See you tomorrow.

LOCKY walks towards the MEN gathered around the ride-ons.

SHANE remembers something, turns back.

SHANE
Hey, you need me to wear a tie?

LOCKY
A tie?

LOCKY points at the gathered MEN, all dressed in dirty overalls and muddy boots.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
What do you reckon? Look at these grubs!

The MEN all laugh. SHANE is bewildered.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
This is Shane everyone. Starts tomorrow.

Each man offers SHANE a handshake and introduces themselves with the same wholesome smiles and friendliness of LOCKY - it's all a little...cultish.

SHANE looks around the garage - whipper snippers, shovels, wheel barrows, bags of mulch.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
Just bring a hat.

It dawns on SHANE - this isn't a security job.

22 EXT. COUNCIL OFFICES, PARKING LOT - DAY 22

SHANE gets back to the car. He leans through the window.

MELANIE
How'd you go?

SHANE
You got me a job as a gardener!

MELANIE
Yeah.

SHANE gets in and slams the door.

SHANE
I don't know ANYTHING about gardening.

MELANIE
You don't have to.

SHANE
Didn't you read my CV? Wait a minute - didn't you WRITE my CV? I'm a security guard.

MELANIE
The whole point of building a new identity is to become someone you weren't before - it makes it harder to track you down.

SHANE
Well no one's going to find me there because I won't be there.

MELANIE
Yes you will. It's the deal.

SHANE looks at MELANIE and knows she's not joking. He angrily turns the ignition and revs the car.

SHANE
You know they're all Jesus freaks?

MELANIE
That's Locky. He takes all sorts with shady backgrounds. Part of his "mission". Lucky for you he doesn't ask questions.

SHANE
What if I get fired?

MELANIE
(scoffs)
Locky never fires anyone.

SHANE
Yeah? We'll see about that.

SHANE, frustrated, puts the car into gear - the gears crunch.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Fucking shit box!

The car revs and speeds away.

23 INT. KELLY HOUSE, KITCHEN, BEDROOM - DAY 23

LIZ at the table with a calculator and notepad. She finishes a calculation, looks concerned.

24 INT. KELLY HOUSE, CLEO'S ROOM - DAY 24

CLEO, SHANE and MAX try and assemble CLEO's bed. SHANE seems to be having a particularly hard time working out what to do.

MAX
Now hand me bracket F.

SHANE
This one?

MAX
No. That's a strut.

SHANE
Why didn't we just get one that was already assembled?

CLEO
This was cheaper.

MAX
It's also more eco-friendly.

CLEO
Shut up retard and pass me the allen key.

LIZ appears at the door with calculator and notepad.

LIZ
How much do you earn a week?

SHANE
'Bout $700.

LIZ
Before tax?

SHANE
Yeah. Think so.

LIZ groans and recalculates.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Don't worry. It's temporary. I'll look for something else.

LIZ
I'm going to look around for some part-time work.

SHANE
What? No way...

LIZ
We're all going to have to make sacrifices.

CLEO
(indicating her bed)
Like we haven't already?

LIZ
I mean more.

Everyone looks at LIZ - more?

LIZ (CONT'D)
Like no mobiles for you guys.

CLEO
What!?!?! How am I supposed to make friends?

LIZ
They're a potential security risk anyway.

CLEO
This is child abuse!

SHANE
Can you be a little mature about this? Like Max.

MAX has moved on, engrossed in the bed construction again.

CLEO
He doesn't need a mobile because he doesn't have any friends!

LIZ
Hey!

MAX stops - that hurt.

MAX
Make your own bed.

MAX stomps out.

SHANE
Hey buddy, come back! I need you.

But he's gone.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Great.
(turning on CLEO)
You're being selfish. We've all got to make sacrifices.

LIZ
Your father's going to have to give up his cable subscription.

SHANE
What?

This is news to SHANE - TERRIBLE NEWS.

SHANE (CONT'D)
No way. How am I supposed to watch the game?

LIZ
Go down the pub.

SHANE
Queenslanders HATE AFL. I'll get lynched if I try and watch it in a pub.

LIZ
I don't care. Neither of you have a choice. We can't afford it.

CLEO
(to SHANE)
I wish you'd just gone to gaol like you should have!

SHANE doesn't react - he's had this before.

LIZ
Nicole!
(correcting herself)
I mean...

CLEO
My name's Cleo now! Thanks to him!

CLEO pushes past.

LIZ
You chose that name young lady!

LIZ goes to pursue CLEO but SHANE stops her.

SHANE
Leave her. It's OK.

LIZ
She shouldn't say that.

SHANE
I'm getting used to it.

SHANE hugs LIZ, calming her. LIZ sighs, sinks into his arms.

SHANE (CONT'D)
(the budget)
It's that bad?

LIZ
It's that bad.

SHANE
You'll work your magic.

LIZ
The interest on zero is still zero.

SHANE shrugs - he doesn't understand financial stuff.

CLEO (O.S.)
ARRGGHHH!

MAX (O.S.)
Get out. I'm in here!

LIZ
Jesus, what now?

25 INT. KELLY HOUSE, HALL - CONTINUOUS 25

SHANE and LIZ rush to investigate. CLEO pushes past them.

CLEO
And I want my own bathroom again!

From the end of the hall, the toilet flushes. LIZ smirks.

LIZ
We're all going to have to learn to share. We'll be closer as a family.

SFX - Plumbing pipes bang ominously.

SHANE
What's that...?

SFX - A loud shudder, then gushing water.

MAX
ARGHHHHHH!

SHANE rushes and opens the toilet door. MAX comes running out. Water is spraying from a tap in the back wall.

SHANE
What'd you do?

MAX
Just a number two!

SHANE
No...never mind.

SHANE tries to turn off the tap but it comes off in his hand.

LIZ
The mains. It'll be somewhere downstairs.

SHANE
Where?

LIZ
I don't know, just find it! We'll deal with this.

LIZ and MAX start unwrapping their brand new towels and throwing them on the growing flood. SHANE bolts out the back.

26 EXT. KELLY HOUSE, BACKYARD - DAY 26

SHANE, covered in water, races down the back stairs. He looks under the house - it's a cramped, dark crawl space about a metre high. Cobwebs and dust everywhere. SHANE hesitates.

LIZ (O.S.)
Hurry!

SHANE, down on his hands and knees, dives in.

27 EXT. KELLY HOUSE, UNDER HOUSE - DAY 27

SHANE crawls through the space, dust kicking up as he goes. It's dark and hard to see.

LIZ (O.S.)
Look for the mains tap!

SHANE scans the floors above him but it's a maze of old pipes and electrics - he's way out of his depth.

28 INT. KELLY HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY 28

LIZ and MAX try and soak up the flood with towels but it's a losing battle. CLEO comes out to see what's happening - she's horrified.

LIZ
Cleo. Get some newspapers quick.

CLEO
Ewww. It's toilet water!

LIZ
No, it's not toilet water...

But CLEO runs away. LIZ groans.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Shane! Hurry!

29 EXT. KELLY HOUSE, UNDER HOUSE - DAY 29

SHANE, still lost.

SHANE
I can't find it!

LIZ (O.S.)
Follow the pipes.

But it's quite dim. SHANE reaches up and feels for a pipe.

As he searches, something falls. SHANE looks down to see what it is and discovers a MASSIVE COCKROACH clinging to his arm. SHANE, the big stand over man, completely loses it.

SHANE
ARRRGHHH!

SHANE, waving his hand, scurries backwards and smacks his head on a floor beam. He collapses to the ground and lies there, dazed.

SFX - The pipes knock loudly. The gushing water stops.

MAX (O.S.)
Yay! You did it!

SHANE sits up, holding his head, confused.

SHANE
I didn't do anything.

SHANE, had enough, starts to make his way out.

As he does, he sees the LEGS of a TALL MAN striding up the side of the yard.

SHANE, instantly alert, wary - <u>who the hell is that?</u>

The TALL MAN is headed for the backstairs - he's going into the house!

SHANE scrambles across the ground to intercept the danger.

30 EXT. KELLY HOUSE, BACKYARD - DAY 30

SHANE leaps out from under the house, ready for action.

SHANE
Hey!

The TALL MAN stops and turns - he's about 70 years old. SHANE wasn't expecting this. The MAN looks at SHANE, covered in dirt and mud, and smiles.

TALL MAN
Bloody plumbing's gone again hasn't it.

SHANE, still wary, nods.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)
I'm Alan. Live next door.

SHANE, relaxes, nods.

ALAN points to SHANE's shoulder - the MASSIVE COCKROACH is crawling over it. SHANE freaks again, desperately swiping.

31 INT. KELLY HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY 31

ALAN tightens a new tap to the wall as LIZ and SHANE look on.

ALAN
I was always over here when Geraldine was alive. Poor old dear couldn't afford the upkeep on the place. But there was no way they could convince her to leave. She died on this toilet you know.

SHANE and LIZ look at each other.

SHANE
Right...Alan, can you not tell the kids that?

ALAN
Sure.

ALAN finishes and gets up.

ALAN (CONT'D)
That should do it.

SHANE
Thanks again. You want a cup of...

LIZ shoots SHANE a look.

SHANE (CONT'D)
...something? Or not?

ALAN
(not noticing the look)
No thanks, better be gettin' back. But how about you lot come over to ours for lunch sometime, once you've settled in.

SHANE
Yeah, that'd be great...

LIZ shoots SHANE another look.

SHANE (CONT'D)
...sometime...

LIZ
Still a lot to unpack.

SHANE
Yeah. Unpacking.

ALAN smiles - blissfully unaware of the tension.

ALAN
No worries! Just give us a hoi.

LIZ and SHANE smile uncomfortably.

32 EXT. KELLY HOUSE, ENTRANCE - EVENING 32

SHANE and LIZ wave ALAN off from the front steps.

SHANE
What was that?

LIZ
Everyone's so bloody nice. It gives me the creeps. Besides we're meant to keep a low profile.

SHANE
People'll get suss if we snob them.

LIZ
I'm not snobbing anyone.

SHANE
I didn't say you were.

LIZ
I'm being careful.

ALAN bends down on the footpath and reaches into a hole. He turns something. The pipes in the house clunk.

ALAN
(calling out)
That's where your mains is.

SHANE
Thanks!

SHANE waves and subtly shoves LIZ - she waves.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Alan?

ALAN looks around. SHANE and LIZ see an ELDERLY WOMAN wandering around ALAN'S backyard near a huge gardening shed - she looks a little distressed.

ALAN
I'm here Pet.

ALAN waves to SHANE and LIZ. They watch as he trots into the backyard and embraces the WOMAN - he is very gentle with her and speaks soothingly.

SHANE
His wife?

LIZ watches as they disappear inside the house.

LIZ
None of our business.

LIZ goes inside. SHANE is curious.

33 INT. KELLY HOUSE, KITCHEN - EVENING 33

CLOSE on SHANE'S WALLET. A hand picks up the wallet. It's CLEO. She expertly slips a $50 bill from it and puts it back. CLEO turns to make her escape but MAX is there. He's seen it all. A stand off between them.

CLEO
Don't say anything.

MAX
If they ask me, I'm not going to lie.

CLEO frowns, genuinely bewildered.

CLEO
Why not? Your whole life's a lie now.

CLEO, defiant, leaves. MAX thinks about what she said - it seems to hit home for him.

34 INT. KELLY HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT 34

ON A TV SCREEN: A report into the sentencing of the Deminsky brothers.

NEWSREADER (O.S.)
The brothers Lon and Brendan Deminsky were sentenced today to twenty years without parole over the gangland killing of three associates...

SHANE watches it in the dark, alone, deep in thought.

MAX appears in his pyjamas. SHANE mutes the TV.

SHANE
Hey. Why're you still up?

MAX comes and sits next to SHANE.

MAX
They're in gaol now right?

SHANE pulls MAX close.

SHANE
For a long time buddy.

MAX
Can we go home now?

SHANE
What do you think about this home?

MAX looks at SHANE for a long moment, nods.

MAX
It's OK.

SHANE smiles and ruffles MAX'S hair. MAX hugs SHANE.

On SHANE - the responsibility heavy on his shoulders.

35 EXT. TOOWOOMBA ESTABLISHER - MORNING 35

A thick fog rolls over grassy fields - it's quiet and tranquil. A long way from the past.

36 EXT. FOOTY GROUNDS - MORNING 36

LOCKY and his team are gathered near a new garden bed. Various flowers are ready to be planted. SHANE strolls up casually, full of attitude.

LOCKY
Shane. You're late.

SHANE
(cocky)
Sorry. Got lost in the fog.

The rest of the crew note SHANE's attitude. LOCKY takes him aside.

LOCKY
Late on your first day. I don't get it.

SHANE just shrugs.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
Is everything right at home mate? You know, moving town and all, it's stressful - you're going through some big changes.

SHANE looks at LOCKY curiously - How much does he know?

SHANE
No it's alright. All good.

LOCKY
Righto. But if you ever need to talk stuff through, I'm all ears OK.

SHANE stares at LOCKY - is this all an act? LOCKY turns to the others.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
OK, we're all here now. Let's get started.

To SHANE's surprise, everyone puts down their equipment and bows their heads in prayer.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
Lord, thank you for the honest work you have given us today so that we may honour your sacrifice for us on the cross.

SHANE looks around and sees a BEARDED GUY (50s) not praying. He's finishing off a sausage roll. They meet eyes. The BEARDED GUY just shrugs - Who cares?

LOCKY (CONT'D)
As we toil beneath the sun you lit for us, in the earth you laid for us, we will thank you always, our saviour. Amen.

THE TEAM
Amen.

Everyone snaps casually out of the prayer.

LOCKY
OK, Denny and Luke, you were here first so you hit the ride-ons. Hal, Ollie and Brad let's work this new bed yeah?

LOCKY turns to SHANE.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
You were last here Shane, so group rules say you get the shitty job.

SHANE
(still cocky)
And what's that?

LOCKY
Brush cutting. It's really shitty. Sorry.

SHANE sees another opportunity to piss LOCKY off.

SHANE
Fuck that. Not doin' it.

Everyone stops and looks at SHANE. LOCKY is genuinely confused.

LOCKY
But...those are our rules Shane. Everyone made them. If you're last here you get the shitty job.

DENNY
It's only fair mate.

HAL (BEARDED GUY)
Someone's got to do the shitty job.

LUKE
We made the rules together.

BRAD
You did tell Shane the rules didn't you Locky?

LOCKY
(mortified)
You know, I don't think I did.

SHANE, bewildered by this discussion.

LUKE
Whoa, maybe we should grant an exception this time.

DENNY
Yeah I reckon.

LOCKY
OK, all in favour of granting Shane an exception...

SHANE can't believe it - this is no fun. They're all so NICE!

SHANE
(irritated)
Forget it! I'll do it OK! Is this it?

SHANE picks up a huge brush cutter.

LOCKY
You sure Shane? I mean...

SHANE
Yes! I WANT to do it.

LOCKY
(backing off)
OK, OK. Denny you show him how.

DENNY leads SHANE off.

HAL
(calling after them)
Don't forget to wear the glasses Shane! Stuff flicks up at ya.

LOCKY
Yeah, good catch Hal.

SHANE follows DENNY away from the team. MELANIE was right - LOCKY doesn't fire anyone.

37 INT. HIGH SCHOOL, PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY 37

LIZ sits across from PRINCIPAL WARDEN (female, late 50s) as she looks over some records.

PRINCIPAL WARDEN
Top of the class in Maths, a distinction in Chemistry, a Grade 5 pianist. Max's record is outstanding.

LIZ
(proud)
He's our little brainiac. Very down to earth though.

38 INT. HIGH SCHOOL, HALLWAY - DAY 38

CLEO sits on a bench outside the principal's office. MAX is looking at a noticeboard.

MAX
(utter dismay)
They don't have an astronomy club.

CLEO
Forget your astronomy club retard. You're at a public school now.

MAX - huh?

CLEO (CONT'D)
You don't need astronomy to work in an abattoir.

MAX sits, disappointed. A MALE TEACHER approaches with TWO GIRLS, HALEY and VANESSA.

TEACHER
When Principal Warden is free I want you to tell her exactly what you did. Am I clear?

HALEY AND VANESSA
(smirking)
Yes sir.

The GIRLS sit at a bench across from CLEO and MAX. The TEACHER leaves.

HALEY
(mocking)
Am I clear?

They giggle. CLEO rolls her eyes. The GIRLS turn their attention to CLEO and MAX, sussing them out.

VANESSA
Who are you?

CLEO blanks them with ice cold ease and turns away. HALEY and VANESSA bristle at the snobbery. MAX, picks up on the tension - he doesn't like it.

MAX
(slightly nervous)
I'm Max.

CLEO, gritting her teeth.

39 INT. HIGH SCHOOL, PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY 39

PRINCIPAL WARDEN is reading. LIZ looks tense.

LIZ
I think the fresh start for Cleo is going to do her good.

PRINCIPAL WARDEN
I see suspension was discussed at one point.

LIZ
But it didn't come to that. She's really turned a corner.

40 INT. HIGH SCHOOL, HALLWAY - DAY 40

CLEO glares at HALEY and VANESSA - it's a Mexican stand off. MAX is still giving his story but he's doesn't sound right. He's sort of babbling.

MAX
(nervous)
We're from Sydney. We went to Blacktown High. It's a public school too...I think. People say it's rough in Blacktown but I don't think so.

As MAX speaks a thin trail of blood seeps slowly from his nose. HALEY notices it, frowns.

MAX (CONT'D)
I kind of miss Sydney but Toowoomba seems nice. Everyone's been nice to us.

HALEY
(at the blood)
EWWWWW. GROSS!

VANESSA sees it too.

VANESSA
He's bleeding!

CLEO sees the blood. She pulls a tissue from her pocket and stops the trickle. MAX is confused.

HALEY
That's the sickest thing I've ever...

CLEO turns on the GIRLS, her eyes are fire.

CLEO
Shut. Your. Hole.

HALEY and VANESSA are stopped in their tracks - they back down.

MAX
What's happening?

CLEO
Hold this.

MAX holds the tissue to his nose.

The PRINCIPAL's door opens, LIZ and PRINCIPAL WARDEN step into the hallway.

PRINCIPAL WARDEN
Take the week to settle and they can start Monday.

LIZ
Thanks.

LIZ sees MAX with a bloody tissue to his nose.

LIZ (CONT'D)
What happened?

PRINCIPAL WARDEN looks accusingly at HALEY and VANESSA.

VANESSA
We didn't do anything! He just started bleeding.

HALEY
It was so gross.

CLEO glares at them. LIZ examines MAX.

LIZ
Are you OK?

MAX
I was just talking.

MAX sees the tissue is full of blood.

MAX (CONT'D)
Oh yuck!

PRINCIPAL WARDEN
You can go and see the nurse if you like.

LIZ
I think I'll just get him home. Thanks.

LIZ helps MAX up and moves off. CLEO follows, glancing back at HALEY and VANESSA - this isn't the last of it.

41 EXT. FOOTY GROUNDS - DAY 41

SHANE is brush cutting a dense, dusty slope. It's hard work. Debris flies everywhere. He slips and falls down the slope. The brush cutter stalls and splutters out.

SHANE tries to start it again but it won't go. Angry and exhausted, he throws it aside. SHANE sits and wipes his brow - he's not used to this sort of manual labour.

SHANE notices something sticking out of the cleared grass nearby. He investigates.

It's a rugby football. He dusts it off.

LOCKY (O.S.)
(from a distance)
Hey Shane!

SHANE looks up to see LOCKY waving his arms from the other end of the field.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
(shouting)
What're ya doing?

SHANE
(holding up the ball)
Found a ball.

LOCKY
Just kick it away and get on with it!

SHANE smiles. He flips the balls in his hands, judges the weight, takes three steps and BOOM!

With a mighty kick SHANE sends the ball high in the air.

The crew stop when they hear the sound - they all watch as the ball arches gracefully across the sky.

LOCKY, stunned, stops and waits. He holds out his arms.

The ball rockets towards LOCKY and lands directly in his arms - it's a perfect 50 metre kick. The crew clap in amazement.

SHANE smiles - he's still got it.

LOCKY holds up the ball.

LOCKY (CONT'D)
Praise Jesus!

42 INT. KELLY CAR - DAY 42

LIZ, CLEO and MAX driving through the middle of town. MAX has a tissue stuffed up each nostril.

LIZ
Hold you head back hon.

MAX
I think it's stopped now.

LIZ pushes MAX's head back - he complies listlessly.

LIZ
So you didn't bump your nose?

MAX
No. I was just doing my story. I got nervous this time though.

LIZ notes this - she hides her concern.

