Screenwriting: An Experience of a Writing Genre

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation, Screenwriting: An Experience Of A Writing Genre, explores screenwriting as a writing genre. Accompanying the dissertation, in a separate binding, is my feature film screenplay, Jungles of Sandakan, a spec script, written with the speculation of selling for production (Trottier, 1998:3). The screenplay represents an experience of writing. From the writer’s position, the dissertation articulates a feminine voice, reflective of the writer who experiences the writing of the feature film script, rather than being an exposé on gender, or feminist-specific issues regarding the experience. As such, it is one kind of research. Nonetheless, the research attempts to explore the complexities of writing in relation to the problems that exist in the film world that prevent, or annihilate, and yet enable and require, the very experience of writing.

Screenplays are the lifeblood of the picture business, writes Paul Lazarus, in Working In Film: The Marketplace in the ‘90s (1993:33). Lazarus, a film producer and observer of the American film industry, paints the script as the endemic life force of the film business. Without the script, it is implied, there is no film production. This gives an impression of privilege in relation to the script, and writing. In the grand scheme of things in the picture business though, this is not the case, as anxieties about the script often render writing inconsequential in the context of film production, thus reducing the script’s privilege and placing its
significance in uncertain terrain, quite often to the point of oblivion. The writer is often voiceless, and often expected, or required, by the production hierarchy, to remain impartial to her work, or relinquish ownership of her work altogether. For an industry that seemingly depends initially on writing for its own existence, the anxieties displayed towards the script, even though it is merely the blueprint of a film production, as well as the writer, appear very problematic (Richardson in English, July/August 2001, pp.72).

The fiction/drama screenplay, as a storytelling device, has fundamental significance pertaining to history, national identity, issues of gender, sexuality, race relations, social, cultural and political dynamics, views and representations of self and of other(s), ethnicity, religion, multiculturalism and so on, a plethora of issues that inform the writing, the script, as represented by characters, and story. These agendas do not only, or simply, reflect those of the characters within the script. They often also signify, reflect, and represent the issues and concerns of the writer. Australian Indigenous writer, Paula Maling, for example, writes in her article, ‘Indigenous writing for television: Attached to Kath and Kim: Stage II’ in the Australian Writers’ Guild, Storyline, about the new sitcom Nevermind:

The idea of the sitcom comes mostly from our own life experiences. We feel the location and characters we are writing about have not yet been give enough exposure on Australian television, something we manage to address in a humorous and educational manner (2004, pp. 23).
As television scripts and film scripts are much alike, Maling, like other writers, includes her life experiences in her screenplays to express the issues that are important, and of concern, to her. Screenwriting, in this light, is a means, a device the writer uses to create a space in which to write, to tell stories, to explore, and to represent a world, and reflect on issues of concern. The stories are represented by characters who act, and speak on the writer’s behalf.

Viewed in such terms, the screenplay would perhaps lead one to believe that it will enjoy value and merit in the scheme of things in film production. This is an illusion, as the production hierarchy, the behind-the-scenes politics in the industry, has the propensity to obstruct the script. A mentor in the ‘Best of the Mentor FAQs’, in the Writers’ Guild of America website illustrates this point:

A lot of the time all they [producers] want is to leave some sort of imprint in the film, otherwise they feel left out ... While writing, I make sure that something/anything that they said ends up verbatim on the page. They love it ... They’ll tell you how you somehow captured exactly what they were talking about. Getting a film made ... is like getting a bill passed ... It’s got less to do with the quality of the writing than the quality of the politics (www.wga.org, 1999, pp.31).

Does such tampering, or interfering, with writing and of telling stories, not suggest something insidious about the production hierarchy? Not only does it undermine the writer, and coerce her work to tilt the producer’s way, but the writer must kowtow to the masters’ pleasure so
that her work will pass the test of scrutiny, and the politics imposed upon her script. This seems a divisive attitude towards the script, and writer, which could throw intended stories, or indeed issues of concern, into disarray, which might lead audiences to view films not written by the writer, or stories the writer intends to tell, but manufactured productions seemingly aimed at massaging the pleasures and indulgences of the production hierarchy. Further, the unbending rules and insistence of format, or conventions, that govern screenwriting itself as a creative medium, and as a craft, might also be a point of contention that limit, or even hinder writing, and henceforth, the script. Such forces of propriety, which both privilege and devalue the script, form the basis for this research project.

The Catch-22

In the 1990s Lazarus writes:

In a recent poll in Los Angeles, California, passersby were stopped at random on a busy city street and asked how they were progressing with their screenplays. Remarkably, one out of three persons responded that they were doing very well with their screenplay project (1993:32).

As recently as April 2003, Australian screenwriter Louis Nowra, whose screen credits include Map of the human heart, Cosi, and Heaven’s Burning, reiterated this phenomenon in his article ‘So you wanna write a movie?, in The Sydney Morning Herald:
a nurse was giving me a catheter and she asked me if I would read her film script. I have had a doctor pitch his screenplay idea to me while I was in a pethidine haze. Waitresses, students, yes, even a taxi driver, have told me they are writing a screenplay (Nowra, April 12-13, 2003, pp.4).

It seems everyone has caught the screenwriting fever. I must have been living in isolation when the fever struck one late October morning. I had never seen a screenplay, nor had I known anyone who was remotely involved in screenwriting. As Ted Tally, the adaptor and screenwriter of The Silence of the Lambs said when he was first hired to write a screenplay: I didn’t even know what a screenplay looked like. I’d never even seen one (Engel, 1995:105). It seems the ignorance of screenwriting is not an isolated case, but quite a general one. It made me realise that throughout my school life, and university experience, screenwriting had not been a subject in the curriculum. For me, it seems almost absurd, a betrayal even, that film theory was among the main topics of discussion in some undergraduate tutorials, though largely in the context of cinema in relation to the construction of images: for example, the surrealists’ context of design or political aspirations. Screenwriting, however, was not part of the curriculum, at least, not during my time. Many thoughts crossed my mind: why had I not known about screenwriting? Why had I not learned to write a screenplay at school? Why had I not heard it in discussion at lectures or tutorials at university? Where does one look for a sample of a screenplay to view? What do screenwriters look like?
I had pictured a screenplay on A4 paper, about 1.5 cm thick, bound by two paper binders with washers (the actual script read by the production hierarchy, and used by actors and directors on the set, what I now know to be the *spec*, or speculation script, or shooting script) because I had in my mind, that this was what a script was, and what a script actually looked like, not one that was published in the form of a book. With that in mind, the aspiring writer would be baffled that her first point of contact, a public library, does not seem to have on their shelves samples of scripts to view. She would want to view examples of the script’s structure, format, style, language, grammar, how the script is constructed and written. It would baffle her even more that her university library does not seem to have on its shelves samples of scripts she could access. Her curiosity would be even more aroused that the bookstores in which she browsed did not seem to have scripts for sale (although it has become apparent now that some bookstores do).

But, initially, the appearance of the absence of scripts at resource venues where one would expect to find them would be a mystery in itself. The aspiring screenwriter would be curious also about the validity of employment in screenwriting, and the kinds of career prospects screenwriters could anticipate. What else would screenwriters do besides writing? The mystery would become even more pronounced with the complete absence of employment advertisements in metropolitan and local newspapers, and employment agencies for screenwriters. Inquiries at the government’s Job Matching agencies for information, contacts and potential jobs, or
opportunities in the film industry for the aspiring screenwriter earned curious stares. The absence of screenplays in public and university libraries, and seemingly no employment opportunities for screenwriters, would imply something peculiar about the state of affairs, not just of screenwriting, or the film industry, but of a society that seems to want to promote a diversified workforce, while for the aspiring screenwriter who is eager to learn, and wants to go to work on writing her screenplay, information about screenwriting, and employment for screenwriters, do not seem to exist at all. Yet, more and more movies and television shows are made each year, with more and more government and societal expectations of writers, and filmmakers whose job is, according to Executive Director of Screen Producers of Australian Association, Geoff Brown, in his article, ‘Positive Affirmation In The Industry’, to screen more positive and healthy images of contemporary Australian life (WIFT Newsletter, June-August, 2002, pp.25). And, as Mark Chipperfield and et al report in ‘Tinseltown’, in The (Sydney) Magazine of The Sydney Morning Herald: the film industry pumped $4 billion into the NSW economy between 2001 and 2002, with Premier Bob Carr saying, filmmaking is a very big industry, with lots of jobs (April 2004, pp.45). Would it not be feasible then to ask, where are those jobs, and why do these jobs seem so inaccessible? And, for the aspiring screenwriter, why do screenwriting assignments seem so invisible in the job market? It would be poignant then to enquire: who are the people we call screenwriters? How, or where do they get hired to write?
Leaping out of the ordinary in the most ordinary of worlds, at a shopping plaza, on a table of books on sale, a small reddish-covered book peeks out from amongst the plethora of reference books, cooking books, street directories, dictionaries, self-help books, feng shui books, tarot cards, cricketers' memoirs, travel books, novels by unheard of authors, and so on. She reaches for it, the small reddish book, and as she gently rescues it from being crushed under the pile, the book breathes its name to her: *Teach Yourself Screenwriting* by Raymond G Frensham. Her eyes widen in disbelief, face to face with a book about screenwriting, which she had not even thought to look for in the first place. A smile spreads across her face and her heart pounds as the book introduces itself:

This book is written for the starting-out screenwriter. The aim is not just to guide you through the intricacies and craft of writing for the screen (film, television and video), but also to give you guidance on how to approach the industry. Of all the different forms of writing, screenwriting is where creativity interfaces with business the most and you need to feel comfortable and confident when dealing with both. The media like to create a mystique about themselves and their methods ... (1996:1).

Frensham introduces something intriguing, yet startling, about screenwriting. Intriguing, because the aspiring screenwriter no longer has to imagine she exists on the margins, or refer to herself as an aspiring screenwriter; rather she is legitimately a screenwriter in the starting-out phase. Her quest for information about the medium, greeted so far by the charade of silence, has now revealed that the mystery is just that, a mystique
created by the medium itself, perhaps by those who have masterminded the craft, and industry, and now conspire to manipulate, or to monopolise, the plot in order to deter the curiosities of the common passersbys. If this is the case, her desires, and ability, to write may stand in favour to challenge such manipulation, or monopoly. It is not so much the intricacies of the craft that are startling, as it is the prospect of guidance, and the fact that learning the guidelines of format, and the principles of writing, may resolve the intricacies. It is, apparently, the intricacies of a creative medium that interfaces with business, and that one must feel comfortable and confident in dealing with, that conjures up the ultimate challenge that may dispirit the starting-out writer before she even has a chance to start-out.