LIZ
(changing the subject)
Mrs Warden was very impressed with your report card.

MAX smiles through his tissues. CLEO scoffs audibly from the back seat. LIZ looks in the read view mirror.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Yours - not so much.

CLEO
Why couldn't you fake my reports at the same time as my identity?

LIZ
Then you wouldn't get the help you obviously need.

CLEO turns away - she doesn't want to talk about it..

LIZ (CONT'D)
Who were your friends?

CLEO
(deadpan)
They weren't friends. I was about to stab them in the eyes for staring.

LIZ sees a sign for a hairdresser. She quickly pulls the car into a carpark.

CLEO (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

LIZ climbs out of the car.

LIZ
I want to see if there's any vacancies. I'll be a sec.

LIZ slips into the hairdresser.

CLEO looks around and clocks a newsagent. She waits a moment - the coast is clear. CLEO gets out of the car.

MAX
Where are you going?

CLEO
Shut up. Don't tell.

CLEO slips away. MAX slumps into the seat, huffing on the tissues still stuffed up his nose.

43 INT. HAIRDRESSER - DAY 43

LIZ looks around - it's basic, a little daggy in a country town sort of way. She hasn't been in a place like this for a LONG time. A HAIRDRESSER approaches her.

HAIRDRESSER
Can I help you?

LIZ
I was wondering if you have any vacancies.

HAIRDRESSER
(looking at diary)
I'm booked up until 4 but after that...

LIZ
I actually meant "job" vacancies. I've just moved here from Sydney.

HAIRDRESSER
Oh. Well, what sort of experience have you had?

LIZ
About 7 years.

HAIRDRESSER
(noting LIZ's age)
Recently?

LIZ is ready with a story.

LIZ
Took a break after the kids but have been back at it for the last 3 years. In Surry Hills. Busy salon.

HAIRDRESSER
Surry Hills! Wow - flash. Let me have a think...

ON LIZ - relieved, fingers crossed.

44 INT. NEWSAGENTS - DAY 44

CLEO quickly approaches the counter.

CLEO
(pointing)
One of those handsets.

The shop assistant reaches up to a display stand of mobile phones.

CLEO (CONT'D)
A red one.

The shop assistant puts a red phone on the counter.

CLEO (CONT'D)
And $30 credit.

The shop assistant adds a sim card and rings it up.

SHOP ASSISTANT
$49.50.

CLEO hands over the $50 note. She stuffs the phone and change in her pocket and scurries out the door.

45 INT. HAIRDRESSER - DAY 45

The HAIRDRESSER looks through her schedules.

HAIRDRESSER
You know, we're always having trouble filling the Saturday morning shift. Do you want to try that?

LIZ
Great!

HAIRDRESSER
OK then, what's the number for your reference?

LIZ
Reference?
(thinking quick)
It's in my phone but it's dead, bloody thing. I'll have to call you back with it.

HAIRDRESSER
Sure, no problem. Call me.

LIZ
OK! Thanks!

LIZ heads out the door - concerned.

46 INT. KELLY CAR - DAY 46

MAX is examining his dry, bloody nose in the mirror.

CLEO climbs back in the car.

MAX
What'd you get?

CLEO takes out the mobile and taunts MAX with it.

MAX (CONT'D)
No way. That's a security risk!

CLEO
You can't trace a burner retard. I'm not stupid.

MAX, not happy. LIZ arrives back at the car, deflated.

MAX
How'd you go Mum?

LIZ
Can you give me a reference for my haircuts?

MAX
Totally!

LIZ smiles and ruffles his hair. But she's a bit flat - how will she get a reference?

47 INT. PUB - LATE AFTERNOON 47

LOCKY and SHANE having a drink after work.

LOCKY
So where'd you learn to play?

SHANE
(wary of his past)
School.

LOCKY
League or Union?

SHANE
(mock outrage)
League.

SHANE pulls off the lie convincingly - he's getting the hang of this.

LOCKY
A good public school boy.

SHANE
My oath. Kept getting injured though so gave it away. Don't even watch it now - can barely remember the rules.

LOCKY
Doesn't matter. Just come along for a training session with the kids, see what you think. I reckon you could teach our kicker a few things. You look like you could tackle too.

SHANE
I hold my own.

LOCKY
Then what're you waiting for? I tell ya, you've got a bloody gift from God in your boot and it's going to waste.

SHANE
Righto coach. Steady on.

LOCKY
So you'll come down?

SHANE thinks. LOCKY's enthusiasm is hard to deny.

SHANE
I'll give it a look.

48 EXT. PUB - LATE AFTERNOON 48

SHANE and LOCKY exiting the pub.

LOCKY
Need a lift?

SHANE
Nah, I'll walk it. Best way to get to know a place.

LOCKY
And coaching. We'll talk, yeah.

SHANE
Yeah, yeah.

LOCKY is thrilled. He jumps in his car and is off.

SHANE watches LOCKY go, smiles - he might even like him.

SHANE heads across the carpark as the sun starts to set.

He takes a shortcut down a laneway running behind the pub.

Up ahead, in the growing dark, he notices a couple of cars parked. A group of men are in close discussions.

He recognises one of them as ALAN, his next door neighbour.

ALAN
(from a distance)
That's half what we said!

BURLY MAN
Fuck off, it's not worth that.

A BURLY MAN (30's) gives ALAN a bit of a shove. ALAN trips backward and lands heavily against the car. SHANE bristles.

SHANE
Hey!

The MEN help ALAN as SHANE strides up.

SHANE (CONT'D)
You right?

ALAN looks between SHANE and the MEN but it's hard to tell who he's more scared of.

ALAN
Yeah. We're just talking.
(to the MEN)
It's fine guys. We're square.

SHANE turns on the MEN - fierce, the old SHANE shows himself.

SHANE
Why’d you push him?

ALAN
(to SHANE)
I said we’re fine!

BURLY MAN
It was an accident. We’re alright aren’t we Al?

ALAN
(spiky)
You gonna take it or what?

ALAN pops the boot of his car. BURLY nods to the others. One of them goes to the boot and takes out a large vacuum sealed plastic bag.

SHANE twigs - contraband.

BURLY looks at ALAN, sensing he doesn’t want SHANE involved. ALAN waves them away.

ALAN (CONT’D)
Go on.

BURLY, wary of SHANE, pulls a wad of notes from his pocket and hands it to ALAN.

BURLY MAN
This should do it.

ALAN takes the money and waves the MEN away - he’s pissed.

BURLY MAN (CONT’D)
So we’ll be in touch Al? All good?

ALAN, doesn’t answer. BURLY MAN tries again.

BURLY MAN (CONT’D)
Al? All good hey?

SHANE
(fierce)
Doesn’t look like...

ALAN
ALL GOOD.

ALAN’s word is final - he avoids SHANE’s eye. BURLY nods to SHANE. The group retreat to their cars and drive away.

ALAN watches them go. He closes the boot.

SHANE
What was that?

ALAN thinks for moment, then...

ALAN
Need a lift?

49 INT. KELLY HOUSE, KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING 49

50 INT. MELANIE'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING 50

INTERCUT:

LIZ is on the phone to MELANIE.

MELANIE
Well can you actually cut hair?

LIZ
My dad had a salon. I've been cutting hair since I was 12.

MELANIE
OK, give them my number.

LIZ
But you're not a hairdresser.

MELANIE
I create identities for a living - I'm sure I can pretend to be a hairdresser for a few minutes.

LIZ, relieved.

51 INT. KELLY HOUSE, CLEO'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING 51

CLEO takes out her new mobile and slips in the sim card. The screen comes to life.

She opens a handwritten address book and finds a name in there - "DANIEL".

52 INT. KELLY HOUSE, KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING 52

53 INT. MELANIE'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING 53

INTERCUT:

LIZ and MELANIE continue to talk.

MELANIE
You know you'll have to claim everything you earn. I mean <u>everything</u>.

LIZ
Of course I do.

MELANIE
Because I've seen your books. It took us months to find where you'd stashed it all.

LIZ
Yeah, well it took me years to build up those investments. And they'd be pretty bloody handy now if you...

There's a knock at the door. LIZ, alert.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Someone's here.

MELANIE
What do you mean?

LIZ
Someone just knocked. Who knows we're here?

MELAINE
No one. Calm down.

LIZ
Then why is someone knocking?

MELAINE
Can you see out the window?

LIZ angles her way to a window and looks out - a WOMAN (50s) in a colourful, flowing HIPPY DRESS is standing at the front door. She has a large cake in her hand.

LIZ
There's a woman. She has a cake.

MELANIE smirks.

LIZ (CONT'D)
What should I do?

MELANIE
Eat the cake.

MELANIE hangs up. LIZ, still cautious.

54 INT. KELLY HOUSE, CLEO'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING 54

55 INT. HUTCHINSON HOUSE, LOUNGE ROOM - EARLY EVENING 55

INTERCUT:

CLEO is on the phone, waiting.

DANIEL HUTCHINSON (17) watches TV with his dad, PETER (45), in their posh living room. His phone rings. The caller is "blocked" but he answers anyway.

DANIEL
Hello?

CLEO
It's me.

DANIEL tries to hide his surprise.

DANIEL
Hi. Yeah. Give me a sec.

PETER gets up.

PETER
Don't worry I was leaving anyway.

PETER strolls away. DANIEL goes back to the phone.

DANIEL
I'm back.

CLEO
I told you I'd call.

DANIEL
Nikki, where'd you go?

CLEO
(flirty)
"Nikki". Ha. Maybe you shouldn't call me that anymore.

56 INT. KELLY HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - EARLY EVENING 56

LIZ opens the door to the WOMAN (50s) in the HIPPY DRESS - she looks like a real new age nutbar.

WOMAN
Hi love! Hope you don't mind me stickybeaking. Saw you'd moved in, thought I'd come introduce myself. I'm Celestia, but call me "Cee". Live across the road.

LIZ
Hi...

CEE
Made you a cake. It's gluten and sugar free but don't tell the kids - they'll never know. They'll be like "Mum, can I have more of Aunty Cee's cake!"

CEE shrieks with laughter and offers up the cake. LIZ holds out her hands. CEE stops, and stares at LIZ's palms.

CEE (CONT'D)
Oh stars, you've got a story haven't you!

CEE starts stroking LIZ's palms.

CEE (CONT'D)
You've come from far away, yes...

LIZ pulls her hands away as politely as she can.

LIZ
I'm Liz.

She offers her hand to shake. CEE smiles and takes it.

CEE
Lovely to meet you Liz! Always nice to have fresh faces in town.

LIZ takes the cake.

LIZ
Thanks for the cake...
(trying to remember)
er...

CEE
Celestia. Means "heavenly". It's not my real name though.
(whispers)
Used to be "Beverly" before my rebirth.

LIZ
Rebirth...

CEE
Just call me "Cee".

LIZ
Got to go Cee. Dinner's on.

CEE
No problem love. Welcome!

LIZ closes the door. CEE calls through the door.

CEE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
We can finish that reading later. We'll make it a freebie.

LIZ holds her breath as CEE's footsteps walk down the steps and away. She's gone - phew.

57 INT. KELLY HOUSE, CLEO'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING 57

INTERCUT:

58 INT. HUTCHINSON HOUSE - EARLY EVENING 58

DANIEL and CLEO talking.

DANIEL
I don't understand. Your whole family just up and left. I had to go to the formal with Emily Barker you know.

CLEO
What, that mole?! If you two hooked up I'll cut your balls off.

DANIEL
No way! We didn't even dance. I think she fucked Craig Atcherly.

CLEO
URRRGGGGHHH! Dry heave!

DANIEL
I know!

CLEO laughs in a way we haven't seen before - she's lighter, more care free for a moment.

CLEO
(genuine)
I miss you Dan.

DANIEL
I miss you too. Why can't you tell me what's going on?

CLEO
I can't say much now. But I promise, when I can, you'll be the first one I call.

DANIEL
What's your number?

CLEO
No. I can't give you that.
(seductive)
But I'll call again. Soon.

59 INT. KELLY HOUSE, HALLWAY - EVENING 59

MAX walks past and overhears CLEO talking.

60 INT. KELLY HOUSE, CLEO'S ROOM - EVENING 60

CLEO finishes her call.

CLEO
I will. Bye.

CLEO hangs up and opens the door. MAX is standing there.

CLEO (CONT'D)
You're not going to tell.

MAX
Was that Daniel?

CLEO
You're not going to tell.

MAX
What if they ask me?

CLEO
Then lie.

CLEO strolls confidently away.

ON MAX - he's troubled.

61 EXT. ALAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT 61

SHANE and ALAN pull up into the driveway. They sit silently in the car for a moment.

ALAN
Keep all that to yourself hey?

SHANE nods.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Good on ya.

SHANE
Was it weed?

ALAN
(offended)
Piss off. I'm not a drug dealer!

SHANE backs off.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hello?

SHANE and ALAN look up to see the ELDERLY WOMAN from earlier looking out the front door.

ALAN
Just us Pet.

The WOMAN approaches the car tentatively. ALAN shoots SHANE a look - not a word. They get out.

WOMAN
Is it Robbie?

ALAN
No Pet, this is Shane. He's just moved in next door. He's from Sydney.

The WOMAN looks confused, disorientated.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Shane, this is Katherine, my wife.

SHANE
Pleased to meet you...

SHANE goes to offer his hand but KATHERINE abruptly turns and goes back inside. She seems agitated.

ALAN
(after KATHERINE)
I'll be in in a sec.

SHANE, confused - was it something I said?

ALAN (CONT'D)
She's had a bad day.

SHANE
Who's Robbie?

ALAN
Son.

SHANE
You expecting a visit?

ALAN
Not anytime soon.

SHANE still not quite getting it.

ALAN (CONT'D)
He's about a foot shorter and wider than you. Lives in Perth so he's not around much to help.

SHANE understands - Katherine has Dementia.

SHANE
Right. Sorry mate.

ALAN
(about KATHERINE)
Getting the proper care is expensive so...

ALAN nods towards the boot of the car. SHANE understands - the amateur contraband operation.

SHANE
At your age you're probably better off with a sausage sizzle. They're good little earners I've heard.

ALAN
Maybe. Keep a secret?

ON SHANE - If only he knew.

SHANE
Yeah.

ALAN walks off towards a huge shed in the backyard.

62 INT. ALAN'S SHED - NIGHT 62

ALAN and SHANE enter the shed - it's surprisingly small inside, full of the typical tool sets, gardening equipment, assorted junk.

The back half of the shed is divided by a wall. A door in the middle - padlocked.

SHANE
A shed like this I thought you must've been into cars.

ALAN
Cars are bullshit.

ALAN unlocks the door and opens it into...

63 INT. ALAN'S SHED, CROP ROOM - NIGHT 63

The room is lit brilliantly by dozens of fluorescent lights hanging from the roof and is crowded with tall plants in purpose built trays. SHANE is impressed and takes a closer look at a plant.

SHANE
Tobacco.

ALAN
Certified organic. Well maybe not "certified" anymore but it used to be my trade for 30 years. Up in Mareeba. There were only ever a few of us, small time stuff but a good living. The government closed it all down a few years ago. I was one of the only ones left.

SHANE
You get compo?

ALAN
A bit. Enough to resettle down here but with Katherine getting sick.

ALAN shakes his head.

SHANE
So you go into the chop chop business.

ALAN
I figured an extra thousand here and there. There's always a market for organic chop chop. Everyone wins.

SHANE
You didn't look like a winner tonight.

ALAN
Nah. I know. Felt like an old fool actually.

SHANE doesn't disagree.

ALAN (CONT'D)
It was the first crop. They wanted an "introductory offer".

SHANE smiles wryly - heard that before.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Bloody old fool.

64 EXT. ALAN'S HOUSE, FRONT YARD - NIGHT 64

ALAN leads SHANE back to the front gate.

ALAN
Thanks for your help. I'll be right.

ALAN starts to walk away towards the house. He bends gingerly to pull a weed. SHANE watches him. Something's on his mind - he's reluctant to say it.

SHANE
The "introductory offer" is just the beginning.

ALAN stops, turns back.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Next it'll be because of a "slow week" or an "off batch". Then they'll want a discount for loyalty. They're going to screw you below cost before you can scratch your balls. Believe me, I've seen it.

ALAN
You know a bit about it?

SHANE thinks.

SHANE
Yeah, a bit.

FLASHBACK:

65 DARK ALLEY - NIGHT 65

BRENDAN DIMINSKY and SHANE (AKA STEVE COSSER) get out of an expensive car. SHANE has a cold look in his eyes - one we haven't seen before.

SHANE (V.O.)
I used to work club security.

A SMALL TIME DEALER is surrounded by THUGS - he's scared.

SHANE (V.O.)
You'd see how the market worked. The addicts, dealers, the distributors, they'd all come through at some point.

THE DEALER nervously hands DIMINSKY a WAD OF CASH. DIMINSKY talks to the DEALER - he's friendly, chatty. But SHANE looms in the background, his eyes boring through the DEALER.

SHANE (V.O.)
And there was only ever one law.

The DEALER tries desperately to stay calm as DIMINSKY counts a WAD OF BILLS. He finishes - and doesn't like the count.

SHANE (V.O.)
You will get fucked.

DEMINSKY walks away. The DEALER cowers. SHANE, frightening, steps forward and throws a punch. BOOM!

FLASHBACK ENDS.

66 EXT. ALAN'S HOUSE, FRONT YARD - NIGHT 66

SHANE looks off - hard to believe this is the same guy.

ALAN
Sounds like I need some help.

SHANE, cautious - he knows where this is going.

ALAN (CONT'D)
You offering?

SHANE
I don't know Alan, I'm just offering advice. I don't want to see you get hurt.

ALAN
Fair go, you saw those guys. They're just fat miners. Pricks took me by surprise. When you turned up though - they were shitting themselves, you could see it.

SHANE
Nah mate...

The rage and humiliation is coming out in ALAN now.

ALAN
You'd just have to stand there and those pussies would piss themselves.

SHANE
Not for me.

ALAN
Make it worth your while.

SHANE
(firm)
Got a family.

This gets through to ALAN - he settles.

ALAN
Yeah, course. Sorry mate.

A DOOR opens nearby. SHANE and ALAN turn to see LIZ cautiously poking her head out the front door of their house - she doesn't want to be seen by CEE.

SHANE
Hey Darl. Won't be long.

LIZ nods and starts to go back inside.

ALAN
Hey Liz. How's Sunday arvo?

LIZ isn't sure what ALAN means.

ALAN (CONT'D)
For a barbie.

LIZ remembers - relents.

LIZ
Sounds good.

ALAN waves. LIZ retreats. SHANE smiles.

SHANE
See you Sunday.

ALAN
Righto.

SHANE heads off.

ALAN (CONT'D)
(cheeky)
Stay out of trouble.

SHANE laughs.

SHANE
Don't worry about me.

67 EXT. TOOWOOMBA ESTABLISHER - NIGHT 67

A light fog rolls through the dark across a sprawling field. It's quiet, peaceful.

68 INT. KELLY HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT 68

SHANE lies awake on the bed at night. LIZ is dozing. She rolls over and sees SHANE awake.

LIZ
Can't sleep?

SHANE doesn't answer. She hugs him.

SHANE
Do you think we'll change?

LIZ
(dismayed)
What? More than this?

SHANE looks at LIZ - serious.

SHANE
No, I mean, I never felt like I had a choice before. But now I do. Do you think I'll change?

LIZ gives SHANE a steely look - dead serious.

LIZ
You bloody better.

SHANE smiles.

SHANE
Roll over.

LIZ rolls over and SHANE spoons her.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Goodnight Mrs Kelly.

LIZ
Goodnight Mr Kelly.

SHANE, peaceful, closes his eyes.

69 INT. PRISON, MEETING ROOM - DAY 69

WADE NELSON (50), sharply dressed in a suit and tie, sits down in a meeting booth. He looks around. A row of other visitors talk to prisoners through the glass panel using telephones. He waits.

Through the glass panel in front of WADE a cell door opens. BRENDAN DEMINSKY, dressed in prison overalls, strolls casually in and sits. They both pick up their phones.

WADE
It's done. They made mistakes - we've pointed them out. We'll know the ruling soon enough.

BRENDAN nods, unreadable - if he's worried it's not showing.

WADE (CONT'D)
I think your chances are good. Lon's...less so.

WADE waits for a response. Nothing. BRENDAN is a wall of subterranean anger. He's giving WADE the creeps.

WADE (CONT'D)
I'll be in contact...

WADE goes to hang up.

BRENDAN
Have you found him?

WADE stops, leans forward, whispers.

WADE
We're looking.

BRENDAN
Find him.

WADE nods, hangs up, desperate to be gone. He leaves.

BRENDAN remains seated, staring straight ahead.

His eyes are cold and dead.

END EPISODE 1.

[Creative Bible]

KELLY COUNTRY

Have you met the new neighbours?

13 x 1 hour TV Series

Created and Written by Anthony Mullins

Contact: Jennifer Naughton and Dayne Kelly (RGM Artists)
Phone: (612) 9281 3911

SYNOPSIS

What if you had to live a lie? Change your name. Fabricate your history. Forge your entire identity. All because of something you did.

Now ask your partner to do the same. And your two teenage kids. Give it all up. Friends, family, home, everything you own... All gone forever.

Starting a new life will be tough - *but your family's life depends on it*.

This is the mess the Kellys are in. And it's all SHANE's fault - and he's got to fix it.

When his family arrive in Toowoomba they seem like any other family from down South on a tree change. SHANE, the father, has started as a council gardener while the mother, LIZ, has got a job at the hair salon. Their teenage kids, CLEO and MAX, are settling into school best they can. The Kelly's are a bit different but they're trying hard to fit in.

Thing is, the Kelly family aren't who they say they are. They're actually the Cosser family from an infamous Melbourne crime gang. And this is no tree change - they're in a witness protection program.

SHANE KELLY (38) used to be known as STEVE COSSER, a stand over man for the notorious DEMINSKY BROTHERS. They offered STEVE and his family a luxurious existence in exchange for his "negotiation" skills. For almost twenty years life was good. That was until STEVE was expected to take the fall for a sadistic, drug fuelled beating turned murder by the DEMINSKYS. Luckily STEVE's wife helped him see he was being used - the DEMINSKYS weren't family, his wife and kids were. STEVE saw sense long enough to take a deal with the cops, setting off a chain reaction that brought down the brothers and guaranteed their eternal wrath. Now, after six months of hopping between dingy hotel rooms in the dead of night, STEVE is now SHANE and his family have arrived in town as the Kellys.

Their new home is the sleepy regional Queensland city of Toowoomba. Perched on the edge of the Great Dividing Range, Toowoomba has never lost its farming roots despite its burgeoning suburbs. It's a quiet, traditional and deeply religious community - basically the last place you'd expect to find an ex-gangster.

But for 17-year old CLEO (she insisted on choosing her own name) and her 14-year old brother MAX they can't see how this is any better than dad being in gaol. They were promised the sun, surf and sand of Miami USA, but instead they've got the fog, fields and cow pats of this Queensland backwater.

LIZ (37), SHANE's wife, isn't exactly thrilled either. It was her idea to flip but LIZ didn't understand how little of their old life they'd get to take with them - basically NONE of it. She'd quietly grown an impressive portfolio of smart investments over the years which were all confiscated by the state. Now they're just scraping by, paycheck to paycheck. They're all going to have to make sacrifices and LIZ leads the charge - after twenty years, she's going

back to work as a hairdresser. She just wants to get by, blend in and keep to herself. But LIZ discovers that laying low in Toowoomba is harder than she thought.

This whole situation isn't what Shane imagined either. After twenty years as a stand over man he now has to learn a new trade as a council greenskeeper. Shane's used to living by his fists - now he has to grow a green thumb! His job is to tend to the council gardens including the hallowed football ground, which wouldn't be so bad if they didn't follow a different religion up here - Rugby League. As a born and bred AFL and Footscray supporter SHANE feels the loss of his weekly pilgrimages to Whitten Oval like nothing else. But when his new boss (and "Jesus freak") LOCKY recruits him to help train the local league team, it looks like SHANE will have to keep his passion for AFL as underground as his real identity. For SHANE, this could be the ultimate lie.

SHANE's attempts to blend in and get square are tested when his next-door neighbour, struggling retiree ALAN, is roughed up by a group of thugs. SHANE discovers ALAN is supplementing his meagre pension with an illegal tobacco crop he's growing in his back shed. ALAN's out of his depth and is being strong armed by his utterly amateur distributors. It's an unfair fight and for the first time SHANE sees his past from the other side - he was nothing but a thug and a bully and he hates it. Unaware of SHANE's past, ALAN innocently asks for his "protection". SHANE is tempted. It's just to help out a mate. It's only short term. And he could use the money. Shane tells himself all this. He REALLY does want to start again. To give his family a better life than the one he's given them so far. And sure enough, after a few missteps, the KELLYS start to see a future in this strange, new life.

But their past is never far behind...

When one of the DEMINSKYS is released on a technicality, it looks like the past might be catching up with the KELLYS.

THE SERIES

Kelly Country is a series that aims for that sweet spot between drama, heart and humour.

This is not a show about gangsters or a gangster life. This is about a family trying to rediscover who they are and what they mean to each other.

It is about ordinary people with an opportunity to start again - What would you change? What would you miss? What future could you imagine? What past would you leave behind?

Throughout the series the KELLYS will be faced with these questions again and again as they try and reinvent themselves and fit inconspicuously into their new home. All the while, the threat of discovery looms as the DEMINSKYS and their associates look for revenge.

This is, of course, also a series about identity - what defines us, what do we care about, what will we fight for? A sporting team, a hometown, a marriage, a religion, a job, an illness, a talent, a past mistake... We're all defined by the things around us, and when those things unexpectedly change, we struggle to adjust.

The KELLYS are the most obvious example of this - SHANE will struggle with his new "shitkicker" status as a council gardener; LIZ will rediscover herself when she returns to work and (eventually) study; CLEO is going to have to fight to regain her "alpha girl" credentials; MAX will be crippled (then eventually liberated) by having to lie about who he is. But they're not the only ones.

Everyone in the series will be faced with these life changing shifts that challenge who they think they are - ALAN will be forced to become a carer for his wife; LOCKY will have his faith tested; even the DEMINSKY brothers will struggle from gaol to stay on top of their empire.

This recurring theme allows us to expand as the series progresses beyond the Kelly family to discover that everyone is in an identity crisis of some sort. We will recognise that everyone's story is part of a bigger idea that teases out the question "What makes us who we are?"

But all the time, drawing us back to a central, driving dilemma, is the ever present threat that haunts the KELLYS - Will they be found out? And can they really change? Towards the end of the season Shane will be dragged back into his criminal past in an effort to protect his family. And he will be forced to go further than he ever has before...

The KELLY'S situation may be unusual, but they want something we all want. A place they are safe, secure and happy. Somewhere they belong. Somewhere to call home.

ABOUT WITNESS PROTECTION IN AUSTRALIA

There are an estimated 500 people living under witness protection in Australia today.

It's "estimated" because it's a crime to divulge any details about witnesses protected under the program - even the exact number of witnesses.

Virtually all of them are ex-crooks and their families trying to start again in a new life, under a new identity. They've been given a job and rented house and told to just get on with it. One might live next door to you. You might even work with one. But you'd never know it - they're all trying to appear as normal as possible. Their safety hinges on their ability to reinvent themselves. To leave the past in the past.

They receive some re-location costs, employment assistance, a limited accommodation allowance and, sometimes, a short-term stipend.

If their assets are from illegal activity they are repossessed by the state. Typically, they take very little from their old life into the new one, either in wealth, family or friends.

One Victorian judge recently described willing witnesses as “brave indeed”.

DRAFT EPISODE SYNOPSES 1 - 3

Episode #1

The KELLYS discover their new home will be the farming community of Toowoomba rather than Miami, USA. Not only that but they’ll be living in a rundown old rental - they all hate it. But they don’t have much choice.

SHANE is forced to take a job as a council gardener - his new boss is a “Jesus freak” called LOCKY. On his first day LOCKY discovers SHANE’s football talents and recruits him to help train the local A grade side (and perpetual wooden-spooners).

Meanwhile, LIZ discovers they’re going to struggle to make ends meet - she applies for a job as a hairdresser but needs a reference. Relocation officer, MELANIE, helps out and pushes LIZ to get out and meet the neighbours.

CLEO is determined to make contact with her old boyfriend, DANIEL, and steals money to buy a mobile phone. She calls him and promises to tell all...eventually.

MAX experiences a mysterious, and embarrassing, nosebleed when he tries to introduce himself. It soon becomes obvious the multi-talented MAX is really bad at one thing - lying.

Meanwhile, SHANE meets ALAN, the next door neighbour and uncovers his backyard “chop chop” operation (illegal tabacco). It’s to fund care for his wife KATHERINE. But Alan is being ripped off by some local heavies. He asks SHANE for help by offering “protection”. SHANE is reluctant - but he could REALLY do with the money.

Back in Melbourne, it looks like BRENDAN DEMINSKY might have a way out of prison on a technicality.

Episode #2

SHANE is coaxed along to footy training with LOCKY. He has to help break up a fight between the players and clashes with the talented but hotheaded DANNY LONG - he’s reminded of himself at that age.

The Kellys are at ALAN’s for a BBQ. There’s a few more neighbours than they expected - LIZ is used to keeping to herself and struggles to adjust to all the socialising.

During the BBQ, KATHERINE wanders off - she's never done this before. There's a panicked race around the neighbourhood but she's quickly found. It's clear ALAN needs help - SHANE offers to "test the waters" with ALAN's chop chop business.

LIZ's first day at work gets off to a wobbly start when a teenage customer requests a radical new haircut only to discover she's the daughter of the local mayor. Mum is NOT happy but LIZ's boss is intrigued when there are requests for similar cuts.

MAX practises his story obsessively. He is asked to introduce himself to the class and is relieved when he makes it through without his nose bleeding. Unfortunately, an unexpected question from the teacher sends him into a panic attack, messy nose bleed and all.

CLEO does her best to assert her alpha girl credentials at school but is cagey about her past. She is quickly labelled a snob. CLEO reluctantly befriends (or is befriended by) a couple of daggy girls and is forced to sit on the fringes of the playground - this is a first for her. Whenever she can, CLEO calls DANIEL who seems strangely distracted...

Meanwhile, from gaol, BRENDAN DEMINSKY intimidates a CORRUPT DETECTIVE who owes him a favour. To appease DEMINSKY, the DETECTIVE reckons he can get access to the witness protection database - he can find STEVE COSSER (AKA SHANE KELLY). DEMINSKY tells him to do it.

Episode #3

There's a big AFL game on this weekend and SHANE is determined to watch it. But LIZ is still holding the purse strings tight - no cable TV. Later, SHANE stops young football star DANNY LONG from shoplifting at a local electronics store. The owner is thankful and, with the help of a little leftover chop chop, SHANE arranges store access after hours to use one of the big plasma screens. But SHANE is careful not to mention the AFL - he says he's addicted to old movies.

ALAN isn't happy about SHANE giving away his chop chop as they harvest the new crop. ALAN arranges a delivery and SHANE's imposing presence helps negotiate a fair deal - until it's discovered the crop has been spoiled. SHANE is forced into a humiliating back down and is angry with ALAN.

MELANIE has arranged for MAX to be psychologically assessed following his panic attacks. She visits the local psychologist, DR BANNER and reveals the KELLYS are state witnesses - divulging any details about them will see the doctor gaoled. BANNER is daunted but agrees.

LIZ is becoming the most popular hairdresser at work and its irritating her co-workers. A mutiny is brewing - scissors are drawn. Her boss doesn't care though - LIZ is bringing in new business with her unusual cuts. But LIZ is increasingly uncomfortable with all the attention she's getting.

MAX has his first session with DR BANNER - he's confused about which version of his story to tell. DR BANNER assures MAX he's safe to tell the truth here but it's OK to tell a different story to others - in fact, he's going to teach MAX how to lie. MAX is encouraged.

CLEO is invited by her daggy friends to a local rodeo - she tries to get out of it but Liz insists she go. As expected, its hot, dusty, noisy, smelly and full of cowboys. Big, hunky cowboys. CLEO meets one. She's amazed when he's able to string a sentence together. And even more amazed when he asks her out. But when old boyfriend DANIEL starts to have doubts about their relationship CLEO is angry - maybe it's time she moved on too.

Meanwhile, the CORRUPT COP arranges to "bump into" old friend MELANIE COOK. He spins a story that he's going to be in Queensland and wants to catch up.

So who are the Kelly family?

Shane Kelly
(38, previously known as Steve "Crunch" Cosser):

SHANE wants to change. It's taken him a long time to get to this place but he's here now - and he wants things to be different. He feels pretty shit about how things have turned out. He can see the stress in his family's eyes and it weighs heavy on him.

So no more late night sitdowns, no more brown paper bags, broken knuckles, bruised ribs, last chance "negotiations", police raids, and definitely no more court rooms. SHANE wants to leave his criminal past behind (of course, depends what you mean by "criminal"...)

But first things first - SHANE wasn't afraid to do the time. The respect he would have earned as the fall guy for the DEMINSKYS, not to mention his rep as an A-Grade head cracker, would have kept him out of trouble. So it wasn't fear that made him flip - it was something else.

You see, for SHANE, the rules of the game are the rules of the game. And somewhere along the line, the DEMINSKYS stopped playing by the rules. That's how they could do what they did to that guy. It was just...mental. And they wanted Shane to take the fall for it. So when LIZ suggested flipping, SHANE made a show but he knew she was right.

And deep down, he'd always resented the DEMINSKYS. Sure they gave him a life of relative luxury and associated respect. But they also took away his dream - playing football. He was all set for the big league when they came calling. It was something he'd wanted since he was a kid. But back then, no one said "No" to the DEMINSKYS and, armed with his legendary status as a big hitter on the footy field, he became the perfect stand over man.

Now, in Toowoomba, his football dreams, and the nightmare he's just stepped out of, are far, far behind him. He's getting his first glimpse in twenty years of how "normal" people live - picking up the shopping, paying bills, cleaning the house, going to work, taking a sicky, mowing the lawn on the weekends. It's all so alien to Shane he hasn't decided yet if it's blissfully peaceful or mind-numbingly boring.

But SHANE is determined make a go of it - he knows there's no backing down from what he's done. Best case scenario is the DEMINSKYS just wait for him to show his face in Melbourne again (which is never). Worse case - they'll come looking.

More importantly, he wants to do it for his family. They've endured enough and Shane feels the need to make it up to them. And like many of his old gang associates, he's a deeply traditional man, a protector and provider for his family.

So when SHANE realises just how skint they are following the relocation he's on the look out for a solution. But ALAN's "chop chop" business isn't the obvious choice for SHANE. Of course, he could do it in his sleep - the town's "criminal underbelly" (as described by the Toowoomba Chronicle) are a bunch of small time wannabes. But SHANE can't risk being caught and thrown out of the program - and being nicked for selling "chop chop" in this cow paddock? Very fucking embarrassing...

Then again, there are some other things to consider - it's low risk with a modest return. No one's going to get rich but he's OK with that - he just wants his family to have a few little luxuries. I mean, what sort of man would he be if he couldn't provide for them?

And for the first time SHANE's seeing his past from the other side of the fence. ALAN's the little guy, trying to scrape together a living as bigger players steal his share of the pie. SHANE sees them for what they are - thugs, bullies, parasites - and deep down he knows that he used to be one of them. The game wasn't fair then and it isn't fair now. But should he try and even the odds? He's trying to change. Become someone new. That's what he really wants to do.

LIZ KELLY
(37, PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS BECCY COSSER):

LIZ wants to keep to herself. She understands the danger they're all in and knows she needs to stay under the radar.

Anyway, apart from SHANE and the kids, LIZ is used to being alone. She never clicked with the other wives in the DEMINSKY crew and resisted socialising with them. In fact, she's never clicked with the DEMINSKY BROTHERS full stop.

The DEMINSKYS grew up in the same neighbourhood as LIZ. She even went to school with them (they were a few grades above). LIZ's dad ran a local hair salon and was well informed about the DEMINSKY BROTHERS teenage crimes. He warned LIZ to steer clear and she did. Until SHANE...

They met at the school formal. SHANE was forced to take his cousin. LIZ's date went AWOL early in the night. Next thing SHANE and LIZ were dancing. He was already a bit of a footy legend and she was admittedly a fan. He had an intoxicating "conquer the world" cockiness that swept Liz off her feet. She loved this guy. And he loved her.

Unfortunately, LIZ was also how the DEMINSKYS met SHANE. And the rest is history...

Despite the hold they had over the happy couple's life, LIZ never took shit from the DEMINSKYS (or anyone for that matter). She was quiet but when pushed LIZ was fierce, never afraid to tell them exactly what she thought of them. As a result, LIZ was perpetually on the outer in the crew. She couldn't easily make friends with people outside either - the DEMINSKYS saw to that. They even made it hard for her to pursue her own dreams - start a business, go back to study. So LIZ spent a lot of time alone, dedicating herself to her family and making the most of the luxuries the lifestyle provided.

And she spent the time well - LIZ became an extremely canny investor and amassed a sizeable fortune from SHANE's kick backs. She used to fantasise that one day they might be able to use it to escape the DEMINSKYS. Unfortunately, when SHANE flipped, her entire fortune was confiscated by the state. She got her freedom, but not her fortune.

Now, as "Mrs Kelly" of Toowoomba, LIZ is happy to maintain the low profile she's used to. It's safer and she's never had many friends anyway. Thing is, Toowoomba still has its country roots - and in the country, people get to know each other. Before long LIZ is being invited to an endless parade of tea parties, BBQs, school committees and fund raisers. And everyone's so bloody friendly - she finds it...weird. LIZ would rather stay home but to say "no" to all the invites would raise suspicion, people would start to ask questions.

So LIZ is about to learn how to make friends again. It won't be easy, she's cautious by nature. And her straight-talking ways are bound to make some enemies along the way.

But LIZ is about to discover what friends are for.

CLEO KELLY
(17, PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS NICOLE COSSER).

CLEO wants the very best. Now. Why? Because she's smart, beautiful and will find a way to get what she wants no matter what anyone does. Got it? Good.
CLEO'S a city girl at heart. She hates the country. HATES it. She hated it even before she saw it for the first time, which was last week when they drove

into Toowoomba. And it was as horrible as she imagined. For CLEO, it's like living in the middle of a huge steaming cowpat. Ugh.

CLEO was due to finish school this year and was planning on a gap year in Madrid but the turmoil of the past few months has changed everything. She will now repeat Year 12 and, because the family is now essentially broke, she'll have to attend the local state school. This is despite having attended the VERY best private schools all her life. Suffice to say, her father is no longer in the good books with CLEO and he's going to have to work very hard to win her forgiveness.

Apart from being penniless and now going to a “povo school”, CLEO's also had to leave behind her boyfriend, captain of the rowing team, DANIEL HUTCHINSON. They’ve been going out all year. They were going to the Year 12 formal together. They were going to spend a gap year in Madrid together. Now that's all ruined. CLEO is afraid she'll never get to touch his totally ripped torso ever again and it's killing her. But make no mistake - CLEO WILL find a way.

The only upside is that she got to choose her own name, CLEO. Like Cleopatra. She was really hot and killed herself with an asp. CLEO wishes she could do the same so she could escape this cowpat.

But CLEO is about to discover there’s more to Toowoomba than cowpats - there’s cowboys.

MAX KELLY
(14, PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS PETE COSSER)

MAX wants everyone to like him. Like REALLY like him. MAX would be friends with everyone if he could. Which is kind of intense - meaning he spends most of his time alone.

Despite his unusual background, MAX is an exceptional student, topping his classes in maths and sciences and winning numerous academic prizes. He was also a child prodigy in piano but gave it up to take up archery, which he also excelled at before he dropped it to take up his current obsession of astronomy. MAX seems to be good at everything he turns his hand to - his problem is sticking with any of it.

MAX is a naturally kind and good natured kid which has always made him a prime target for bullies (an embarrassing irony for stand over man SHANE). MAX is hoping to make more friends in Toowoomba - he always found the private school playgrounds of Melbourne mysterious places to navigate. Everyone here seems nice. They’re different from the city. But MAX soon faces a new obstacle to acceptance - anxiety attacks. Taking on a new identity isn’t easy when you’re someone like MAX. At first he thought it’d be like playing an undercover spy - but the reality of lying every day is messing him up. It all starts as strange nose bleeds which soon transform into

debilitating panic attacks. MAX feels trapped - he likes his new friends but he can NEVER tell them who he really is.

It soon becomes clear to everyone - MAX has to learn to lie.

This is NOT easy. But, after some awkward first steps, MAX begins to get the hang of it. In fact, he discovers lying may actually be another talent he can add to his long list of abilities.

MAX even starts to like it...

OTHERS CHARACTERS IN THE KELLY'S LIVES

MELANIE COOK
(34, WITNESS PROTECTION OFFICER FOR THE KELLYS)

SARGENT MELANIE COOK wants to give her cases the very best chance to start again. Of course, most of these losers won't be able to - they'll always be eternal fuck-ups. But for those that show even a glimmer of commitment to change themselves, MELANIE wants to help. It's her job and she's good at it - something also happens to be proud of.