The questions the keen and aspiring screenwriter asked in the 'Best of the Mentor FAQs' are typical of the kinds of questions and thoughts that swirl in the minds of her and her contemporaries. The answers she receives would test the might of those who dare ask those questions:

Q: I’m an aspiring scriptwriter. I love to write, love it, from thinking something up to writing the last line, it’s the best feeling in the world. I’ve written one-full length script, one episodic drama, and have several other works in progress. What I need now is how to get started. Should I find an agent first? If so, where should I start? Who would be a good judge of what I’ve written? Anything you have to offer would be greatly appreciated.

A: Basically, you’re fucked. There’s no way in. Forget it. Welcome to the wonderful world of Catch-22, where you can’t get an agent without
credits, you can’t get credits without a job, and you can’t get a job without an agent (www.wga.org, 1999, pp.30).

The aspiring screenwriter is full of vigour and excitement in her love of writing, and is confident about her abilities to write. She wants to go to work, and needs information on the procedures, and avenues to usher her screenplays into production. Her questions are both relevant and universal among new writers who seem unable to access the information from other vocational outlets. Books can tell me how to write a script, but nobody tells me what to do when I’m finished with it, producer/writer J.M. Straczynski writes of the aspiring writers who asked him for advise in The Complete Book of Scriptwriting (1996:v). In contrast, the answers she receives are extremely offensive, condescending, seemingly calculated to dismiss the new writer, without compassion or appreciation for the years of dedication she has invested in her work. But the answers, however harsh the tone, are also brutally honest. Suddenly, one’s eagerness and confidence to pursue a way of existence is crushed. One’s passion to write, to work is striped away. One is ridiculed, shunned, dismissed before one is able to get a foot in the door. The doors are shut, there is no way in. How then, did the well-established and credited get in? How, or where, did it happen for them?

As one ponders the commonality of interest in the pursuit of screenwriting among the passersby in the busy street—the nurse, the doctor, the students, the waitresses, the taxi driver—one begins to sense that the seemingly impenetrable doors of the screenwriting establishment are
perhaps also illusions. One begins to hear the echoes of
the giggles of those inside the establishment, mocking
those desiring to be screenwriters. One begins to see the
irritations of the established (who no doubt had been
down some rough roads in their own pursuits of the same
desires), mocking in annoyance at the nurse and the
doctor who are brutalising him with medical procedures
while pestering him with curiosity (or indeed their
passion) to write and to pitch their screenplays in
disregard for his fragile condition. The waitresses, the
students, and the taxi driver appear as the crazed fans
of the now established one who would rather not be
bothered by their unwarranted adulation. The one in three
among the passersby, along with the nurse, the doctor,
the waitresses, the students, the taxi driver, seem to
magnify the anxieties of those inside the establishment,
those who would perhaps rather not let too many intrude
on their turf for fear that they might be overshadowed,
and the illusion shattered, thus revealing the truth of
the matter: that there are in fact no doors to
establishing oneself as a screenwriter. Lazarus yet again
throws light on these seemingly impenetrable doors:

After all, no boards or entrance exams need be
passed to establish the writer’s competence at
his craft. ... Take the word processor, the
typewriter, or even pencil and paper and go to
work. Start writing a screenplay and magically
you will transform yourself into a screenwriter

There are no boards, or entrance exams to establishing
oneself as a screenwriter: this is too flimsy, too easy.
The appearance of the technical simplicities of the craft
without governing boards, or exams, or any formal prerequisites required to enter the profession, leads one to ponder the fuss made in the there is no way in scenario, and the perceived mocking of the nurse, the doctor, the waitresses, the students, the taxi driver, who aspire to be the screenwriter. One ponders also, in a society like ours that is so governed by boards of executives, examiners, taskmasters, security guards, and the plethora of other governing bodies, whether becoming a screenwriter without the approval of such regimens seem dangerously ungoverned, uncontrolled. This really is a contradiction, when the starting-out screenwriter presents her work with questions for directions to establish herself, only to be told by those in the wonderful world of Catch-22 that she is fucked.

The contradiction is apparent, cast in the same light as the appearance of technical simplicities, as later in the chapter Lazarus reveals: in screenwriting, there are no shortcuts to developing one’s craft. Learning the form and developing the skills necessary to commit one’s ideas to paper are requisite beginnings (1993:39). With this in mind, it is apparent to the starting-out writer, and to the unacquainted eye generally, that the script looks distorted and alien when compared with other forms of writing. William Goldman, of screen credits such as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, The Hot Rock, and A Bridge Too Far, said of his first encounter with the screenplay: I could never write in that form because it was full of all those awful capital letters and numbers ... it was unreadable (Brady, 1981:94). And, as Frensham instructs:
Before starting the creative journey it is important to establish some basic details about how scripts are laid out on the page and the technical language used (Frensham, 1996:16).

It seems the script must contain properly structured and formatted pages, which may include scene headings, scene direction, camera angles, montages, paragraphing, entrances and exits, character cues, actor direction, dialogue, sound, and what these measures mean, and how they are used, or not used, in the script (Frensham, 1996:17-30). It is not the intent of this thesis to detail the applications of these measures, but rather, to point out that these structures and formats are the epitome of recognition and acceptance of one’s professionalism in the craft. Structure is crucial, as writer Lynda La Pante advises: get hold of a professional formatted script and note everything; from simple instructions like INT. and EXT. to the exact length, and never stray from that format (Frensham, 1996:16). Even the font in which the script is written must be in Courier 12-point (the font I choose to use throughout the project for consistency with the script, and also to illustrate that the insistence on only one particular font might actually hinder writing rather than assist it), as nothing else will do (English, 2003, pp.2). The Courier 12-point font, according to script consultant and writer, David Trottier, in The Screenwriter’s Bible is, quite deliberate: what you use in a screenplay. It looks like it’s typed using a typewriter ... [it] is easier on the eyes of industry people who read dozens of scripts every week [and] it also retains the one page equals one minute screen time industry standard (1998:112). Such
advice seems simplistic, straight to the point, yet also unforgiving if one should be so curious as to experiment and stray from the form. Why so? Is there no room to experiment with new, or different, ways of writing a screenplay?