Not that you'll get hard-arse MELANIE COOK telling anyone that - she's not one for sentimentality and knows not to get overly involved in the lives of her clients. She likes to take the "hard facts" approach to relocation. FACT #1: This is going to be fucking difficult; FACT #2: Most people can't hack it; FACT #3: This is the rest of your life. MELANIE figures her approach flushes out the bullshitters quick smart. Her clients have usually been living in a gangster's fantasy their entire life - it's time for some harsh reality.

But deep down (like DEEP down) MELANIE does care. She knows this world in a funny sort of way. You see, MELANIE moved around a lot when she was a kid - they were trying to avoid her father. He was a drinker. Simple as that. He loved them all in his strange way and they loved him on the rare occasion he sobered up. But he was a disaster they needed to escape.

MELANIE is respected and well liked but her career has been tough on her relationships. She likes her job and there isn't much room for anything else. She sometimes ends up bedding a colleague after drinks on occasion. Other than that, its all business.

But someone is about to deceive MELANIE - and when they do, the KELLY's lives will be at risk.

ALAN TAYLOR
(70, the Kelly's next door neighbour).

ALAN wants to take care of his wife KATHERINE through her illness. She's taken care of him through some dark times. She deserves the best he can give her.

ALAN's a retired tobacco farmer from North Queensland. His business went belly up when the federal government shut down all tobacco production back in 2009. There was compensation to help him retire so they moved south to his wife KATHERINE'S hometown of Toowoomba.

But then KATHERINE started showing the first signs of dementia. Within a couple of years it was obvious ALAN was going to need help with her. And he was determined to make sure she got the very best care - KATHERINE had nursed ALAN through numerous bouts of depression as his tobacco business slowly died. She was his rock and now it's his turn.

ALAN was determined to keep KATHERINE at home but his pension wouldn't cover it. That's when he struck on the idea of growing organic "chop chop" (illegal tobacco) to supplement his income. Not a big operation - just enough to pay the extra bills and some home care for KATHERINE. And as an ex-farmer he knew exactly how to grow the stuff hydroponically in his backyard shed.

The only thing ALAN didn't think about was the distribution side of the business - selling contraband brings with it a different set of rules that aren't always fair. And ALAN isn't exactly in a position to fight back. That is until he meets SHANE. He figured it was all so simple. But where there's smoke...

LOCKY MCLEAN
(28, Shane's boss at the Council)

LOCKY'S been born and bred in Toowoomba and loves it. Wouldn't live anywhere else. He's married with two kids, a devoted church-goer (Catholic) and a respected young citizen. He's even been touted as a future politician if things work out.

For the moment though, LOCKY's dedicated himself to running the council gardening program where he employs workers with "shady" backgrounds. He helps them get on the straight and narrow. But this doesn't mean LOCKY is trying to recruit them for his God squad - heaven forbid. But if anyone needs a hand LOCKY is always there to talk things out in his impossibly optimistic way.

LOCKY also coaches the local first grade rugby team, The Toowoomba Wattles (facetiously called "The Roses" by their opponents). They're a motley group of mixed aged amateurs who are more interested in drinking than winning. As perpetual wooden spooners, the locals reckon that even God has

abandoned them (despite Locky's best efforts). But when LOCKY sees SHANE's hidden talent with a football, he recruits him to help train the team. And that's when God's love starts to shine on them...

But when one of the youngest and most loved players on the team is left brain damaged by a freak on-field accident, LOCKY carries the responsibility like a cross.

His faith will be tested.

BRENDAN AND LON DEMINSKY
(Shane's old bosses)

BRENDAN (46) and LON (44) weren't always bad. They used to be altar boys. Almost angels. Until their priest started secretly abusing LON. BRENDAN found out and the two brothers turned on the priest after service one Sunday. He never did it again. Never walked again either.

BRENDAN and LON spent the rest of their childhood in and out of detention. But they were survivors. By the time they were 21 they were veterans with the balls to claim their own little corner of Melbourne's gangland. First it was shop lifting gangs, cars heists and B&Es. Small time. Then they were into the protection rackets and SHANE joined their ranks. He'd met the DEMINSKYS through LIZ, who grew up in their neighbourhood. SHANE's big hitting legend alone was usually enough to bend "negotiations" in the DEMINSKYS favour. But it was all still controllable, almost civilised. Everyone knew how things worked.

Then things changed.

The DEMINSKYS wanted to expand. They started using new tactics that were less predictable, more anarchic and decidedly cold blooded. No one knew how this thing worked anymore, including SHANE, and this was exactly how the DEMINSKYS wanted it. Armed robbery, drug manufacturing, prostitution, even a few strategic contract kills on their competitors. It was all in the game now for the brothers.

Unfortunately, LON ran the drug operation and, well, one thing led to another. He was increasingly out of control, even for BRENDAN. It all came to a head in a ice-fuelled beating he dished out to a smart mouthed associate. SHANE was there, trying to drag LON off the guy. But it was too late - it took the cops two weeks to identify the body.

But their case was tight - either LON or SHANE was the killer. SHANE was expected to take the wrap. He didn't. After SHANE'S evidence, LON'S case was open and shut. BRENDAN'S, however, had a few holes in it. He's about to get out on a technicality.

And he's got a score to settle...

TOOWOOMBA

Toowoomba may have grown to be a regional city, but it never lost touch of its country roots. Perched high on the edge of the Great Dividing Range and surrounded by lush farming land, Toowoomba is the gateway to the sprawling cattle country of Central Queensland. It is neither big enough to bump into old enemies nor small enough to attract too much attention - which makes it a perfect place to disappear.

Its people are traditional folk, enjoying a simple life that rarely requires them to go into the “big smoke”. Flower festivals, Sunday service, rodeos, horse racing and rugby are the big pastimes in town (not to mention roo shooting when the cull is on).

But the KELLYS would be foolish to think they can pull the wool over the eyes of these folk. Everyone in town was born with a built-in bullshit detector, especially when it comes to anyone south of the range.

While the KELLYS would probably like to keep to themselves, there are plenty of people to meet if they're going to start a new life here - work colleagues, bosses, principals, schoolmates, neighbours, shopkeepers.

How are the KELLYS going to keep their story straight?

DRAFT SERIES ARCS

SHANE

SHANE wants his family to have a good life, free of want or worry. But now he can’t just do what he used to. He has to change, which is harder than he expects.

Helping Alan

Shane will gradually be coaxed into helping Alan with his “chop chop” business. First as an extra pair of hands for the aging Alan, then as protection. Later, however, bigger players will want in on Alan’s product and his backyard operation will start to expand beyond his control. He needs a bigger shed, more equipment, and maybe even extra hands. Despite the risks, Shane doesn’t want to leave the old guy in the lurch and becomes a reluctant strategist and deal negotiator for Alan. And to add to the hassle, Shane has to tolerate Alan’s mood swings as he struggles with the ups and downs of Katherine’s on-going illness. But, without anyone realising, Shane and Alan’s product actually makes it’s way into the tobacco stained fingers of Brendan Deminsky – he likes this mellow shit from up North and demands a steady supply.

At Home

Shane wants to give his family a few of the luxuries they’re used to and his cut of Alan’s business is going to help. But spending the money is a lot harder than Shane thought – not only is Mel keeping an eye on him but Liz is onto

every cent that comes through the house. Shane becomes expert at making elaborate excuses for where he gets the money for family treats – a meat tray won at the pub; a broken freezer at the corner store offers up tubs of ice cream; a bargain at a lost and found auction gets Max a new bike. But it's all small fry – what Shane really wants is a home theatre system with a cable subscription so he can watch footy. How's he going to get that by Liz and Mel? And with Liz going back to work, Shane is also called on to pull his weight around the house. Cooking, cleaning, raising the kids (he soon finds he can't just be the good guy like he's used to). It's a new world for Shane – but he did say he wanted to change. To his surprise, he discovers a few talents, like cooking. He decides he's a master and rule of the kitchen becomes an unexpected battleground for Liz and Shane.

At Work
One of Shane's challenges here is learning he's not number one – he's part of a team. He can't just bully people around. Also, he has to turn up on time and actually do his job like he said he would. But biggest of all, Shane has to learn to handle a bit of friendly sledging. With Locky's help and patience Shane's thin skin grows a little thicker. Of course, there's also the issue of his backstory – talking shit is a pre-requisite skill with Locky's crew and Shane struggles to keep his story straight.

Footy
Apart from his eternal quest to secretly watch this week's AFL game, Shane will also learn about Rugby League when he helps Locky train the Toowoomba Wattles. But to do it Shane will have to get fit again – NOT easy. His focus will be on the wayward young fullback Danny Long who he turns into a killer kicker. It looks like the Wattles are turning around their losing streak when the captain of the team is hurt in a freak accident and suffers a brain injury. Locky takes it very hard and for once Shane will be the one to offer support. A fundraiser is held to support the injured captain and his family. Shane makes a large anonymous donation that cleans out his savings from the chop chop business. Oh well, guess that plasma screen will have to wait.

Laying Low
See below – "Deminsky's Hunt for Shane".

LIZ
Liz would really just like to lay low. She understands the danger they're all in and knows they need to stay under the radar. Besides she's used to being a loner. But Liz is going to discover what friends are for.

At Work
Being the daughter of a barber, Liz finds her feet with hairdressing again very quickly. Unfortunately, what Liz struggles with is making conversation with the customers. She has thoughts about most things but has been used to laying low, only offering her honest opinion when pushed. She hates making inane conversation with the customers, not just because she doesn't want to talk about herself (for obvious reasons) but also because she thinks they spend

the whole time whinging. She doesn't want to just humour these people, she wants to slap them! Luckily, her boss Jeannine is patient. After a few false starts, Liz discovers she has a knack for giving brutally honest advice that is genuinely useful to her customers. Jeannine almost fires Liz over it but, thanks to a growing list of return customers, Liz finds her words of wisdom are in demand.

Friendship

Despite her reluctance to get close to people, Liz will make two very special friends in Toowoomba – a woman called Adel and the eccentric fortune teller / nutbar, Cee.

Liz meets Adel as a customer at the salon. Adel works in a local bank and introduces Liz to a small group of female friends. They warmly welcome Liz into their social life but Liz resists for a long time, afraid to reveal much of herself to the group. Their friendship and persistence eventually coaxes Liz out on their regular get togethers. But when Brendan Deminsky is released from gaol on a technicality, Liz becomes very afraid and retreats again. Adel can see her distress and tries to be a friend but Liz pushes her away.

The ever-present Cee (she's comes over most days) gets through to Liz again. She's been a great help to Liz, looking out for Shane and the kids as well as providing a constant supply of baked goods and surprisingly perceptive fortune telling. Cee helps Liz see she needs friends if she's going to survive whatever she's going through.

At Cee's encouragement, Liz recontacts Adel and admits she's afraid to make friends because she can't be honest about her past. Adel understands – there's a lot she can never tell Liz about herself as well because it's just too painful. But it doesn't mean they can't be friends. Liz gets the feeling Adel has a history she's running from too.

At Home

Of course, Liz still has a lot to do at home too. There's keeping an eye on Shane (she's got a feeling he's up to something...) as well as helping the kids settle in to their new life. And there are some bumps along the way. Cleo not only develops a shoplifting habit but is also caught contacting Daniel by mobile phone. And then there's poor Max – his anxiety attacks were tough but then the psychologist teaches him how to lie. And boy, does he tell a BIG LIE (more on that later...)

CLEO

Cleo wants to be special again. She wants to be alpha girl – the coolest, smartest, most beautiful girl at school.

But Cleo's caginess about her past, as well as her natural big-city spikiness, will see her labelled a snob very quickly at school. She's on the outer and, despite her best efforts to discourage them, will be adopted by the daggy

Helena and Michelle. It's all so humiliating. As a result, Cleo clings to her relationship to Daniel like a lifeline to her glorious past.

But Daniel will bore of the mystery surrounding Cleo/Nicole's disappearance very quickly. He will move on and Cleo will be devastated – so much so that she develops a nasty shoplifting habit ("I'm not sad, I actually NEED this stuff!"). Helena and Michelle take Cleo to her first rodeo to try and cheer her up (and to stop her shoplifting). Cleo hates it until she meets Glenn, a hunky cowboy who shows an interest in her. And he's nothing like what Cleo expected – he's smart, articulate and very, very cute. Unfortunately, he's from a poor farming family ("Sorry, 3 out of 4"). Cleo hesitates.

When her on-going shoplifting activities attract the attention of Jason, the school captain, Cleo thinks she might be back in the Alpha Girl game. But then she gets seriously busted trying to steal a gift to woo Jason. Not only do her parents find out, but their hard arse relocation officer Mel is also called in. No conviction will be recorded but Cleo will be placed on a community service order – NOT cool!

Max

Max wants everyone to like him. Everyone. All the time.

Unfortunately, this manifests as nose bleeds and, later, anxiety attacks whenever Max has to talk about himself or his past. It's horrible. He will be ostracized and bullied at school.

Luckily, Mel organises for Max to see a psychologist, Dr Banner, who will gradually teach Max that it's OK to lie in certain situations. Max, being kind of awesome at everything he tries, actually takes to it quite well. So much so that he fabricates a story that he gets nose bleeds because he has cancer.

Max's fortunes at school turn rapidly – everyone is lovely to him. Sympathetic friends set upon bullies who hassle Max. But maintaining this lie will be tricky. Max uses Liz's clippers to shave off all his hair. Liz is bewildered why he would do that and forces him to wear a bandana to school (PERFECT!).

Unfortunately, a teacher will get wind of Max's story and ask Liz about it. Max is so busted. Being the naturally honest kid he is, Max admits it all. He says he's learnt how to lie now so he'll stop. He has just one last story to spread – his CURE! Liz and Shane reluctantly agree – how much different is it to what they do everyday anyway?

Deminsky's Hunt for Shane

Brendan Deminsky wants to get out of prison and find Shane.
Unfortunately, he can't do much about either for himself – he needs help.

The first part he pretty much has to leave to his lawyer, Wade. Bit by bit Wade and Brendan will inch towards his freedom based on a series of technicalities

that Wade will have to argue. But he'll get there. And eventually, Brendan will be on the streets again.

The second part, finding Shane, is more involved and he recruits old friend Detective Constable Vincent Goss for the job. Vincent owes Brendan a long list of favours and he now has to deliver – or he'll be the one with the contract out on him.

Vincent has heard of Mel Cook and that she works for witness protection (he discovered this from a colleague who was one of Mel's occasional flings years ago). Vincent will set about finding, meeting and seducing Mel. His plan is to see if he can find out where Shane went. It takes a while and Mel calls Vincent out on his stalky behaviour. But Vincent is an effortless charmer and the lonely and tired Mel, uncharacteristically, falls for it. When Vincent discovers Mel is Shane's protection officer he realises he's hit the jackpot. He will use a "lost" mobile phone left in her car to track Mel's movements (a commonplace feature on any iPhone). He soon knows Shane is in Toowoomba.

He will go looking, taking leave from work to stay in the town. Vincent will find Shane just when he is about to give up – and Shane will instantly recognise him as working for Deminsky as always. There will be a car chase down the winding mountain range at night with Vincent desperately fleeing the enraged Shane. There will be an "accident". Vincent will be barely clinging to life as Shane tries to drag answers from him – "Does Deminsky know?" Vincent will die before Shane has answers.

The series will end on the turmoil that Vincent has brought back into the Kelly's lives and they will have to decide – should they stay or should they go?

Screenwriting with Stanislavsky

Major Studio Work #2: *Saviour*
(Television Series Pilot Script and Creative Bible 1-3)

Anthony Mullins
Bachelors of Arts (Media Production) – Griffith University
Masters by Research (Screenwriting) – QUT

Queensland College of Art
Arts, Education and Law
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree
Doctorate of Visual Arts

November 2014

Savior Pilot Script and Bible redacted due to commercial development

Screenwriting with Stanislavsky

Major Studio Work #3: *Starting Over*
(Television Series Pilot Script and Creative Bible)

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November 2014

MAJOR STUDIO WORK #3

STARTING OVER

TV series

Episode #1

Created and Written by
Anthony Mullins

Forty and divorced...
How the hell do you start over?

contact@anthonymullins.com
www.anthonymullins.com

Contact: RGM Associates (Jennifer Naughton and Dayne Kelly)
Phone: (612) 9281 3911

1 INT. CARPARK - DAY 1

A stylish SUV zips through the crowded carpark.

There's a space. Another car is within reach. The SUV accelerates and easily beats it. Precision driving.

The door of the SUV opens and CLASSY BLACK STILETTOS step from the car with the same confident precision. Strong sexy legs, striding away. Tailored business suit. Lipstick. Dark sunglasses. This is ALISON (40). Don't mess with her.

2 INT. CARPARK, ELEVATOR DOORS - DAY 2

ALISON presses the elevator button, waits.

The doors open. Inside a MAN (40) leans against the wall, adjusting the cuffs of his casual, yet stylish, suit. His face sprouts a CONFIDENT GREY STUBBLE. He has a crumpled, roguish charm about him. This is MARTY.

MARTY's eyes flick up to ALISON. He acknowledges her with the smallest smile. ALISON, unreadable through dark glasses.

MARTY moves aside to make room. ALISON steps into the elevator and looks straight ahead.

3 INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 3

MARTY reaches casually for the ELEVATOR BUTTONS, finger hovering.

MARTY
Floor?

ALISON turns and looks directly at MARTY. She removes her sunglasses, revealing PALE GREEN EYES for the first time. They blink coolly at MARTY.

He confidently returns her gaze. There's an undeniable connection between them - is it getting hotter in here?.

ALISON's eyes narrow. She steps closer. MARTY, expectant.

ALISON studies MARTY's face - his clear blues eyes, his strong jaw, his mouth. There's SOMETHING at the corner of his lips - egg?

ALISON stops abruptly, taps her mouth.

ALISON
(matter of fact)
Lunch.

MARTY
What?

MARTY touches his mouth.

ALISON
Other side.

MARTY
Oh.

MARTY wipes a smear of egg from his mouth with a tissue.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Gone?

ALISON looks.

ALISON
Yeah.

ALISON turns to the front, preoccupied. MARTY blows his nose. ALISON looks at him again, examining.

ALISON (CONT'D)
The beard makes you look older.

The doors of the elevator open and ALISON strides out.

MARTY
(offended)
Oh really?

MARTY follows. A SIGN on the wall - "FAMILY LAW COURTS".

4 INT. FAMILY LAW COURTS, FOYER - DAY 4

ALISON walks. MARTY catches up.

MARTY
I've been told it makes me look distinguished. Like George Clooney distinguished.

ALISON scoffs.

ALISON
They mean you look older.

MARTY
What's the matter with you? Are you stressed or something?

ALISON
Of course I'm stressed.

MARTY, surprised. He stops ALISON.

MARTY
Are you getting cold feet?

ALISON
(dismissive)
No.

MARTY
(eager)
Because we don't have to do this today you know. I mean, it's kind of inconvenient bringing it forward on us like that.

ALISON
No Marty.

MARTY
And we haven't even told the kids and we've got that stupid dinner tonight...

ALISON
(silences MARTY)
No! We'll tell them tonight. I want this over.

A COURT ATTENDANT steps into the foyer.

COURT ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Martin and Alison McEwan.

ALISON waves to him. The COURT ATTENDANT opens a door and motions for them to enter.

ALISON
(firm)
We're doing this.

ALISON heads inside. MARTY reluctantly follows.

5 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, ALISON'S BEDROOM - DAY 5

CLOSE ON - A PHOTO ALBUM is placed on a bed. It opens to reveal VARIOUS FAMILY SNAPS of the McEWANS over the years - MARTY and ALISON with TWO GIRLS and TWO BOYS. Beach holidays, birthdays, Christmases.

LUCINDA (17), in an effortlessly cool retro dress, lies on the bed scanning the album. Satisfied, she closes it and gets up, taking the album with her.

6 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY 6

JAKE (9), in a dirty school uniform, stands in an immaculately neat and organised living room watching TV. He has a FOOTBALL under one arm and A REMOTE CONTROL in the other. He's transfixed by a FOOTBALL GAME on the screen.

COMMENTATOR
And Fidler has it, passes to Taylor...

JAKE pauses the video, rewinds. He hits play. The same section plays again.

COMMENTATOR (CONT'D)
(off-screen)
And Fidler has it, passes to Taylor...

As the play happens JAKE mimics the on-screen action. He's concentrating hard, taking in every detail, learning.

LUCINDA walks into the living room with the album.

LUCINDA
Jake. Outside with the footy.

JAKE, disappointed, thinks quick.

JAKE
(lying, badly)
Mum said I could practise here now.

LUCINDA
Oh no you don't. Mum would <u>never</u> say that. Outside.

JAKE looks around at the fastidiously clean living room - yeah, that was a big porky. He shrugs and heads outside. LUCINDA walks into the...

7 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY 7

MIXING BOWLS and a RECIPE BOOK on the counter. DANIELLE (14), also in a school uniform, is scanning the pantry. LUCINDA walks in with the PHOTO ALBUM.

LUCINDA
I'm gonna take these.

DANIELLE
(seeing the album)
But they're everyone's.

LUCINDA
I'm getting them duped. It's for a project. Don't worry, I'll bring them back.

DANIELLE
(back to the cupboard)
So have you seen the condensed milk? I'm making cheesecake for tonight.

LUCINDA
(cautious)
Right. Listen, Danielle. When Mum gets here I'm gonna go out OK?

DANIELLE
What?

LUCINDA
There's a exhibition opening and...

DANIELLE
Wednesday night is dinner night!

LUCINDA
Yeah, but <u>every</u> Wednesday?

DANIELLE
If <u>we</u> don't come to these dinners Mum and Dad won't bother seeing each other.

LUCINDA
I kinda think they'd be cool with that.

DANIELLE
But I want to see <u>you</u>. And Paul! And Dad!

LUCINDA
(giving in)
OK, OK!

DANIELLE
We're still a family!

LUCINDA
I get it! I'll stay.

DANIELLE calms down.

DANIELLE
So have you seen the condensed milk?

LUCINDA
I think I saw Paul with it.

DANIELLE
NO!

DANIELLE rushes out of the kitchen and down the hall.

8 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, PAUL'S OLD ROOM - DAY 8

PAUL (14), long ratty hair with a skater's cap, kneels by the window of the COMPLETELY EMPTY ROOM. He drags on a JOINT and blows the smoke out the window.

DANIELLE (O.S.)
Paul! If you've eaten that condensed milk...!

PAUL expertly flicks the joint out the window, closes it and slides oh-so-casually against the wall. DANIELLE bursts through the door.

PAUL
Fucking knock next time.

DANIELLE glares at PAUL and looks around - in the corner is an EMPTY TUBE OF CONDENSED MILK. She picks it up.

DANIELLE
That was for the cheesecake tonight!

PAUL
(shrugs)
I didn't know.

DANIELLE
Yes you did!

DANIELLE throws the tube at PAUL - hard. PAUL ducks it.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
You did it on purpose!

PAUL
Fuck you bitch!

LUCINDA enters, shoots daggers at PAUL.

LUCINDA
Don't call her that!
(to DANIELLE))
We'll make something else Danielle.
I'll help you.

DANIELLE
It'll be too late.
(to PAUL)
You ruin <u>everything</u>.

PAUL
Get out of my room.

DANIELLE
It's not your room anymore!

DANIELLE stomps away, upset. LUCINDA turns on PAUL.

LUCINDA
You're a douchebag.

PAUL
I was hungry. I had the munchies.

PAUL smiles wickedly. LUCINDA steps closer to PAUL, smells the air. Yep - dope.

LUCINDA
(under her breath)
Don't try that shit at Dad's.

PAUL scoffs.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
I'm serious.

PAUL
Get outta my room.

LUCINDA leaves. PAUL picks up the tube and sucks it - all gone. He tosses it aside.

9 INT. FAMILY COURT - DAY 9

CLOSE ON: A NOTEPAD. A hand sketches a VERY UNFLATTERING CARICATURE of a FEMALE JUDGE. It's a skillful illustration, professional.

MARTY, sitting in the front stalls, giggles quietly as he adds detail to the picture. ALISON, sitting next to him, looks over and sees the picture. She reaches across and closes the notepad. MARTY silently protests. ALISON glares.

At the front of the court the FEMALE JUDGE (55) finishes reviewing a FILE in front of her. She looks busy, tired and VERY grumpy. MARTY's picture was an excellent likeness.

JUDGE
(reading)
Martin and Alison McEwan.

MARTY and ALISON come to the front with their solicitors.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
I've read your application for divorce and everything seems to be in order. Has an agreement been reached for distribution of properties?

MARTY AND ALISON
Yes Your Honour.

JUDGE
And care of the four children.

MARTY AND ALISON
Yes Your Honour.

ALISON goes to clarify.

ALISON
We're each caring for two of...

JUDGE
(in a hurry)
As long as there is an agreement.

ALISON and MARTY nod - there is.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
And there is no chance of reconciliation.

ALISON
No Your Honour.

MARTY
No Your Honour.

JUDGE
Very well. I will grant a divorce order which will take effect in one month and one day from this date.

The judge bangs a gavel. ALISON and MARTY are surprised how quick it's all over. ALISON raises her hand.

ALISON
Your Honour, might I say a few words. I'd like to explain why we're getting divorced...

JUDGE
(examining another file)
Not today Ms McEwan. It is not required, nor do I desire, to hear the personal details of your divorce presented in open court. Next case...Douglas and Kirsty McGrath.

ALISON's solicitor motions her away. ALISON backs down. She looks to MARTY - he shrugs.

ON ALISON, unsatisfied.

10 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY 10

DANIELLE looks through recipe books. LUCINDA is flicking through the photo album.

DANIELLE
What about a meringue?

LUCINDA
(without looking up)
Keep it simple. Let's just get tubs of everyone's favourite ice-cream. Like an ice-cream orgy.

DANIELLE
That's not special! Every dinner we have as a family should be special now.

LUCINDA
(over it)
OK. Meringue. It's good, whatever.

PAUL wanders in, opens the fridge, still hungry. DANIELLE glares at him. PAUL pulls a grotesque face. She ignores him.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
(looking at the album)
Awwww...check it.

LUCINDA takes a photo from the album and shows the others.

CLOSE ON - An OLD PHOTO of TWO SMILING BABIES on a rug. They're IDENTICALLY DRESSED.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
You really are twins.

DANIELLE takes the photo, smiles. She looks at PAUL. He snatches the photo from her and sneers.

PAUL
Fuck that shit. Don't remind me.

PAUL flicks the photo away - it lands on the edge of a sink full of water.

LUCINDA
HEY!

DANIELLE saves the photo, holds it close.

DANIELLE
Why are you so mean to me? What'd I do to you?

PAUL
(sarcastic)
Uh, let's see...You were born.

DANIELLE turns away and bursts into tears. LUCINDA thumps PAUL hard in the arm.

PAUL (CONT'D)
OW! It was a joke!

LUCINDA
Fuck off shit stick.

LUCINDA goes and hugs DANIELLE. PAUL saunters away.

PAUL
Jeeze, so fucking sensitive!

11 INT. COURT HOUSE, ELEVATOR DOORS 11

ALISON waits at the elevator. MARTY walks up.

ALISON
You got off lightly.

MARTY
Would it've made a difference?

The elevator doors open - it's crowded. A couple of solicitors have much taken over the elevator with huge TROLLIES OF DOCUMENTS. Other passengers huddle around them. There might be room for one.

ALISON turns to MARTY. MARTY sighs and gestures for ALISON to take it. Everyone in the elevator groans and tries to shuffle around. A SOLICITOR steps on a WOMAN's foot.

WOMAN
OW!

SOLICITOR
Sorry.
(to ALISON)
Can you wait?

ALISON concedes. The elevator doors close.

MARTY
(joking)
Stuck with me.

ALISON
Not any more.

MARTY smiles, touche. Despite everything, there's still a glimmer of affection between the two of them.

Another elevator door opens - it's empty. They get in and the doors close.

12 INT. COURT HOUSE, LIFT - DAY 12

MARTY and ALISON stand closer this time. MARTY, thinking.

MARTY
I don't really feel up to Wednesday night dinner tonight.

ALISON
It's Danielle's thing. We've got to make an effort.
(thinking)
But we really should tell the kids tonight.

MARTY
Bit of a bummer.

ALISON
I think they're already bummed out don't you.

MARTY
Guess so.
(conceding)
OK. Tonight.

The elevator stops.

ALISON
My floor.

ALISON and MARTY look at each other. The significance of saying goodbye isn't lost on either of them. The doors start to open. ALISON turns to leave.

MARTY reaches across and hits the "CLOSE" BUTTON. The doors close. ALISON stops, turns to MARTY.

MARTY
Hey. I'm sorry. About all this.

ALISON nods.

ALISON
I know you are.

MARTY and ALISON give each other a gentle hug. No kiss.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Seeya later on.

MARTY
Seeya.

MARTY pushes the “OPEN” BUTTON. They start to open - then STOP with a shudder. They jerk violently back and forth and close again.

ALISON
Bloody hell.

The elevator starts to move again.

MARTY
Hang on.

MARTY presses the button furiously.

ALISON
What are you doing?

The elevator SHUDDERS to a stop.

MARTY
Shit.

MARTY starts pressing all the buttons - none of them work.

ALISON
Stop pressing them!

MARTY
We’re stuck.

ALISON
I know!

MARTY throws up his hands, sulks. ALISON sighs.

ALISON (CONT’D)
Shit.

13 INT. COURT HOUSE, ELEVATOR - DAY 13

INTERCUT WITH

14 EXT. ALISON’S HOUSE, VERANDAH - DAY 14

LUCINDA and DANIELLE are sitting on the backsteps. DANIELLE is wiping her eyes after a big cry.

LUCINDA
You OK now?

DANIELLE nods.

LUCINDA (CONT’D)
He’s being a complete cock to everyone right now. Not just you.
(MORE)

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
But I reckon you're better off with the new setup. Give you two a break.

DANIELLE
Yeah, I know.

LUCINDA phone rings. She answers.

LUCINDA
Hey Mum.
(frowns)
You're breaking up.

ELEVATOR: ALISON is on the phone. In the background MARTY is on the EMERGENCY PHONE waiting for an answer.

ALISON
I said I'm going to be late. I'm...
(thinking)
...stuck in traffic.

LUCINDA (O.S.)
Sure OK. I'm at your place with the others.

ALISON
Shouldn't be long.

MARTY gets an answer on his phone.

MARTY
Yeah hi, we're in one of your lifts...

ALISON glares at MARTY - SHUT UP!

MARTY (CONT'D)
(whispers)
And it's broken down.

VERANDAH: LUCINDA frowns.

LUCINDA
Is that Dad?

DANIELLE listens up.

ALISON (O.S.)
No, it's the radio. I've turned it down. I'll be home soon OK.

LUCINDA
OK. Bye.

LUCINDA hangs up.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
Mum's stuck in traffic.

DANIELLE
Was Dad there?

LUCINDA
Sounded like it.

DANIELLE
Why would they be together?

LUCINDA and DANIELLE look at each other. DANIELLE gets excited, jumps up.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
I'm going to make a meringue!

LUCINDA
No! Danny, don't get your hopes up!

DANIELLE runs inside. LUCINDA follows.

15 INT. CALL CENTRE - DAY 15

INTERCUT:

16 INT. COURT HOUSE, ELEVATOR - DAY 16

MARTY is on the EMERGENCY PHONE. ALISON tries to stay calm.

MARTY
Do you know how long?

PHONE ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Not until we see the situation sir.

MARTY
Are we talking minutes? Hours?
Days?

CALL CENTRE: A PHONE ATTENDANT sits at his desk.

PHONE ATTENDANT
Not days sir. How many of you are
there in the lift?

MARTY (O.S.)
Just me and my ex-wife.

PHONE ATTENDANT
Ex-wife sir?

MARTY (O.S.)
Yes, ex-wife.

ELEVATOR: ALISON frowns, listens in.

MARTY (CONT'D)
(smirking, a joke)
Please hurry.

ALISON glares, mouths "Fuck you".

PHONE ATTENDANT (O.S.)
(getting the joke)
Yes sir, we'll elevate this situation to priority status.

MARTY
Thank you.

PHONE ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Do either of you have a medical condition that needs attention?

MARTY
(under his breath)
Well, my ex is a pain in my arse. Does that count?

The PHONE ATTENDANT and MARTY chuckle. ALISON whips the phone out of MARTY's hand.

ALISON
Just get on with it!

She slams the phone down.

MARTY
(still giggling)
I was just trying to lighten the mood.

ALISON
(seething)
Nice one.

MARTY
C'mon, it's not like it's my fault.

ALISON scoffs.

MARTY (CONT'D)
How is this <u>my</u> fault?

ALISON gives MARTY a withering look.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Oh I get it! <u>This</u> is what you wanted to tell the court.

ALISON
Give it a break.

MARTY
(grandstanding)
Yes Your Honour. I can sum up the reasons for our divorce in one simple word...MARTY!

ALISON
Fuck you.

ALISON turns her back on MARTY - she's about to explode.

MARTY
I know Your Honour, it's incredibly simple but after months of counselling and soul-searching by both of us it's all boiled down to this simple, irrefutable fact - it's MARTY'S FAULT.

ALISON's had enough.

ALISON
Well you did FUCK MY SISTER!

MARTY
Stop saying it like that.

ALISON
How else should I say it? You "made love"? Exchanged body fluids? RUBBED UGLIES?

MARTY
Stop it.

ALISON
You FUCKED MY SISTER!

MARTY
Alison...

ALISON
YOU FUCKED MY SISTER!

MARTY
OK - I FUCKED YOUR SISTER! ONCE!

ALISON
How does "ONCE" make a difference?

MARTY
It makes a BIG difference!

ALISON and MARTY glare at each other - uh oh.

17 EXT. ALISON'S HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY 17

JAKE kicks and passes the ball to himself in a high energy game of IMAGINARY FOOTY.

JAKE
(to himself)
It's a fight to the death between these two sides. Neither is giving ground without a fight.

PAUL, still kind of stoned, wanders outside and sits to watch - a sneer on his face.

JAKE (CONT'D)
The pass goes wide to McEwan. McEwan dummies. Creates the gap, he takes it. But has he got the speed? YES HE DOES! McEwan dives for the line - IT'S A TRY!!!

JAKE does a spectacular dive. He leaps up, triumphant.

JAKE (CONT'D)
(crowd sound)
RAAAAAAAAAA!

PAUL slow claps.

PAUL
Oh yeah, he's done it. Jake McEwan has won the Meathead Cup for his team the Rapists.

PAUL cracks up. JAKE doesn't react to PAUL's jibes. He picks up the ball and trots over to PAUL. He crouches on one knee, like in a half time huddle. He looks at PAUL for a long time - its kind of unnerving. PAUL stops laughing.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What?

JAKE
Paul, we're headed for a really tough season. This is a time where we need to pull together as a team. It's gonna be rough, but I believe in us. We can do this.

JAKE speaks with sincerity and intensity - it's like he's channeling the half-time speech from some long dead coach. PAUL, in his stoned state, is unnerved. He snatches the ball off JAKE and KICKS IT onto the ROOF OF THE HOUSE.

PAUL
Freak.

PAUL stumbles off. JAKE, once again, doesn't react. He surveys the situation and sees a TREE NEXT TO THE HOUSE. He heads for it.

18 INT. COURT HOUSE, LIFT - DAY 18

ALISON and MARTY are still at it.

MARTY
"Once" means we understood it was a mistake.

ALISON
So did you and Michala come to this "understanding" together while you were BANGING HER?

MARTY
You're just trying to punish me now.

ALISON
Oh...SORRY! I didn't mean to punish you for FUCKING MY SISTER.

MARTY
Oh go on, say it again.

ALISON
YOU FUCKED MY SISTER, YOU...SISTER FUCKER!

MARTY
SISTER FUCKER?

ALISON
FUCKER!

MARTY
OH FUCK YOU!

The PHONE on the wall rings. MARTY picks it up.

MARTY (CONT'D)
(abruptly)
WHAT?

MARTY listens. He looks up - dread on his face.

ALISON
What is it?

MARTY holds his hand up to shush ALISON. He listens.

MARTY
I see. OK. Thanks for letting us know.
(MORE)

MARTY (CONT'D)
Yeah I think the small space, it's...getting to us a bit. Yeah. Will do.

MARTY hangs up. He slumps against the wall.

ALISON
What is it?

MARTY
They can hear us.

ALISON
What? Who?

MARTY
Everyone. The whole court.

ALISON understands - oh shit...

MARTY (CONT'D)
Echoes thorough the lift shaft, into every chamber.

ALISON
Uh f...

ALISON cuts herself off and slumps against the wall.

19 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY 19

DANIELLE pulls a punnet of strawberries from the fridge.

DANIELLE
We can put strawberries on top!

DANIELLE puts the strawberries on the counter and starts whisking an EGGY, SUGARY MIXTURE in a bowl.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Mum and Dad are going to love this.

LUCINDA
It might not have been Dad.

DANIELLE scoffs.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
Well even if it was it doesn't mean they're getting back together.

DANIELLE
They <u>never</u> see each other apart from these dinners. Why else would they be getting together?

LUCINDA
(not wanting to say it)
Well, there is...

SFX - A CLOMPING SOUND ON THE ROOF

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
What's that?

JAKE (O.S.)
(from outside)
Arrrghhh!

LUCINDA
JAKE?

LUCINDA rushes outside. DANIELLE follows - but as she runs DANIELLE knocks the BOWL OF SUGARY MIXTURE over. It starts to LEAK all over the PHOTO ALBUM.

20 EXT. ALISON'S HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY 20

JAKE writhes on the ground in pain - his football and a BROKEN BRANCH are beside him. LUCINDA and DANIELLE run up.

LUCINDA
Jakey were you on the roof?

JAKE
I had to get my ball.

LUCINDA touches JAKE's arm - he grits his teeth.

LUCINDA
I think it's broken.

DANIELLE
We'd better get him to hospital.

LUCINDA
(to DANIELLE)
Go see if Mr or Mrs Yuan are home.

DANIELLE runs next door. LUCINDA gets on the phone.

21 INT. COURT HOUSE, LIFT - DAY 21

ALISON and MARTY sit in silence on the floor of the lift. The mood is still tender - both of them exhausted.

MARTY
I'm sorry.

ALISON stares straight ahead, nods.

MARTY (CONT'D)
For everything.

ALISON
I don't want to talk anymore.

MARTY, thinks, holds out an olive branch.

MARTY
Maybe it was mostly my fault.

ALISON nods.

ALISON
(definite)
Yeah.

MARTY, irritated - he was hoping for a little more middle ground from ALISON. They've been at this impasse before.

MARTY
You know Al...

The elevator SHUDDERS and starts to move. ALISON stands up and wipes her eyes. MARTY gives up and stands too.

22 EXT. ALISON'S HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY 22

LUCINDA helps JAKE up. DANIELLE returns from next door.

DANIELLE
No one's home.

LUCINDA
I can't get onto Dad either.

PAUL wanders out and sees JAKE - uh oh.

PAUL
What the fuck?

LUCINDA
Jakey fell off the roof.

PAUL, worried - this could be bad for him.

JAKE
(to PAUL)
I kicked my ball up there.

PAUL, confused. A look from JAKE - this is team work. PAUL irritated.

DANIELLE
What're we going to do? Should we call an ambulance?

LUCINDA starts to dial.

LUCINDA
I know who we can call.

ON DANIELLE - Who?

23 INT. COURT HOUSE, CAR PARK - DAY 23

The elevator doors are opened by a MAINTENCE MAN. MARTY and ALISON exit warily. A SMALL CROWD of people watch on, smirking. ALISON and MARTY just want to get out of there.

A MAN IN A CASUAL SUIT snaps them with a mobile phone. He clocks MARTY - a look of recognition.

MAN
Hey Marty!

MARTY knows the guy. He quickly goes up to him while ALISON checks her phone.

MARTY
Davin? Mate, no pictures please.

DAVIN
Need ‘em for the story Marty.

MARTY
You’re not seriously going to run this?

DAVIN
Sure. It’s great.

MARTY
How is this <u>news</u>?

DAVIN
Er, couple get divorce, get stuck in lift, rip each other a new arsehole. The story writes itself.

MARTY
No, no, no, no. You’re not running it. Who’s your editor?

DAVIN
C’mon Marty. You used to take the piss out of people for a living.

MARTY
This isn’t taking the piss. This is an invasion of privacy - my kids don’t even know we’re divorced yet.

DAVIN thinks.

DAVIN
Would you have run it?

MARTY
No. Way.

DAVIN
Hmm. Maybe that's why I still work there.

DAVIN smiles and trots away. ALISON comes over - she's concerned.

MARTY
Don't worry I'll sort it.

ALISON
It's not that.

MARTY
What?

ALISON
Jake's in emergency. He's fallen off the roof.