**Synergies for writing**

It begins that morning when I wake with an overwhelming desire to write. This may seem a theme common with other writers, or artists, or inventors, who have had similar evocations that inspired them to write, to paint, or to do things. It may even seem like a cliché. Nonetheless, this was exactly what happened to me. It was late October 1997, in the latter days of my undergraduate degree. A few months prior, I was among some of my contemporaries discussing and contemplating career options and prospects upon graduation. What could we do with our degrees? What might be the kinds of career prospects that lay before us in the beginning of the twenty-first century, at a time, and in a space, where our lives seemed torn by a rapidly changing world of constant technological feats, where lives and dreams are ruled, and sometimes ruined, by economic uncertainties and acute anxieties about the prospects of joblessness, and despair about an uncertain existence.

Our heads turned in unison to one another, staring and studying the expressions of stark uncertainties and anxieties in each other’s faces. In the long silent pause, our eyes looked to the ground for solace, trying to make sense of what might happen to us. Quietly, in my thoughts, I entertained the notion, *I don’t want to work.*
I want instead a way of living that would allow me to entertain the theories and concepts learned at university, and utilise them as working tools. What could this kind of work be? Then, in an instant, the silence of the daydream was shattered, not just for me, but for all of us.

Well, if push comes to shove, I can always go back to the factory, bellows the person next to me.

Yeah, me too, back to the office, sighs another.

Jolted by this earth-shattering reality, our hearts sank, but almost instantly, thoughts of resistance also came to light: were these not our very reasons for coming to university? So that we might apply thinking skills learned in tutorials and lectures, and in the plethora of writing projects assigned in the duration of study, so that we might choose, if we so wish, not to return to the regimens of the oppressed, disguised in ultramodern offices and factories where computers rule our thinking, where the clock dictates our meal times and bodily functions, where the content of work is meaningless, and the worker feels worthless, alienated from the world, and from herself.

Erich Fromm, in *Marx’s Concept of Man*, writes about the political economy of a world where the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and to the most miserable commodity, as a result of her work (1966:93). I can relate to the regimens of such work that alienates us, as I too remember the factory, and the office. In the summer
of 1998, after the completion of my Honours dissertation, I found myself in a compact disc (CD) manufacturing factory as a process worker. This was my first experience of a factory. Prior to this, I had been an office girl, working at the computer initiating and shuffling paperwork for production on the factory floor. Now, after a university degree or two, I got to see and experience what happened after the paperwork left my desk. I see women, predominantly migrant women, who like myself are recruited, not as workers, but as commodities, as by-products, as extensions with pairs of hands, as part of the production regime. We clock in at six in the morning (not earlier, not later). We march onto the factory floor, sit our bottoms down at the workbench, and there, for twelve hours of the day, the feats of endurance, and the humiliation from the taskmasters, simultaneously take place. There is a window to the right of us in that huge space called the production floor. That 5m x 10m frame of the sky, our only means of communication with the outside, becomes a fixture of our gaze. For some of us, a bird flying by represents a freedom for which we could only wish. A patch of cloud floating by is a sight awesome enough to engender a scene of epic proportions, entertaining the toils of our mindless work. We have committed no crime to be cut off from the world like this, and all the while we insert (stuff would be a more appropriate term) inlays into the CD cover. So, we stuff inlays into the CD cover, we stuff inlays into the CD cover, we stuff inlays into the CD cover. No, this is not a typing error, this is the contingency of the work routine on the factory floor. We stuff inlays into the CD cover, we stuff inlays into the CD cover, and we stuff
inlays into the CD cover to make our living. We march to tea and lunch breaks in shifts, toilet breaks as we must, then march back to the workbench, and continue stuffing more inlays into the CD covers until at six in the evening, we clock out.

As we sit stuffing inlays into the CD covers, I try to make sense of our existence in the production room. Why are we here? Why are we doing this? As I gaze at that 5m x 10m frame of sky, I am satisfied that some are happy to be here and doing just what they are doing. They are working. They have a job, and they are taking home a salary that sustains the life they have sought to live in a new country. Life is just as it should be, with contented, well-nourished children and family. The bright and colourful national dresses they sometimes wear to an otherwise sterile factory environment seem to reflect their sense of satisfaction and contentment. However, I cannot help feeling that among the appearance of satisfaction and contentment, they still endure the toils and humility of the most discriminated, marginalised, and exploited in our society, the migrant women that Ellie Vasta in Intersexions: Gender, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, refers to as being at the bottom of the labour market heap (1991:163). The same toils and humility, and discrimination, marginalisation, and exploitation I sought to research in my university studies on migrancy, work and gender. Now, the assignment is removed from discussions of the oppressed in the comforts of the tutorial rooms and lecture theatres with the assistance of academic texts. My assignment is now to access the
lived experience of the factory worker sitting next to me.