MARTY
C'mon.

ALISON and MARTY, briefly united again, run for their cars.

24 EXT. HOSPITAL - EVENING 24

Establisher.

25 INT. HOSPITAL, EMERGENCY WARD - EVENING 25

LUCINDA signs her name in JAKE's cast with a beautiful illustration - it's of JAKE running with a football. She has MARTY's gift. PAUL and DANIELLE watch on, impressed.

A WOMAN in the background nervously scans the corridor. She kind of resembles ALISON. This is MICHALA (34) and, apart from being pretty cute in her stylish hipster clothes, she looks terrified being there.

LUCINDA
Whatdaya think of that?

JAKE
Whoa! Awesome. Aunty Michala, your turn.

MICHALA
(reluctant)
Oh, I don't think I could top Lucy.

PAUL
Here, give me a go.

PAUL takes the pen. JAKE pulls his cast away.

JAKE
No swear words.

PAUL
Yeah alright.

DANIELLE
And no penises.

PAUL smiles mischievously and starts drawing. MICHALA pulls LUCINDA aside.

MICHALA
I'd better go.

LUCINDA
Thanks again.

LUCINDA gives MICHALA a big hug - they seem to have a bond.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
Guys. Michala's going.

JAKE
Thanks Aunty Michala!

PAUL
(without looking up)
Yeah.

DANIELLE pretends to be distracted - she doesn't want to speak to MICHALA. LUCINDA goes to say something but MICHALA stops her - it's OK.

26 INT. HOSPITAL, ENTRANCE - EVENING 26

ALISON and MARTY arrive together. ALISON stops MARTY.

ALISON
You'd better wait.

MARTY nods. He waits back as ALISON checks at the front desk - she gets directions and heads up a corridor.

MARTYY dials his mobile, waits.

27 INT. HOSPITAL, EMERGENCY WARD - EVENING 27

ALISON walks into the room just as MICHALA is coming out. ALISON is stunned to see her.

ALISON
What are you doing here?

MICHALA looks terrified. LUCINDA steps up.

LUCINDA
We needed a lift. You weren't answering.

ALISON
(furious)
You could've called an ambulance!

LUCINDA
Mum!

MICHALA
It's OK, I'm going.

MICHALA tries to step past ALISON.

ALISON
(seething)
Stay away.

MICHALA, head down and shaken, keeps walking.

LUCINDA
She just gave us a lift.

ALISON silences LUCINDA with a look. She steps into the room and puts on a brave face for JAKE.

ALISON
Jakey honey. What have you done?

JAKE
It's bad news Mum.

ALISON
What do you mean?

JAKE
I'm gonna miss four weeks of footy.

ALISON
(relieved)
Oh, that's awful.

ALISON hugs JAKE. LUCINDA watches MICHALA leave.

28 INT. HOSPITAL, ENTRANCE - EVENING 28

MARTY is on the phone.

MARTY
He even snapped us coming out of the lift. It's fucked. The kids don't even know it's official yet, that we're divorced. They can't find out this way.

MARTY listens - a negotiation taking place.

MARTY (CONT'D)
OK. No names, no pictures. Good.

MARTY sees MICHALA coming up the corridor - he wasn't expecting this. She looks like she's been crying.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Vince I've got to go but I owe you one. See ya.

MARTY hangs up. MICHALA sees him and realises she can't avoid MARTY. She walks quickly past him, eyes down.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Michala...

She doesn't stop.

MARTY (CONT'D)
(calling after her)
Is Jakey OK?

MICHALA looks back briefly and nods, keeps going. MARTY, helpless, watches her go. He turns and jogs down the corridor.

29 INT. HOSPITAL, EMERGENCY WARD - EVENING 29

Everyone is gathered around JAKE's bed.

JAKE
The ball was in the gutter so it was easy to get. But then the branch I was holding snapped and next thing I know, SMASH!

MARTY enters.

MARTY
Hey.

JAKE
Dad! Guess what happened!

ALISON
(to MARTY)
Fell out of a tree getting the ball off the roof. Greenstick fracture. Four weeks in plaster.

JAKE slumps - she stole his thunder.

MARTY
It's not like you to miss a kick Jakey.

JAKE
Yeah, it was a pretty mangy kick.

JAKE shoots PAUL a glance. PAUL sulks - he's really milking this. A DOCTOR arrives.

DOCTOR
How's the monkey?

JAKE giggles. The DOCTOR examines his arm.

LUCINDA whispers to MARTY.

LUCINDA
I tried to call you. Michala gave us a lift.

MARTY nods, understand. ALISON watches them, suspicious.

DOCTOR
Well your plaster's all set so you can go home.

JAKE
Yay!

The DOCTOR gives MARTY a pamphlet.

DOCTOR
Have a read of this for care instructions and take him to see your GP in four weeks.

MARTY
Will do.

ALISON pointedly takes the pamphlet from MARTY's hand.

ALISON
Ah, he stays with me.

DOCTOR
(uncomfortable)
Okey dokey.

The DOCTOR smiles and leaves. MARTY throws ALISON a look - was that necessary?

DANIELLE
So there's still time for a Wednesday dinner right?

ALISON and MARTY look at each other - no way.

MARTY
It's been a big day. Let's do it next week, yeah?

ALISON
Agreed.

DANIELLE
But it's important.

MARTY
I know, I know...

LUCINDA
It's OK Danielle. You never finished your dessert anyway.

DANIELLE
(disappointed)
I s'pose.

Everyone prepares to leave. DANIELLE watches MARTY and ALISON looking for clues of a reunion - nothing.

30 EXT. HOSPITAL, ENTRANCE - EVENING 30

The family make there way across the carpark.

Time to split up. DANIELLE hugs MARTY and LUCINDA. She goes to hug PAUL but he just sneers - no way. MARTY and ALISON give each other a polite touch of the shoulder - seeya.

The family, head off to their cars in two groups.

ALISON with JAKE and DANIELLE. MARTY with LUCINDA and PAUL. This is the way things are now.

31 MONTAGE BEGINS: 31

32 INT. ALISON'S CAR - NIGHT 32

ALISON drives, lost in her own thoughts.

33 INT. MARTY'S CAR - NIGHT 33

LUCINDA watches MARTY as he drives, also lost in his own thoughts. He notices her and gives her a reassuring wink.

34 EXT. ALISON'S HOUSE, YARD - NIGHT 34

ALISON listens as JAKE, now in a cast, describes where he fell from the roof.

35 EXT. DWAYNE'S HOUSE, YARD - NIGHT 35

MARTY, PAUL and LUCINDA come up the side of DWAYNE's house. The kids open the door to a FLAT UNDER THE HOUSE and go inside.

MARTY looks up to see his old friends, DWAYNE (41) and BARB (35), peering down expectantly from the verandah above. MARTY nods solemnly - it's done. BARB holds up a tea pot, offering. MARTY smiles, shakes his head goes inside.

36 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT 36

ALISON and DANIELLE clean the kitchen back to its typical sparkling shine. ALISON finds the FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM covered in MERINGUE MIXTURE - she's about to get angry but stops. ALISON hides it from DANIELLE.

37 INT. MARTY'S FLAT, KITCHEN - NIGHT 37

MARTY makes hot chocolate as LUCINDA and PAUL watch TV. The flat is a chaotic mess - books, pictures, paper everywhere. It couldn't be more different to ALISON's. PAUL shows LUCINDA something on his phone - she's disgusted and kicks him away. He laughs maniacally.

38 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT 38

ALISON tries to save the family photos - she wipes the dried meringue off but many are stuck together. She's upset.

39 INT. MARTY'S FLAT, BATHROOM - NIGHT 39

MARTY finishes cleaning his teeth. He opens a BOTTLE and takes out a couple of SMALL WHITE PILLS. He throws them back and swallows some water - all very routine.

40 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE - NIGHT 40

ALISON climbs into bed. She lies staring at the ceiling.

41 INT. MARTY'S FLAT, MARTY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 41

Marty lies awake too - alone, staring at the ceiling.

42 MONTAGE ENDS. 42

43 EXT. DWAYNE AND BARB'S HOUSE - MORNING 43

Establisher.

44 INT. MARTY'S FLAT, FRONT DOOR - MORNING 44

A knock. MARTY, with cereal bowl, opens the door - it's BARB.

BARB
You're on TV.

BARB runs off. ON MARTY - Huh? He follows.

45 INT. DWAYNE AND BARB'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING 45

CLOSE ON TV: A morning show host welcomes back viewers.

TV HOST
(smirking)
And now to a truly "terrifying" story involving a just divorced couple and a broken elevator.

MARTY stands slackjaw watching the screen.

MARTY
Fuckers.

DWAYNE
This is yesterday right?

MARTY
Yeah.

DWAYNE
Oh mate, that's really...
(can't find the words)
Oh mate.

HOST
The unfortunate incident happened yesterday at the family law courts and was captured by a court reporter.

CLOSE ON TV: DAVIN's mobile phone footage plays - it's a SHOT OF THE ELEVATOR DOORS. A small crowd is gathered - they're cringing at the muffled sound coming from the elevator.

ALISON (O.S.)
You (BEEP)ED MY SISTER!

MARTY (O.S.)
OK I (BEEP)ED YOUR SISTER!

ALISON (O.S.)
SISTER (BEEP)ER!

MARTY (O.S.)
(BEEP) YOU!

ALISON (O.S.)
(BEEP)ER!

MARTY points at the screen.

MARTY
OK, they edited that to make it sound worse.

DWAYNE
(shaking his head)
Oh mate...

CLOSE ON TV: A shot of ALISON and MARTY leaving the elevator - their faces are BLURRED OUT but it's easy to see it's them.

TV HOST (O.S.)
The elevator was eventually repaired and the couple were finally "separated".

CLOSE ON TV: the TV HOST and a CO-HOST sit on a couch.

TV HOST (CONT'D)
Jules this could inspire a new form of couple's counselling don't you think?

JULES
Well Fitzy, I wish I'd had an opportunity like that with my ex.

JULES and FITZY laugh.

BARB
This shit's gonna go viral.

MARTY sighs.

46 INT. MARTY'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - MORNING 46

INTERCUT

47 INT. ALISON'S OFFICE - DAY 47

ALISON, hard at work. A colleague, PETER (35, handsome, sharply dressed) pops his head in.

PETER
It's all set Alison.

ALISON
The presentation is loaded?

PETER
Yep.

ALISON
Air conditioner on?

PETER
Yep.

ALISON
Turned on the spotlights , not the fluros?

PETER
(smiles)
It's all set. I got everything.

ALISON
Sorry. I get a bit anal with this stuff.

PETER
I've already been warned.

PETER smiles. ALISON relaxes. Her phone rings. She checks the screen - it's MARTY. ALISON rolls her eyes.

ALISON
Gotta take this.

PETER leaves. ALISON answers.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Yeah?

MARTY's FLAT: Marty looks exhausted.

MARTY
Ah, we're on the Morning Show.

ALISON's OFFICE: ALISON, utterly perplexed.

ALISON
What?
(realising)
NO. You said you'd sort it.

MARTY
I did what I could, I'm not Rupert Murdoch. They didn't give our names but there's a shot where you can kind of see...

ALISON
(cutting him off)
Jesus Marty, you're useless.

MARTY'S FLAT: MARTY seethes.

MARTY
Thanks. I'll remember that in my job interview this morning. "Marty, You're useless".

ALISON
Do you think the kids will see it?

MARTY
We'll be lucky if it stays under a million hits. We'd better tell them.

ALISON'S OFFICE:

ALISON
OK. Tell them tonight.

MARTY
Yeah OK.

ALISON's assistant, EMMA (25), knocks at the door, gestures - "They're here".

ALISON
I've got to go.

ALISON hangs up abruptly and follows EMMA out of the office.

MARTY'S FLAT: MARTY hangs up, irritated.

MARTY
(sour)
Yeah, have a nice day.

48 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - DAY 48

LUCINDA, with school bag, opens the front door.

LUCINDA
(calling out)
Anyone home?

No one answers. LUCINDA wanders into the...

49 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY 49

LUCINDA goes to where she left the PHOTO ALBUM. She can't find it. LUCINDA takes out her phone and TYPES A TEXT.

50 INT. ALISON'S OFFICE, BOARD ROOM - DAY 50

ALISON enters a board room and greets a number of important looking suits.

ALISON
Hi. Alison McEwan, senior event coordinator.

An OLDER SUIT shakes her hand.

OLDER SUIT
We've heard good things.

ALISON
Pleased to hear.

ALISON's phone BEEPS.

OLDER SUIT
(a little flirty)
Looks like you're in demand.

ALISON
I'll just turn this off and we'll get started.

The SUIT takes a seat. ALISON opens the phone and sees LUCINDA's text - "wheres photo album want to copy it".

ALISON quickly types - "Its damaged - in my room". She hits "send" and takes her place at the front of the room.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Thank you all for coming today.

51 INT. ALISON'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY 51

LUCINDA picks up the PHOTO ALBUM. It's a mess - pages are badly stained with dried meringue mixture or stuck together completely. She puts the album in her pack and rushes out.

52 INT. CAFE - DAY 52

MARTY sits across from two guys in casual suits, ABE (29) and JIM (27). They're scanning a folio of illustrations.

ABE
So this is the one that won the Walkley?

MARTY
Yeah, that's it.

JIM
Barnaby Joyce? Which side is he on again?

MARTY
Nationals.

A blank look from ABE and JIM.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Queensland senator.

Blank - they have no idea who he's talking about.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Wants to mine Antartica?

ABE
Ah right! Yeah. Funny.

MARTY realises these guys are morons. This is not going well.

JIM
So what have you been doing since redundancy?

MARTY
Been working on a blog, political cartoons of course.

JIM
Does it pay?

MARTY
A couple of thousands subscribers, five thousand twitter followers.

JIM
Yeah but does it pay?

MARTY smiles wryly.

MARTY
Well, no. That's why I'm talking to you.

A SHARP-LOOKING WOMAN (33) enters. ABE notices and waves her over. MARTY tries not to be distracted. He keeps talking to JIM, who looks bored as he plays with his phone.

MARTY (CONT'D)
I've been raising my four kids too. Don't know which is more difficult - journalism or child-raring.

JIM
You should do a comic strip on being a house husband. Seriously. We barely touch politics - its mostly entertainment and lifestyle. I mean, no offense, but who can be bothered with politics - they're all shit.

MARTY bristles - these guys are dicks.

The WOMAN arrives at their table. ABE greets her with a hug.

ABE
Hey Ellie, you bad girl! How'd you get an exclusive? Who do you know?

ELLIE
Well, I can't reveal my sources but they said you two can go fuck yourselves.

ABE laughs a little too much - looks like he has a thing for ELLIE. MARTY waits patiently. ELLIE catches his eye.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Hi, I'm Ellie.

ABE
Sorry, this is Marty. Marty has a Walkley award!

ELLIE
Don't tell me you're trying to get a job with these hacks.

MARTY smiles, shrugs - maybe.

JIM
Ellie produces The Morning Show.

MARTY smiles fades.

MARTY
THE Morning Show?

ELLIE
Yeah. You a fan?

MARTY
The Morning Show that covered the elevator story today?

ELLIE
(cringes)
'Fraid so.

ABE
Oh, yeah I saw that...

ELLIE
You know the couple?

MARTY nods, fuming. ELLIE recognises MARTY, uncomfortable.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Oh wait. You <u>are</u> the couple.

MARTY
(cold as ice)
That's right.

JIM
(confused)
I'm sorry. What's happening here?

MARTY stands, collects his things.

MARTY
Your mate Ellie broadcast my divorce to the entire fucking world.

ELLIE
Look, the point of the segment...

MARTY
The <u>point</u> of the segment? I wonder what the point of the segment was. News maybe? Information? Oh, I know maybe it was lifestyle advice?
(to ABE and JIM)
Or even better - <u>entertainment</u>.

MARTY glares at ABE and JIM but they don't notice - they're huddled around ABE'S PHONE, chuckling.

SFX - muffled sounds of ALISON and MARTY's argument come from the phone.

ON JIM and ABE, caught out. ABE puts the phone away.

MARTY (CONT'D)
No. It was flat out fucking public humiliation.

JIM
I think we're finished here Marty.

MARTY's fired up now.

MARTY
(to ABE)
Fuck you Shit Stain.

MARTY throws ELLIE an icy glare and turns to leave.

ELLIE
I agree with you.

MARTY stops.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
It was wrong. I never wanted to run it - but I was overruled by a bunch of arseholes who don't know what it's like to get divorced.

MARTY is surprised. So are ABE and JIM.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
So I owe you an apology. I'm sorry. Can I buy you lunch?

ABE
Ellie you don't need to...

ELLIE
Fuck off Shit Stain.

ABE backs off.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
(to MARTY)
So? What do you think?

MARTY, finally speechless.

53 INT. ALISON'S OFFICE, BOARD ROOM - DAY 53

ALISON is finishing her presentation.

ALISON
So, if I had to give you a simple "takehome" it's this.

ALISON looks directly at the OLDER SUIT.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Your conference will be in safe hands, because it's in my hands.

The OLDER SUIT smiles, starts clapping. The others join him. ALISON has won them over. PETER winks at her - nice work.

A YOUNGER SUIT puts up his hand.

YOUNGER SUIT
Wow, this all sounds great. I have a question if that's alright.

ALISON
Of course, please.

YOUNGER SUIT
The people that come to our conferences, they're very close. They're like a family really.

The other SUITS nod.

YOUNGER SUIT (CONT'D)
So can you create like an online photo album, a place where they can share memories of the good times and, you know, stay in touch.

OLDER SUIT
Yes, they're very close and the photos would mean a lot. Can you do that?

The idea resonants with ALISON - the destroyed photo album.

ALISON
That'd be lovely, a great idea. Every family treasures photographs and it's definitely something we could do...er...

ALISON's voice wavers, her eyes well up a little.

ALISON (CONT'D)
We've done things like that...er...

PETER sees she's struggling. He intervenes.

PETER
Sorry Alison. This is really my area.
(jokey, to the others)
I missed my cue.

EVERYONE laughs. ALISON is relieved.

PETER (CONT'D)
So how we've done it in the past is to give each delegate a log in...

ALISON takes the opportunity to slip outside.

54 INT. ALISON'S OFFICE, BALCONY - DAY 54

ALISON steps onto the balcony and looks out over the city. She bursts into tears.

ALISON
(angry with herself)
FUCK!

ALISON wipes her eyes and gathers herself. She heads back in.

55 EXT. CITY STREET - DAY 55

INTERCUT

56 INT. MICHALA'S STUDIO - DAY 56

MICHALA is hard at work sorting through various designs for an ad. Her phone beeps. She sighs and reluctantly dials.

CITY STREET: LUCINDA stands at a bus stop. Her phone starts to ring - she answers.

LUCINDA
Why didn't you call back?

MICHALA'S STUDIO:

MICHALA
I'm at work. Besides, your Mum. You saw her last night.

LUCINDA (O.S.)
She can't tell me who I can see.

MICHALA
Ah, I think she can.

LUCINDA (O.S.)
This is an emergency.

MICHALA
(not convinced)
Uh huh.

BUS STOP:

LUINDA
Danielle spilt cake mix all over one of the family photo albums. It's totally wrecked.

MICHALA
Have you tried a photo lab?

LUCINDA
Heaps but they've got no idea. These photos are really important.

MICHALA'S STUDIO: MICHALA is VERY reluctant - she's torn.

MICHALA
Urgh! OK. Come to the office.

BUS STOP: LUCINDA is thrilled.

57 INT. RESTAURANT - DAY 57

ELLIE and MARTY chat and eat - the atmosphere is intimate, classy. There's a half drunk bottle of wine on the table.

ELLIE
Never marry a colleague, that's all I can say. If you've got any ambition you're already married to your job and if you get promoted faster than your partner...
(point to herself)
...believe me, you're on The Titanic. Icebergs ahead. And it's not going to be a beautiful Kate and Leo goodbye - you're gonna hold them under yourself.

MARTY chuckles - he likes her, she's got real attitude.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
I think it was all the time apart that finally killed us. That and my fuck buddy publicist.

MARTY shakes his head.

MARTY
Tsk, tsk, tsk.

ELLIE
You can talk "sister fucker".

MARTY
Do you think people can tell that's what she said?

ELLIE
Yeah! You crossed a line there buddy. What possessed you? Besides the obvious.

MARTY
(unsure)
Well...are we being honest here?

ELLIE
Define "honest".

MARTY
OK.
(dives in)
(MORE)

MARTY (CONT'D)
I was actually pretty up and down at the time.

ELLIE
Riiiight...

MARTY
When I was made redundant I had all these plans - work from home, start a blog, see more of my kids, blah, blah, blah.

ELLIE nods, listening.

MARTY (CONT'D)
So Alison went back to work and I...went insane. Every day I was either starting a new project that would change the world or I was sleeping. Like a lot. There wasn't much in between.

ELLIE
Uh huh.

MARTY
I eventually realised I'd always been like this but without a job to throw myself into...

ELLIE
Yeah, I know plenty of arseholes like you. Classic mid-life. Very boring.

MARTY
Very cliched.
(embarrassed)
I took up the guitar again.

ELLIE
URGH! Now that's grounds for divorce.

MARTY
Yeah, that and...

MARTY AND ALISON
(together)
Fucking your sister in-law.

MARTY shakes his head and sighs. ELLIE raises her wine glass.

ELLIE
Hey Arsehole. You're not the first.

MARTY nods, smiles. He likes this chick. They chink glasses.

58 INT. ALISON'S OFFICE - DAY 58

ALISON stares out the window - deep in thought. Her phone rings, she picks up.

ALISON
Yep.
(listens)
Oh. Already? OK, put them through.
(waits)
Hi James. I didn't expect to hear from you so quickly.

A soft knock at the door - it opens. It's PETER. He slips in and listens as ALISON talks.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Well, I hope it's good news you're calling back with.
(smiles)
Wonderful. We're thrilled.

ALISON gives a thumbs up to PETER. He pumps the air.

ALISON (CONT'D)
OK, I'll get legals on it this afternoon. Looking forward to working with you. Thanks again.

ALISON hangs up and breathes a sigh of relief.

PETER
Congrats! You were amazing in there. You totally seduced the CEO.

ALISON
I don't know about "seduced".

PETER
Oh, I saw you.
(seductive)
"You'll be in my hands".

ALISON
(embarrassed)
I said it like that?

PETER
YES!

ALISON
Well I don't care - it worked!

PETER
Fist bump.

PETER holds out his fist. ALISON bumps it awkwardly.

ALISON
Thanks for covering by the way.

PETER
Sure. Looks like we're a good team.

ALISON
Yeah. I mean...you know (the crying).

PETER
Don't worry about it. No one noticed. You OK now?

ALISON considers whether to be open - she dives in.

ALISON
I got divorced yesterday and, you know...

PETER
Yeah I do know.

ALISON
You've been divorced?

PETER
No, I just know you got divorced. Actually...everyone knows.

ALISON
What? How?

MARTY
Do you watch The Morning Show?

ON ALISON - Oh no.

59 INT. MICHALA'S STUDIO, ENTRY - DAY 59

MICHALA meets LUCINDA as she steps out of the elevator. LUCINDA looks around with excitement. People mill around - designers, artists, photographers, writers.

LUCINDA
Wow, so cool!

MICHALA
You should be in school.

LUCINDA
Can I do work experience here?

MICHALA ignores the question. They head for her office.

60 INT. MICHALA'S OFFICE - DAY 60

LUCINDA takes the photo album from her bag.

LUCINDA
It's got all of my baby pictures, the holidays to the coast, tons of stuff.

MICHALA picks up a phone.

MICHALA
Hey Benjamin. Can you come see me?

MICHALA puts down the phone.

LUCINDA
So? Work experience?

MICHALA shakes her head.

MICHALA
No Honey.

LUCINDA nods, knows why. A guy, BENJAMIN (28), enters.

MICHALA (CONT'D)
A little accident with cake mix.

LUCINDA
Meringue.

BENJAMIN
Eeewww.

MICHALA
Can you save them?

BENJAMIN
I've done dried vomit but...

MICHALA
They're family photos.

BENJAMIN can see they mean a lot to LUCINDA and MICHALA.

BENJAMIN
I can do it.

MICHALA
(to LUCINDA)
He can do it.

LUCINDA smiles at MICHALA - Yes!

61 EXT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON 61

MARTY and ALISON exit the restaurant, both a little drunk.

MARTY
That was quite a lunch.

ELLIE
Sorry. It's my dinner time see. Now I go home and sleep.

MARTY
Well thanks again.

ELLIE
And sorry again. That was shit. I hate my job sometimes. But I'm glad I got the chance to make it up to you.

ELLIE is very genuine. MARTY thinks...

MARTY
Yeah. So...um.

ELLIE
What?

MARTY dives in, confident. He pulls a NAPKIN from his folio and hands it to ELLIE. There's a pretty awesome CARICATURE of ELLIE on it. It's signed with a MOBILE NUMBER.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Wow. When did you do this?

MARTY
You were in the bathroom.
(pointing to the napkin)
That's my number.

ELLIE
(unsure)
Ah...

MARTY
We should do this again.

ELLIE laughs, embarrassed.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Sorry. Too fast? I'm out of practise here.

ELLIE
No, it's not that.

MARTY
C'mon, I'm divorced, you're divorced.

ELLIE
Yeah, but I'm not single.

MARTY
Ah! Right. Makes sense.

ELLIE waves a cab - one pulls over. ELLIE turns back to MARTY, holds up the napkin.

ELLIE
Nice pick up line though. You'll be fine - plenty of fish in the sea.

MARTY
Plenty of icebergs too I hear.

ELLIE
You watch out for those.

ELLIE climbs in the cab.

MARTY
Will do.

ELLIE waves goodbye as the cab pulls away. MARTY waves. A big sigh - all his confidence gone. This is hard.

ALISON (O.S.) (PRE-LAP)
SISTER (BEEP)ER!

62 INT. ALISON'S OFFICE - DAY 62

CLOSE on PETER's mobile phone - a VIDEO CLIP shows ALISON and MARTY leaving the lift (their faces obscured).

ALISON
(horrified)
Oh, turn it off.

PETER does. ALISON puts her hands over her face.

ALISON (CONT'D)
This is the most humiliating day of my life.

PETER
Don't worry about it. No one's going to mess with you after hearing you go off like that.

ALISON
I'm a monster.

PETER
C'mon. You're not a monster. You're a beautiful, sexy, FREE woman now.

ALISON is slightly embarrassed at PETER's frankness.

PETER (CONT'D)
We should be out celebrating your freedom AND the massive contract you just won. Let's take an early mark and go have a drink.

ALISON is tempted.

ALISON
Well...It's been a weird day...Maybe one...

PETER
Yes!

ALISON
(seeing the time)
Oh no, I can't. I've got to pick up the kids.

PETER
Oh, you tease.

ALISON laughs.

PETER (CONT'D)
OK, but some other time.

ALISON nods, curious - is he flirting?

PETER (CONT'D)
Soon.

ALISON
OK. Soon. Pushy.

PETER opens the door.

PETER
I'm holding you to that.

ALISON
OK.

PETER exits.

ON ALISON - what was THAT?

63 EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY 63

LUCINDA sits flicking through her phone. She gets a text.

CLOSE ON SCREEN - “Your olds?”

LUCINDA frowns and clicks on the link.

SFX: The familiar sound of The Morning Show segment.

LUCINDA watches - WTF?

64 EXT. LIBRARY - DAY 64

DANIELLE studies with some friends. LUCINDA comes over.

LUCINDA
(whispers)
Danielle.

LUCINDA jerks her head and starts towards the back of the library. DANIELLE follows.

LUCINDA talks to DANIELLE (we can’t hear them). She takes out her phone and shows it to DANIELLE. They watch.

DANIELLE
No!

LUCINDA comforts DANIELLE.

65 EXT. AFTER SCHOOL CARE - AFTERNOON 65

Kids mill around in a playground. LUCINDA is with DANIELLE, PAUL and JAKE (in a cast). Everyone is quiet - in shock.

LUCINDA
We’ve got to do something.

PAUL
Why?

DANIELLE
(upset)
Because we’re still a family.

PAUL backs off. LUCINDA nods - it’s decided.

66 INT. PETER’S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON 66

INTERCUT:

67 INT. ALISON’S CAR - AFTERNOON 67

ALISON drives, deep in thought. She pulls up to a red light.

Her phone beeps - a message from LUCINDA. ALISON takes the opportunity to read it: “JAKE AND DANIELLE AT DADS. WATCHING MOVIE. PICK UP 6.30”.

ALISON is disappointed - what does she do now? She dials her phone, waits.

PETER’S APARTMENT: PETER opens the fridge and takes out a bottle of wine. His phone rings. He sees it’s ALISON. He answers.

PETER
Hello.

ALISON’S CAR:

ALISON
Hi. Hey the kids have gone to their father’s so...

PETER
Right.

ALISON
I can do that drink now. If you’re still up for it.

PETER’S APARTMENT: PETER moves away from the kitchen, speaks softly.

PETER
Uh, sorry. I’ve made other plans.

ALISON’s CAR: ALISON is embarrassed but covers.

ALISON
Oh, that’s OK.

PETER
Is that OK?

ALISON
Of course!

An awkward silence. ALISON’s mind racing.

PETER
So...

ALISON
(professional)
And great work today. I was really impressed.

PETER
Oh thanks.

ALISON
I just wanted to let you know.

PETER
Great. Listen I've got to go.

ALISON
OK. See you tomorrow.

ALISON'S CAR: ALISON closes her phone and cringes silently.

PETER's APARTMENT: PETER hangs up and turns back to the kitchen. A woman, SUSAN (34), enters and goes to the cupboard, takes down two wine glasses.

SUSAN
Good day?

PETER
Yeah...I think I've won over the new boss.

PETER kisses SUSAN and starts pouring two glasses of wine.

ALISON'S CAR: ALISON slumps.

ALISON
(to herself)
Idiot.

She hits her head with the phone softly.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Idiot, idiot, idiot.

ALISON checks the time and looks around - what now? She sees something and gets out of the car.

68 INT. DWAYNE'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON 68

DWAYNE is hovering near the window, waiting. He sees MARTY pulling up. He rushes out.

69 EXT. DWAYNE'S HOUSE / MARTY'S FLAT - LATE AFTERNOON 69

MARTY gets out of the car, still a bit deflated. DWAYNE's dog, WOOFER, comes bounding up.

MARTY
Hey Woofer! Good boy.

MARTY gives WOOFER a pat. DWAYNE comes out of the house.

DWAYNE
C'mon.

He throws MARTY a dog lead and keeps walking.

MARTY
Are the kids home?

DWAYNE
They're with Barb. C'mon, want to show you something.

MARTY attaches the lead and follows DWAYNE.

70 INT. BOOKSTORE - LATE AFTERNOON 70

ALISON browses a bookstore. She turns a corner and sees a "SELF HELP" sign.

ALISON
(sneers)
Urgh.

ALISON turns away, keeps walking. Then she stops, thinks. Reluctantly, ALISON returns to the self-help section.

71 EXT. PARK - EVENING 71

MARTY and DWAYNE get to a park. Various dogs run around while their owners watch on or play with them.

DWAYNE
How'd the interview go?

MARTY
Shit. They were two twenty-something knobs who've probably never read a newspaper in their lives.

DWAYNE
The youth of today.

MARTY
Guess who I had lunch with though.

DWAYNE
Who?

MARTY
The producer of The Morning Show.

DWAYNE
Get fucked.

MARTY
Chick called Ellie.

DWAYNE narrows his eyes - is this bullshit?

MARTY (CONT'D)
Serious. She actually apologised to me and bought me lunch.

DWAYNE
How old is this Ellie?

MARTY
Don't know. Early thirties?

DWAYNE laughs.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Almost got her number too. She's got a boyfriend.

DWAYNE
You dirty dog.

MARTY
Fuck I was nervous. It'll be easier next time though.

DWAYNE unclips WOOFER's leash.

DWAYNE
Oh well, don't let me stop you.

DWAYNE lets WOOFER go - the dog races across the park.

MARTY
Woofer!

DWAYNE turns and strolls away.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Where you going?

DWAYNE doesn't look back, just waves. MARTY - huh? He runs off after WOOFER.

72 INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY 72

ALISON has a couple of books in her hand - "DIVORCE: HEALING THE GODDESS WITHIN" and "THE ALL NEW YOU! A SURVIVORS GUIDE TO DIVORCE". They're both colourful with cheesy designs. ALISON hates them both equally. Eventually she chooses one, "ALL NEW YOU", and heads for the counter.

ALISON slips the book on the counter face down, embarrassed. A SCRUFFY-LOOKING SHOP ATTENDANT (45ish) serves her. He picks up the book and looks at her. ALISON smiles uncomfortably. The MAN starts to ring up the book but stops.

SHOP ATTENDANT
Sorry. Do you mind if I recommend another book?

ALISON
What? Why?

SHOP ATTENDANT
This one's not very good. It's actually bad. Like bad for your health.

ALISON
It's OK, I just want something I can...

SHOP ATTENDANT
Just a second.

The SHOP ATTENDANT races off into the shelves. ALISON is irritated.

ALISON
I'm kind of in a hurry. I think this is the book I want.

The SHOP ATTENDANT re-emerges with a book and hands it to ALISON.

SHOP ATTENDANT
It's called "Julius Winsome".

ALISON
What's it about?

SHOP ATTENDANT
It's about a hermit. Someone shoots his dog so he goes looking for the killer.

ALISON looks blankly at the SHOP ATTENDANT.

SHOP ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
It's very beautiful but kind of sad which is probably how you feel right now.

ALISON can't believe his presumptuousness.

ALISON
So it's not about divorce?

SHOP ATTENDANT
Fuck no. Don't read that shit - it's bad for you. This'll make you cry too but, I don't know...in a good way.

ALISON
How much is it?

THE SHOP ATTENDANT looks around furtively.

SHOP ATTENDANT
Take it. If you like it, pay me later.

ALISON
I can't just take this!

SHOP ATTENDANT
Yes you can, I'm the manager. Take it. Go!

ALISON
OK.

ALISON, a little bewildered at this strange man, heads for the door.

SHOP ATTENDANT
(calling after her)
You'll be back!

ALISON smiles - Yeah, she probably will.

73 EXT. PARK - EVENING 73

WOOFER zeroes in on a small Terrier. They circle each other. WOOFER has a good sniff of the Terrier's bum. MARTY finally catches up.

MARTY
Woofer!

A WOMAN (late 30s) standing nearby turns around.

WOMAN
Woofer. Here boy.

WOOFER hears the woman's voice and runs to her. She pats him vigorously - he loves it. MARTY goes over to them.

MARTY
Got a friend Woofer?

WOMAN
Oh yeah - he makes friends with <u>everyone</u>.

MARTY
Right.

WOMAN
(holding out her hand)
I'm Indira.

MARTY
(shaking her hand)
Marty.

INDIRA
Are you minding Woofer for Dwayne?

MARTY
Just moved into his flat.

INDIRA
Great.

Another TWO WOMEN (late 30s / early 40s) join them.

INDIRA (CONT'D)
Hey, this is Marty. He's moved into Dwayne's flat.

WOMAN 1
Hi, I'm Jane.

MARTY
(shaking hands)
Hi.

WOMAN 2
Ling.

MARTY
Hi Ling.

INDIRA
So you're on Woofer duty today?

MARTY
Yeah, guess so.

MARTY looks around - WOOFER is having a good sniff of another dog's bum.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Is he normally this...friendly?

INDIRA, JANE, LING
(wry smiles)
Yeah.

MARTY cringes.

MARTY
He is NEVER gonna kiss me again.

INDIRA, JANE and LING crack up - they're all flashing smiles and flowing hair. MARTY smiles. This is what DWAYNE wanted to show him - he's a good mate.

74 EXT. DWAYNE'S HOUSE - EVENING 74

MARTY strolls up to DWAYNE's house with WOOFER. There's a spring in his step now. He lets WOOFER off the leash.

MARTY
Off you go.

WOOFER runs inside. A car pulls up on the street. MARTY turns around and is surprised to see it's ALISON.

MARTY (CONT'D)
(apprehensive)
Hi.

ALISON
Hi.

MARTY
Is everything OK?

ALISON sees MARTY's confusion as she approaches.

ALISON
Yeah. I'm just picking up the kids.

MARTY
But it's only Thursday.

ALISON
No - Danielle and Jake.

MARTY
Danielle and Jake are here?

ALISON, alarmed, heads for the flat. MARTY follows.

ALISON
Lucinda told me they were watching a movie. Have you even checked on them?

MARTY
I was taking Woofer for a walk! Dwayne said Barb was watching them!

ALISON
(under her breath)
Jesus, you're...

MARTY
Don't say it...

ALISON
What?

MARTY
You know what you were going to say. I'm not taking that shit anymore, I told you.

ALISON rolls her eyes.

MARTY (CONT'D)
And you're not barging into my house.

ALISON stops, angry.

MARTY (CONT'D)
(firm, strong)
This is my house. Not yours. You can't just bust in and try and control it like you want to control everything else. This is my life now. You can come in when I invite you.

MARTY throws opens the door and steps inside to...

75 INT. MARTY'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - EVENING 75

LUCINDA, DANIELLE, PAUL and JAKE sit quietly at a table set with a sumptuous roast chicken meal. The cluttered room is lit atmospherically with candlelights.

And they've heard the whole argument - they all look a bit tender. MARTY is dumbstuck.

ALISON (O.S.)
(sarcastically)
Well can I come in?

MARTY
Yeah. You better come in.

ALISON steps inside. She sees the kids sitting at the table.

ALISON
What's this?

MARTY
I think it's Wednesday dinner.

ALISON is completely thrown, shakes her head.

ALISON
But it's Thursday. This isn't a good night...you've got school in the...

MARTY puts a hand on her shoulder.

MARTY
Al. Sit down.

ALISON is reluctant. MARTY heads for the table.

ALISON
(to MARTY)
Did you..?

MARTY shakes his head - he didn't know anything.

MARTY
(gentle)
C'mon.

JAKE
You guys sit at the heads.

MARTY sits at one end of the table, ALISON at the other. PAUL and DANIELLE start serving the chicken, LUCINDA salad, while JAKE pours wine, resting the bottle across his cast.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Say when.

MARTY smiles, his glass is getting pretty full.

MARTY
When.

JAKE starts pouring ALISON's wine - she stops him quickly.

ALISON
Thanks Honey. I've got to drive.

ALISON looks at MARTY - should we tell them? MARTY, not sure. ALISON makes a decision.

ALISON (CONT'D)
(to everyone)
Guys.

Everyone stops.

ALISON (CONT'D)
We should get this out of the way. Your Dad and I have some news. And there's never going to be good time to...

LUCINDA
Mum.

ALISON stops.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
We know.

DANIELLE starts to cry. MARTY comforts her.

ALISON
Oh.

ALISON doesn't know what to say.

LUCINDA
We've all talked about it. It's OK.

LUCINDA, teary, wipes her eyes.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
We're sad but...we'll be OK. We've got each other.

MARTY
You've got us too Honey.

MARTY looks at ALISON.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Both of us.

LUCINDA nods, smiles.

LUCINDA
We know.

ALISON starts to cry. She hugs LUCINDA.

JAKE sniffs, wipes his nose with his cast. PAUL notices and, despite his usual dickheadedness, puts his hand on JAKE's shoulder. MARTY watches them, smiles.

MARTY
Come here you two.

MARTY pulls them both close - they don't fight it.

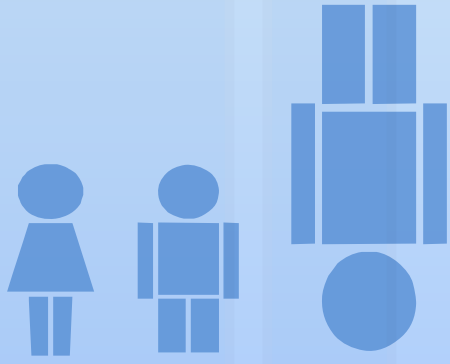
The family all hug. MARTY and ALISON look at each other through the tears.

They'll always be a family.

END EPISODE 1.

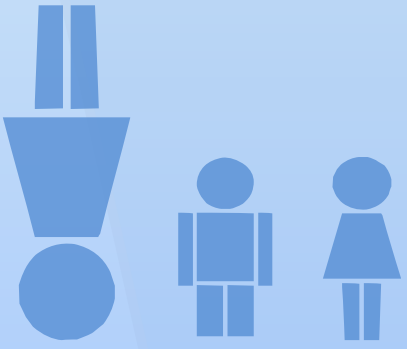
[Creative Bible]

Starting OVER



Forty,
divorced
with kids.

How the
hell do you
start over?



A proposal for a bittersweet TV drama

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Synopsis

Marty (40) and Alison (40) McEwan were forever. Teenage sweethearts. Soul mates. Two opposites helplessly attracted in an eternal chain-reaction of infuriating love and passion...Until just now.