_Someone come fuck me!,_ screams the most obnoxious woman on the factory floor. All heads turn to her as she shrieks with laughter, breaking the monotony and boredom of work. Smiles and more laughter spread among the women who momentarily emerge to express their humanness, the humanity they surrender as they perform tasks so repetitious, so mentally tedious and monotonous that profanities no longer offend, but provide a source of comic relief to the boredom endured (Vasta, 1991:165). In _Marx’s Concept of Man_, Fromm writes about the alienation and worthlessness of the worker in reflection of the value of the object of her work:

The more the worker expends himself in work the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself. ... The worker becomes a slave of the object. ... the more value he creates the more worthless he becomes; the more refined his product the more crude and misshapen the worker, the more civilized the product the more barbarous the worker; the more the work manifests intelligence the more the worker declines in intelligence and becomes a slave of nature (1966:96-97).

The materialisation of the world of objects not only supersedes the worker, but the worker is cajoled into its world. The object becomes more meaningful than the worker who materialises the object. Work, in this sense, has no meaning, but is simply an alien existential ritual to earn a currency in order to survive. There is no life, but a mere existence in the struggle for survival. Not
many in that factory who warranted stuffing inlays into CD covers, as work, or a career, wanted to be there, but they must because they must survive. I ask myself, has the framework of academic thinking corrupted me in such a way that I begin to resist the way I once made a living? While recognising the relevance of such regimens in our so-called world of specialisation in order to put food to mouth, and in keeping the grind-stone of political economy, surely in the beginning of a new century, and a new millennium, this mode of employment, of existence, for some of us at least, could be left in the past.

Write!

In “Coming to Writing” and Other Essays, Hélène Cixous describes the attack of the desire to write as intoxicating, and like a madness:

Suddenly I was filled with a turbulence that knocked the wind out of me and inspired me to wild acts. “Write”. When I say “writing” seized me, it wasn’t a sentence that had managed to seduce me, there was absolutely nothing written, not a letter, not a line. ... The attack was imperious: “Write!” (1991:9).

What is Cixous saying? Surely, she is saying, in the dawning of a new day, a strange and irresistible desire to exist consumes me. Similarly, the awakening of that October morning sparked in me a desire impossible to ignore. There was nothing in words, or sentences that made sense. Nothing, but a quiet thought: write a screenplay. The quiet thought struck like a thunderbolt, and like a madness, it consumed me. In the daze, I pondered what the experience would be like, to immerse
oneself in writing a screenplay. I imagined the screenplay would incorporate the adventures of working, to make sense and give meaning to the power of dreams, the violent struggles of poverty, the cancer of racism, the loneliness of old age, the cosmic point to all this life, as columnist Ron Suppa describes in his article, ‘Why We Write’, in Creative Screenwriting (March/April, 2002, pp. 30). Yes! And, the turbulence that knocked the wind out of Cixous and inspired her to wild acts, well some of that elixir of wild acts must have spilled over into me! For me, interested in the story of my forebears, and reading the books that bear references to my father’s family in a part of history that relates directly to Australia, the seduction to write is simply irresistible.
Chapter 2

The Sandakan scenario

Don Wall, in Sandakan, The Last March, writes:

Alex Funk, who was arrested at Kemansi on 8 August, was taken to Sandala Estate where his wife Maggie and his other relatives were ‘grilled’ ... (1986:38).

Jack Wong Sue, in Blood on Borneo, recalls:

For poor Paddy Funk, the realisation that Australia and the local Kuching and Sandakan people thought so little of his brave brother Alexander and the other heroes in the grave, was heart breaking. More disappointing was the knowledge that Australia couldn’t care a damn, even though the men had sacrificed their lives in the interests of the Aussie prisoners (2001:336).

Lynette Ramsay Silver reiterates in Sandakan, A Conspiracy of Silences:

The Funk family suffered at the hands of the Japanese ... (1998:125).

Yes, we did. Alexander and Paddy Funk were my uncles. The relatives grilled, who suffered atrocities at the hands of the Japanese, were my grandparents, aunts, and uncles. It is precisely the involvement of my father’s family, and the experience of what happened to them during the war that not only took the lives of thousands of Australian and British prisoners in Sandakan, but also the many local people who aided them, that gave rise to
my interest in writing the story as a feature film script. While many movies and television series from *Bridge Over the River Kwai* to *Changi*, have been made about the Second World War in South East Asia, the story of Sandakan has remained unscripted. This is perhaps because little is known about Sandakan, and the atrocities of war that occurred there nearly 60 years ago, where thousands of young Australian and British soldiers, and the local people who aided them, died terrible deaths. This little known fact about Sandakan is fleshed out in a few sentences in an Appendix in Lynette Ramsay Silver’s book, *Sandakan, A Conspiracy of Silence*:

The Australian War Memorial, which had until that time [1995], made little reference to the Borneo prisoners, incorporated a new Sandakan room into its display. Starkly simple, the exhibition’s most significant feature is a wall covered with photographs of almost all of the 1787 Australians who died (1998:323).

Such statements as, *made little reference*, 1787 Australians who died, and photographs of those men staring from the *starkly simple* Sandakan room at the Australian War Memorial, would seem to contextualise a scene, and depict an aspect of the war, that does not resonate with Australia’s tradition of respect and honour for its war dead. Rather, it seems a disturbing fact that this was a war, and a group of war dead, that Australia would rather forget. Does this not motivate one’s curiosity, as to why such silences had been imposed upon the Borneo prisoners, and why it has taken Australia half a century to commemorate these long forgotten men? *It was not until the early 1960s that the first public memorial to honour Sandakan’s POWs was erected — not in Australia,
but in Sabah (British North Borneo), Silver continues (1998:322). Indeed, it was then not until the late 1980s that local memorials in Australia were erected commemorating these men. And, it was not until 1995 that the Australian War Memorial incorporated a new Sandakan room, and displayed photographs and relics of these long ignored, forgotten soldiers. Similarly, in same year the Sandakan memorial in Burwood Park, depicted in the opening and concluding scenes of Jungles of Sandakan, was constructed (Silver, 1998).