The piece of paper lying in front of them says they are officially no more. Divorced. They didn't quite make it to twenty years before Alison discovered Marty had recently slept with her sister, Michala. He insisted it was a mistake, a fucking stupid thing to do, that it was over. Alison agreed – but she was talking about their marriage. They were just too different. And it was time to admit it.

A little over twelve months after the emotional carnage and the McEwan family have finally settled into two households. Alison is staying in the old family home with their youngest son, Jake (10), and daughter, Danielle (14). Marty is living in a converted flat with their oldest daughter, Lucinda (17), and son, Paul (14). There's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. The kids still see each other and both parents. Everyone's cool – as cool as can be expected. Most of them have accepted that this is just how it's going to be now. And soon, very soon, it’s going to be time for “starting over”. And it scares the hell out of Marty and Alison.

After almost two decades together, Alison and Marty are single again. They were still in their teens when they met. Now they feel like they're back there again – only this time they've got teenage kids of their own and a big tattoo on their forehead that says “Divorced and Desperate”. Great.

It's time again for sideways glances, sweaty palms, pounding pulses, nervous laughter, awkward flirting, subtly asking for that number, calling that number, trying not to call that number again, appearing desperate, seeming aloof, hot dates, blind dates, and dates from the deep depths of hell. And lying awake at night wondering if they'll die this way. Alone. Single.

All the while, there is this other life for Marty and Alison, this parallel existence, that's still a part of them both. Their kids, their friends, their families are all still there on the sidelines as they put together a new life with new partners, new kids, new friends and families. And what will happen when they all meet? Neither of them want to think about any of that just yet.

But no matter what they do, Marty and Alison will always be together in a weird sort of way. Despite everything, no one knows them better than each other – and there will be times when they need each other. There will also be tears, there will be shouting, there will be humiliation and laughter and joy and triumph and sex, lots of sex in all its messy combinations.

And it's going to hurt like hell. But, like for so many before them, Marty and Alison will survive. It may even be the best thing that’s ever happened to them.

Starting Over is a bittersweet drama about Marty and Alison, two forty year olds who are discovering what else (and who else) life has to offer.

About the Series

This is a show about second chances.

Marty and Alison have a chance for a new life. They're going to “start over”, with a clean slate, and learn from their mistakes and step boldly into a better life that is happier, more fulfilling and overflowing with love and acceptance. Yeah right... Of course, life is messier that that. And while Marty and Alison may think they're “starting over”, the reality is it’s just more of this one life they have. Sometimes it'll feel better, other times... But everyone deserves a second chance and this show will be ultimately optimistic in tone, even when Marty and Alison are heading for the same cringe-inducing mistakes they made the first time there will always be hope that they will survive (albeit with a few humiliating bruises to show for it).

Another big thing - Divorce is a family affair.

So it's not just about the unhappy couple. It's about their kids who are struggling to understand it; the mothers and fathers who said it'd never work (they were right); the brothers and sisters who are trying to reassure their own kids (and themselves); the friends who are there with a shoulder (or maybe a mercy fuck); the colleagues who wish you'd stop crying in presentations (and wonder if a mercy fuck would help); everyone's affected. And then, when it comes to starting again, trying to meet someone new - same deal. Same messy deal. So this series is not just about Marty and Alison. It's also about their family, friends and colleagues, the people orbiting them everyday as they adjust to this new person who's trying to drag themselves from the wreckage of the last twenty years (nineteen years and ten months actually).

Some harsh reality...

30% of marriages in Australia end in divorce. 50,000 divorces were granted in 2011. That's 100,000 unhappy customers. And probably another 100,000 hurt and confused kids. In 2011 alone. So, divorce is a big deal. We've all been touched by it in some way. And it hurts. It really frickin' hurts. Who said what, did what, should have done this, that or the other. It's a past that sits there like a squashed toad in the middle of your highway to happiness. And you keep trying to swerve around it but you can't help running over it again and again, squeezing more of its rotting entrails out for all to see...

But some good news...

50% of people re-marry. And those people are MUCH less likely to get divorced – which probably means a good percentage of them are happier. So the odds are even that you'll meet someone else to help you sort out the car crash your life has become and hopefully... possibly... potentially... be happier for it.

So there is equal opportunity for good times and bad times in all this.

Just like in this series. There will be laughter alongside the tears, hope curdled with despair, forgiveness in a fog of anger. Ultimately it will be uplifting. Because this a show about one of the most traumatic things a family can experience...

And surviving it.

Key Characters:

Marty McEwan (40, divorced)

The last couple of years weren't great for Marty. He was made redundant from his job as a political cartoonist after twenty-two years (longer than his marriage to Alison). Then he had a little cancer scare (it was on his arse of all places). And for the first time he started feeling old. He was thinking “life's too short”. So he started swimming, launched his own independent journalism blog, became a pretty good cook, started playing guitar again....And had sex with his sister-in-law.

It was the whole working from home thing. Michala was coming over to help design his blog. And...it...happened. Only once, but that was enough. To Marty's surprise, he found it easy to hide the whole sordid thing. He didn’t want to do it again so he just pretended it didn’t happen. But then Michala cracked. And so did everything else.

Now, with perspective, Marty realises he was going through a slow motion mid-life crisis of sorts. He’d always had a tendency to go on a “crazy” (as he cheerfully called them) but losing his job just took it all to a new level – the mountain of unfinished projects, the bouts of all-day sleep-ins, the compulsive masturbation, taking up the guitar again... Yeah, the truth was, his “crazies” were really undiagnosed bi-polar disorder – relatively mild but enough to drive him through a newspaper career and everyone around him nuts. But without a job – well, he went on a very big “crazy”.

Marty really wanted to save his marriage to Alison. He started taking medication (not that he thinks it helps) and tried to be super husband. He really did love her and thought it was amazing she’d ever married him – they were pretty different. She was the rock and he was the constant wave of chaos battering their shore. Alison used to joke Marty had more in common with her sister Michala (which didn’t help matters...).

Marty’s apprehensive about what comes next – new relationships, new job, new life. But he's still relatively young, he's fitter than he's been in years, he cooks. He's a bloody good catch! At least that's the impression he gives in his dating site profile. Truth is, Marty's afraid he's going to choke to death on cold, weevil-infested Weetbix, alone, bored and sex-starved in some moldy, one-room flop house in his eighties.

And then there's the whole “career” thing. Marty’s amazed he ever had something resembling what you could call a “career”. But after twenty years of taking the piss out of politicians and high flyers he doesn’t exactly feel qualified (or motivated) to do anything else. And it’s not like there are any jobs in newspapers anymore. Marty thinks maybe the joke is finally on him.

In a funny way the kids are handling this better than him really. Lucinda (17) and Paul (14) have chosen to live with Marty. They've all set up in a flat under Dwayne's place (his best mate) and a shade of normality is returning to their lives. Lucinda has been remarkably supportive of her dad (something Alison quietly resents) and Paul just wanted to get away from his twin sister Danielle (they've been fighting a lot). They seem OK with the new set up – they still get to see their siblings every weekend and stay with Mum on every second. It's a bit of juggling act but they're handling it. Which is great because Marty has shit to do...

He has to start a new career, raise his kids, meet a life partner and keep his mid-life crisis at bay. Starting...now!

Alison McEwan (40, divorced)

Last year was meant to be Alison's year. It was all going to plan. She was moving up at work, feeling at the top of her game again as a highly paid event coordinator, Marty was doing an OK (but messy) job of taking care of the kids and the house, their sex life had been strangely reinvigorated (or not so strange on reflection...). She felt strong and motivated and kind of happy. She liked being forty.

Then..it..happened.

Alison didn't see it coming. She was enjoying being caught up in her own shit for the first time in years. And Marty seemed OK with it – she was earning way more than he ever did and he kept saying it was “her turn”. Which now just makes her all the more angry. There she was, doing what she wanted for the first time in years and everything falls apart. Why was it her job to keep it all together? WHY?

Sure, in counseling, Marty said he wasn't being honest with himself, that he was probably “depressed”. But she'd been telling him that FOR YEARS – the ups and downs, the insomnia, the chaos! Coming home was a real come down. So Alison threw herself into work. Sure, she could have recognised things were falling apart earlier. But why did it have to be Alison that fixed everything?

Anyway, Marty messed this up more than her – Alison is absolutely certain of that. He fucked her sister. In their house. In their bed. Alison had heard stories of infidelity from her friends. But nothing like this. She had nothing to compare this pain to. There was no going back.

So now, Alison's forty and single for the first time in twenty years. Not that she's looking to change this anytime soon. She’s not the impulsive type. In fact, marrying Marty was probably one of the most impulsive things she’s ever done (and look where that got her). In fact, she's only ever slept with three other guys.

But a strange voice in the back of her head is telling Alison maybe it’s time to break out. Maybe even play the field a little (only slept with three guys remember). Engage in a little more...foreplay before committing to any particular...position. She’s a free agent. When is she going to get this chance again?

But no. That’s crazy talk. Alison has enough on her plate without thinking about dating. She's struggled to keep her job through all this chaos and there's been a few opportunities come and go along the way. But the kids are settling into the new living arrangement (at least that's what Alison tells herself) so she's eager to get back to work. It would have been too much for Alison to try and raise four children by herself AND keep her job. Besides, Marty will be in no position to pay alimony anytime soon.

And then there's Michala. Well, not much to do there. Alison's said everything she wants to. She'll see Michala at family get-togethers if it's absolutely necessary – Alison's not going to make this hard for the rest of the family. But she can't forgive her. They used to be so close. She trusted Michala like she used to trust Marty. The three of them were like a family within the family for so long. In fact, Alison feels like she's lost both her best friends in all this. If she's honest, she misses them. But Alison's resolved. She can't have people like that in her life anymore.

Trouble is, knowing who “people like that” are...

Lucinda (17, oldest daughter)

Lucinda saw this coming. Her parents hadn't liked each other in years. They used to laugh a lot. They had these in-jokes that used to crack them up in front of her friends to the point of embarrassment. But Lucinda hasn't heard them laugh like that in years. It wasn't sudden or anything. Things just sort of died between them. And Mum going back to work put the nail in the coffin. At first she was really proud of her mum for going back to work and doing great. But then her "career" became this big thing. It was all that mattered, like she had something to prove. But come on, she was just an event coordinator – whoopy. It's not like she was saving the world or anything.

Meanwhile, she just left Dad to sort everything at home, which he was completely shit at. No wonder he went crazy. I mean, how can you go from being an award-winning political cartoonist, someone who actually DOES help change the world, to being a house husband? He was dumb to agreed to it. And REALLY dumb for sleeping with Aunt Michala. But something had to give...

Lucinda is cool living with her dad. His musical tastes (and abilities) are pretty shit but he's always been interested in the world and politics and art and she admires that. In fact, Lucinda takes after him – she's not a bad illustrator herself and wants to study design when she finishes Year 12. Living with her brother Paul is the only downside to this new setup – he's a dick. She was hoping it'd just be her and dad.

Anyway, none of it will be Lucinda's problem soon – she's on the shortlist for a prestigious design scholarship in Spain when she graduates. They love her work and have said they want her (unofficially anyway). Aunty Michala put her onto it. She, alongside her dad, has always been great at encouraging Lucinda's talents. They're really close, even now. Lucinda still sees Michala, although she doesn't tell Mum...

Paul (14, oldest son and Danielle's twin brother)

Paul and his dad weren't getting on even before everything went to shit. Paul's pretty much flunking school. Dad says he's not applying himself, that he's a lot smarter than he's making out. But Paul disagrees – he's NOT a lot smarter. Sure, he used to read heaps and kinda knows about history and geography and stuff from Dad. But at some point it all just became so FUCKING BORING. He struggles to stay awake at school (which might have something to do with his secret pot habit) and has been suspended a couple of times for random acts of mischief and mayhem.

What makes it worse though is his twin sister Danielle is brilliant at school. She's always top of her class. Which means Paul looks even WORSE next to his sister. It's hard to believe they're twins – in fact, Paul rarely tells anyone anymore. There was a time when they were inseparable but right now Paul couldn't feel any more different from Danielle. He likes to think of himself as the "evil twin".

When everything went to shit Paul was really angry with his Dad. How could he do that to Mum? What an arsehole. He didn't want to live with him, but his Dad insisted saying he wanted to get him "back on track" (yeah right, he can talk...).

But there was an upside – he wouldn't be compared to Danielle so much. So Paul agreed in his non-committal way. And he figured living with Lucinda would be alright. But she's going to be gone soon – then his Dad will REALLY be on his back.

Danielle (14, youngest daughter and Paul's twin sister)

Danielle hasn't given up on her parents. It's only a separation, not a divorce (as far as she knows). They're just going through a rough patch. At any opportunity, Danielle wants a family get-together – birthdays, holidays, sports days, ANY days. That's on top of the "Wednesday Dinners" Danielle has forced on the family routine. Every Wednesday night everyone goes to either Mum or Dad's for dinner. Secretly, Danielle hopes this strategy will help her parents see they can't live without each other. Then they'll move back in together and everything will go back to normal. That's what Danielle hopes for. In fact, she's desperate for it. Because Danielle doesn't just feel like she lost her Dad in all this – she lost her twin brother too.

Danielle and her twin brother Paul used to be close. But they've been fighting a lot lately. It's like Paul's jealous of how good Danielle does at school, like she wants to show him up and make him look dumb. Of course, she doesn't. But she also doesn't want to feel bad when she gets a good mark! It's so infuriating!

But because of all the changes, Danielle's going to buckle down and work even harder. She's read that divorce can have a serious impact on children's grades. She going to make sure that doesn't happen.

She just needs to be careful she doesn't push herself too hard.

Jake (10, youngest son)

Jake's cool with this new situation - as long as it doesn't get in the way of footy.

When he heard that Dad was going to go and live somewhere else Jake's first question was – "Will he still come and watch me play footy?" Once it was established that he would Jake asked his second question – "Will you still take me to footy practice Mum?" The answer was "yes" of course. Then no probs.

Despite his apparently blinkered view of the world, Jake does take it all in. He knows how people are feeling and is always there with a strangely perceptive observation. It's weird, like he's channeling the philosophical post-match words of an old football coach from a previous life. Maybe it's just that Jake's a team player. If someone is down in the team you have to help them up. That's just the way he is.

But don't, repeat, DON'T get in the way of his footy. You don't want to see that.

Michala (35, Alison's sister)

Michala feels like shit. This is without doubt the most humiliating thing that has ever happened to her. She just wants to pack up and go.

But if she's honest with herself she'd long been attracted to Marty. He was smart and funny and since he'd been swimming, he'd gotten kinda buff. But loyalty to her sister kept it as a secret crush. Her and Alison were basically best friends.

Michala remembers she kissed Marty first. He was sad. It'd been a tough year for

him. She was just trying to comfort him. But then it was more than that. Michala felt terrible – but she also felt something else. She was glad Marty finally knew how she cared about him. She didn't know where things were meant to go from there...but it felt "right". Then Marty acted like nothing happened and Michala accepted that, of course, none of this was "right". And she couldn't go on lying to Alison. She really hoped they could just air it and put it behind them.

Michala hasn't seen any of them for almost a year. All except Lucinda – she still visits and asks advice for her design scholarship. She wants to do an internship at the ad agency where Michala works as a Senior Art Director (Michala said no).

Michala's had the opportunity to leave all this behind her – she's an in-demand Art Director, able to transfer internationally at a whim. But she hasn't. She doesn't want to leave. Michala misses them all. They felt like her family too.

She'd do anything to make it better.

Other Characters:

Dwayne (41, Marty's best friend)

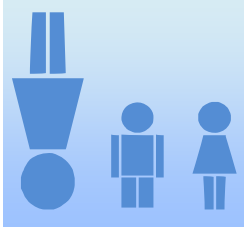
Dwayne and Marty have known each other since school. They're very different people but a long history keeps them close. After trying his hand at a few things, including alcoholism, Dwayne settled down to run a successful landscape gardening business. He's conservative, a church-goer and a no bullshit sort of guy. In fact, Marty and he constantly spar over politics. Things are pretty black and white for Dwayne (he gave Marty a real dressing down for his affair). Marty sees things in shades of grey. There's a lot of agreeing to disagree.

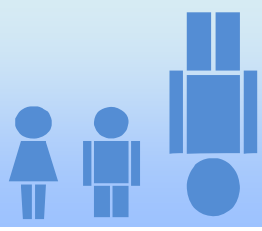
Despite this, these two guys are close. Marty is renting the flat under Dwayne's house. His wife Barb is cool with it and their kids hang together. Dwayne has two teenage daughters Emily (8) and Shana (12). They've been a little spooked by what's happened to Marty's family but Dwayne reassures them – he will NEVER divorce their mum.

Barb (35, Dwayne's wife)

Barb's a career housewife and happy with it. She takes good care of Dwayne and the family and, as a result, likes to take some of the credit for his successful business. Like Dwayne, she's a no bullshit sort of girl. In fact, she's bloody tough (she'd have to be to put up with Dwayne's big noting). She got Dwayne off the drink and helped get him straightened out before their first kid arrived.

Barb's never really gotten on with Alison – she felt judged because she was happy to stay at home. It was never anything Alison said, it was just there. She's sad for Marty that things didn't work out but thinks it's time to dust himself off and try again. In fact, Barb's been married before and fancies herself a bit of a match-maker (she found Dwayne second time around didn't she?). She's got a long list of eligible ladies from the church community for Marty to meet. But Barb's image of the ideal woman and Marty's are a little...different.





The Forsters (Alison's family) - Susan, Alexander and Thom

Alison's parents, Susan and Alexander never liked Marty. They made their feelings very clear during a private dinner with Alison before she was officially engaged to Marty – he was a free loading communist. They'd seen his articles and cartoons for the student university paper and it was clear his views were incompatible with their own. He would only hold Alison back!

The Forsters are "old money" (as Marty used to call them). Their wealth came from a long family history in property development. Largely retired now they spend their time serving on a variety of influential boards or hosting fundraisers for their preferred charities. But with Alison now divorced Susan and Alexander are going to devote their time to getting their only daughter back on her feet...and making sure she doesn't make the same mistake again. And they have a long list of suitable suitors.

Holding Sue and Alexander back is Alison's younger brother Thom. Despite being a plastic surgeon, he's a little more level-headed than his parents. He's seen more of Alison during the divorce and has been able to (discreetly) help with finances. He reckons his big sister knows what she's doing and he'll be there to help in whatever way he can – like plastic surgery to remove those wrinkles around Alison's eyes. It'll take years off her!

The McEwans (Marty's family) - Clark, Debra, Elaine, Steph and Judy

What hope did Marty have with a dad like Clark?

You see, Marty's already comes from a blended family. His Dad, Clark (65), has been married three times. He's a charismatic and renowned politics professor. His passion for his subject often spilled over into relationships with his students. He's been lucky to survive without being fired. His marriages haven't been so lucky.

The first time Clark was married was when he was nineteen. It lasted two months (no kids). Then there was Debra (Marty's mum, 60). That lasted ten years. Then Elaine (52). That lasted fifteen years and produced Steph (30) and Judy (32). Along the way there were countless affairs. Despite the mess Clark has made of his marriages his relationship with his ex-wives and children have continued. He is a loving man (you can say that again) and he wants them all to remain a part of his life. And they have – both Debra and Elaine are often at family events and Steph and Judy regularly have dinner with their father and his latest girlfriend.

Marty hates that his marriage ended in divorce like his father – he knows first hand the pain it brings. But Clark is philosophical about his wanderings. He feels he only has one life to live and so much love to give.

And lately Marty's started to appreciate his Dad's outlook.

Series Creator / Writer: Anthony Mullins

Anthony is a BAFTA and AWGIE award winning screenwriter and director.

The projects Anthony has written and directed have won numerous international awards including a Primetime Emmy, an International Digital Emmy, two BAFTAs and five Australian Writers Guild awards.

His short films and documentaries have competed in some of the world's most prestigious film festivals including the Cannes Film Festival, Aspen Shortsfest, Karlo Vary Film Festival and South by Southwest. Anthony's most recent awards include the 2012 Australian Writer's Guild Award for Best Feature Documentary Script ("The Curse of the Gothic Symphony") and a nomination for Best TV Script at the 2012 Queensland Literary Awards ("The Strange Calls: Phantom").

Between 2006 and 2012 Anthony was the Creative Director of Hoodlum, a leading multi-platform studio based in Brisbane, Australia. He has been the creative director and lead writer on several award-winning interactive projects for major film and television productions including Lost, Spooks, Primeval, The Bourne Legacy and Salt (starring Angelina Jolie).

Anthony is currently freelance writing and has TV projects optioned with numerous companies including Matchbox Pictures and Essential Media. He is represented by RGM & Associates.

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