The slow, seemingly reluctant approach in commemorating these soldiers, and in the issuing of more information about their plight, resounds in both Silver and Sue’s titles for their books, Sandakan, A Conspiracy of Silence and Blood on Borneo. The books’ titles are revealing of the fact that something unpalatable, notably the bungled Kingfisher Operation, a concerted Australian-British-American land, air and sea mission, planned, with the aid of some of the local people of Sandakan, to evacuate and rescue all the prisoners of war from the PW camps in Sandakan area of British North Borneo was aborted, resulting in the conspiracy that the disastrous Kingfisher Operation project must be kept secret at all cost (Silver, 1998:176,301). The secret of the failed Kingfisher Operation has remained to this present day World War 2’s most deadly secret (Silver, 1998:312). The debacle of the rescue mission, and the secrecy that has surrounded it since, of which Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), Sir Thomas Blamey, a highly-revered, but at the same time often-reviled public figure (Silver, 1998:302), was chiefly responsible,
resulted in the massacre of nearly the entire Australian and British prison population, and explains why little is known about Sandakan. While my screenplay *Jungles of Sandakan* is not about the conspiracy, it still raises the little known story of Sandakan.

While books like Wall’s, Silver’s, and Sue’s, and others had been written about Sandakan, and documentaries such as *Jack Sue: A Matter of Honour* (1998), *Beyond Sandakan* (1999), and *Return to Sandakan* (1995), have been made to commemorate the Sandakan experience, Australian screenwriters appear unaware of Sandakan, and as the conspirators shy away from making more information available, this has invariably sketched a space for a script like *Jungles of Sandakan*. At the same time it gives me, a descendant of those who had experienced the war, those who had seen and aided the Australian and British prisoners, the opportunity to write. Growing up on the very turf where this war was fought, and where lie entombed many of the forgotten soldiers, the stories, and experiences my family told about this war allowed me an insight to write, and to explore the story in script form.

*Jungles of Sandakan* is written from the point of view of the local people of Sandakan with the character, George, a Eurasian boy, as the lead. George’s character is partly based on my father and his untold story. Although my father’s name did not appear in the books alongside his brothers, he nonetheless played a significant role, for example, in evacuating his family from their estate to escape capture, and, as a young private in the Volunteer
Force, escaping from his Japanese captors, and surviving the ordeal of the jungles of Sandakan. Ching’s character is partly based on my mother whose friendship and relationship with my father was not welcomed by my grandmother. Jungles of Sandakan also largely depicts my father’s silences, and where details are not known, or forgotten, fiction blends with reality to propel the story. Whilst the war, which sets the historical backdrop for the drama that unfolds as a love story, is based on the historical record, the love story itself has a blend of fiction and reality.

Why must this story be told from the local people’s point of view? The intention here is to disrupt the dominant discourse of literature and films, which habitually contextualise stories of the colonised from predominantly Western viewpoints. Don Wall, in Sandakan, The Last March, encapsulates the point:

Sandakan, on the East Coast of Borneo, was the pre-war Capital of British North Borneo. ... The sound of marching men could be heard through the still morning - this sound was to become very familiar to the local people. ... It was not surprising when the Australians arrived at Sandakan that the hopes of the Chinese Resistant Movement rose in anticipation of being able to take control of Sandakan (1986:9-10).

Wall’s immediate and unreserved claims of Sandakan as British unconditionally set the theme for stories of Western heroism to be told in this context. Further, Silver’s casual reference to my uncle Paddy as Brown’s houseboy is questionable, even dismissive, and appears in
contrast to Sue’s account that Paddy was one of the Funk brothers [who] became involved in assisting the Australian POW through the Sandakan underground movement ... (1998:106; 2001:340). It seems both Wall and Silver’s claims are examples of, as Edward Said observed in Orientalism:

> a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, [who] have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, custom, mind, destiny, and so on (1995:2-3).

From such elaborators of knowledge from the centuries of the colonisation of the Orient, Western literature, as well as films, has instinctively subscribed to a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1995:3). As such, Wall and Silvers’s writing of the Sandakan experience invariably reflects such rhetoric, and implies the marching white men have landed, the heroes, the liberators are here, and that the local people at the sidelines may watch, and play the role of their subordinates, or houseboys. I do not want to contest the heroism of the marching men (the captured Australian and British soldiers), who Australia and Britain seem to have ignored for so long. Indeed, their struggles for survival in the most abject of circumstances were heroic, and their story must be told. However, Jungles of Sandakan, is written not from their point of view, but from the point of view of the people of Sandakan, and from a postcolonial context, and so
firstly, it tries to dispel the myth that heroism in a colonised regime is inevitably Western. Secondly, it is about a family with its own agenda, struggling to survive in a horrific war while witnessing and experiencing the horror that unfolds for the white men, and aiding them in their plight where possible. At the same time though, the story may set its own agenda of theme and content, and the primary purpose here, essentially, is to experience the writing of a screenplay, and explore the regimes in which the script may be viewed, or received, by the production hierarchy.

Undeniably, the colonial setting of Sandakan seen from a postcolonial perspective—the images of the marching men, which conjoin Australians and British (the colonists) with the local people (the colonised, of which some of my relations were among), provides an irresistible, and a notably historic and nostalgic site, for the writing of a feature film script.

As an experiential piece, the melodrama features instead of the docu/drama or a range of experimental genres, as it was the feature length melodramatic script that was workshopped and edited to comply with the structured 3-Act script. Also, as war plays an intrinsic part in heightening the senses of urgency for love and life, the genre of the melodramatic script seems congruent with the setting of the love story in a war environment, while the placing of the characters, nestled deep in the jungles of Sandakan, play significant roles in exaggerating the emotive struggles for survival, and indeed, the expression for love and acceptance of destiny.
The script as narrative

Roland Barthes writes:

Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres ... Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images ... narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama ... conversation ... narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society ... narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (1993: 251-252).

Barthes’ notion of narrative being identifiable in a variety of genres, and present in every form of literature and writing, everywhere, and in every instance of life, is borne out by the script. Jungles of Sandakan certainly has in its context a narrative of history, tragedy and drama representing life in a war environment. It is precisely the script’s interplay of articulated language, both spoken and written (dialogue and direction), with images, both fixed and moving images (visual narratives) and devices like flashbacks and parallel storylines (story-within-story) that propels the script, and which simultaneously entertains, fascinates and challenges me to write.

Trottier clarifies how such narratives may translate in the script genre:

keep your narrative description (and dialogue) on the lean side, providing only what is absolutely necessary to progress the story while emphasizing important actions and

As an example, he illustrates how a scene might read:

The young woman is CALCUTTA COTTER. With the phone to her ear, she turns towards the classroom window and frowns at what she sees—the professor doing cartwheels down the aisles (1998:107).

Be clean and lean, and write only what is absolutely necessary seems simplistic, and provides little, or no grammatical eloquence, or academic finesse. For me though, the writing of scenes, or the process of visualisation through the writing of scenes, frame by frame, rather than articulately structured sentences, or descriptive paragraphs, creates the imagery, delivery, vocabulary, which as Barthes said, springs from the body and part of the writer and gradually becomes the very reflexes of his art (1993:32). The reflexes here in script form, written in the context of the colonised, perhaps represent a people struggling to speak on their own behalf within the regimes of the coloniser. Here, as bell hooks puts it: often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate (1989:28). The script form, particularly in the way that it uses language and style to express context, is born out of a regime that precisely situates the radical voice, coupled with the measures of sound and visual representations, so that the voices repressed by the dominant language may speak.
A case in point is *Jungles of Sandakan*, although it predominantly speaks the coloniser’s language, it also purposely sketches a space allowing the colonised to speak in their own native tongues (without translation), thus ensuring the emergence of transculturality. The native tongues of the colonised, although circumscribed by the dominant language, are nevertheless heard directly from the colonised’s own mouths, and voices inevitably set within the script, creating the opportunity for the languages to co-exist. This is reflective of, for example, Coco Fusco’s, *The Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo* (1989), a project that situates a group of Anglo-Americans and Latin Americans at the Tijuana/San Diego border. The project, through performances and other devices of the arts, explores bilinguality and tongues, and challenges the concept that when North Americans talk about bilinguality, they think that it is the Mexican who has to be bilingual, not themselves (Fusco, 1989:53, 61).

Effectively, the native tongues in *Jungles of Sandakan*, without translation into the dominant coloniser’s language of English, highlight this point. They allude to the fact that the colonised, through the centuries of colonisation, have had bilingualism imposed upon them, or even experienced the suppression of their own native tongues altogether, in order to learn the dominant language.

Suffice to say, the struggle for language, particularly the Chinese Hakka dialect, which itself is a minority dialect within the Chinese and native Malaysian languages, in this case does not rest solely with the characters of the colonised in the script. It reflects also that of the writer, who is trapped ... in a cultural
context that defines freedom solely in terms of learning the oppressor’s language, and assimilating however slowly into the dominant hegemony, into the mainstream, while the native tongue is suppressed, silenced, and hence forgotten (hooks, 1989:29). The experience of this act of writing, and particularly the writing of this script, which involves research and the writing of a story that generates a narrative, also opens up a way to rekindle a link with one’s own past, and for the preservation of one’s own language, voice, heritage, identity and culture that had been suppressed, and oppressed, while learning and living within the dominant cultural context (hooks, 1989).

In an interview in The Craft of the Screenwriter on his work in screenwriting, William Goldman, said:

There’s a marvellous narrative thing ... movies are marvellous in terms of the story’s size and sweep that you can hardly do in a novel ... they are entirely different forms. The only similarity is that very often they both use dialogue. Otherwise, the way that one handles a scene in a movie and the way one handles a scene in a book have nothing to do with each other (Brady, 1981:88).

The story’s size and sweep that Goldman refers to seems to resonate with Jungles of Sandakan, which has compelling overtones of human suffering, of falling in love, family life in war-time, and a degree of horrific human suffering that some people are still not able to speak about. This could be seen to reflect on traumas suffered by individuals and families who had witnessed and experienced atrocities to such an extent that such
narratives are impossible as acknowledged, articulated, stories within the family. As Lena Inowlocki, in Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson’s Between Generations, writes about Jewish families who experienced Nazi persecution: they have not been able to talk about this period of their lives ... the heart of their experiences cannot be turned into a story for the grandchildren, who must be protected from knowing about the pain and absolute despair, from the complete absence of meaning of the individual, and the collective suffering (1993:139). Similarly, my father, a mild-mannered man, never spoke in detail about his ordeal. His silences perhaps resemble Inowlocki’s observations that atrocities and suffering are sometimes simply impossible as stories within the family. Silenced, unable to speak out in response to the situation, as Jean-Francois Lyotard puts it, in The Differend: the survivors rarely speak about it. When they do speak about it, their testimony bears only a minute part of the situation (1988:3). Such situations of trauma and atrocities, when words are inadequate are then, I think, better expressed, better told, in a visual context.

As a mode of writing, the script as a visual entity does not require indepth, or intricate, descriptions of characters, objects, appearances or moods. According to Trottier, a screenplay will focus on the visual aspects of the scene ... on the action—the drama—because movies are primarily visual ... The novel may focus on the thoughts and feelings of each character [the inner conflict] (1998:4). The visual content of showing through action usually works better than telling with dialogue
(Trottier, 1998:4). As a writing mode, writing elaborate inner feelings of conflict, or description, of props and details, is unnecessary. Writing the script in this sense may conjure up appearances of a non-professional, or even a derogative form of writing, as it does not seem, in its format and presentation, an articulate form of writing, certainly not in the sense of the novel, for example, where professional, elaborate, articulate, descriptive language, stylistic grammar, and well-structured sentences are the ultimate prize to be strived for and celebrated. Thus, a specific description, sometimes a short sentence, or a specific word, gives the director and actor their cues to create and work the theme, or mood, of the scene. This is because whilst creating and writing scenes in the script, one is constantly aware that there are other devices, or apparatuses, like the camera, and the colours and tones that the camera sees, that enhance the visual and emotional content of scenes, and the story as a whole. At the same time, the script’s reliance on other mediums to describe, to support its narrative, may give the appearance of a certain coping out on the writer’s part in choosing a literary style that is much less intimidating to write than a novel (Lazarus, 1993:32). This much less intimidating to write theme, or perhaps demonstrated lack of literary flair, or academic finesse, in the screenplay seems reflected in Den Shewman’s interview, ‘A Writer’s Road to Perdition’, with David Self of screen credits The Haunting, 13 Days and The Road to Perdition. Self’s academic family were unimpressed with his chosen profession:

his parents are both college professors, and his aunts and uncles are high school teachers.
As proud as they must have been when Self earned both a Bachelors degree and a Masters in English ... they were decidedly less enthusiastic when he announced he was going to take up screenwriting: They thought I was completely insane, said Self (www.creativescreenwriting.com, 2003, pp.1)

Could this lack of enthusiasm for the screenwriting profession (specifically its literary style and genre), amongst those in academia be reflected in my uneventful search for the screenplay in public and university libraries? The absence of the presence of the screenplay in my initial research for its genre of literary style and format at these venues seems to suggest that because it is less intimidating to write, or because of its lack of academic finesse, it has no status in the literary world. But, how is it less intimidating to write when the challenge of writing the script is the awareness that authorship does not reside solely with the writer, but with the collaboration of the production?

As a result, it challenges one to relinquish ownership of one’s work even at the very point of writing. One is constantly aware that scenes and dialogue that may be held dear to the writer may end up neutered, mutilated, or murdered altogether in the editing suite. In this sense, the writer loses her identity and connection with her script, as she has no real voice in the scheme of the production to represent her work. One bears in mind that the script after all is a play, an entertainment. It also represents a mode of writing, an existence, and an experience that incorporates the collaboration of other people, and other mediums and devices of production.
The script, as the blueprint of a movie production, is ultimately a shared enterprise, and for the new writer especially, the script, or more importantly, the story one creates and writes, may be reshaped, remoulded or retold to comply with the machinations of Hollywood, which seems to have set the standard of the central conflict theory that has become law in most important centers of film industry in the world (Goldsmith, March/April, 2002, pp.16; Ruiz, 1995:9). Thus, in essence, one does not write a script, one writes a film (English, 2003, pp.5). Here, one cannot help but be reminded of the regimes of the colonisers, in that the imperialism of Hollywood now strikes at the very heart of the movie world, colonising even Australia, as we kowtow to a regime that does not even recognise, or address, our own culture, and yet we must go along to get along in the picture business. As in the experience of writing Jungles of Sandakan, I must write in a language, and format, in accordance to the Hollywood model, otherwise, there would be no chance of even entering my script in their feature film screenwriting competitions, since we do not seem to have any of our own for me to enter.

As Jungles of Sandakan is written from a different cultural angle, which does not feature Anglo-Australians in leading roles, the opportunity of production in Australia, seems very remote. A prominent Australian film producer whom I interviewed for this project has acknowledged that while Australia has changed progressively to a multicultural society in the last 30 years, feature films have largely not reflected this change. The reasons are varied, from changing
technologies of film deliveries, to the aging Australian population responding to such changes. For example, Arthouse cinemas, for which the bulk of Australian films are made, are experiencing a huge diminishing of their audience. Congruent with this change is the fact that most films, including Arthouse, can now be viewed with just as much enjoyment at home on DVD, or even downloaded from the Internet.

The effects of such new technologies, which perhaps have made film delivery to the audience more efficient and effective albeit with a downturn of profit for cinema outlets, still do not fully explain the reluctance of Australian filmmakers to feature multicultural Australian stories. It seems films based on screenplays like Jungles of Sandakan, which features non-Anglo Australians in leading roles, and a story narrated from a foreign perspective rather than that of the dominant, may not be recognised as Australian films. Experimental short films from the ethnic communities portraying ethnic leading characters are emerging. However, as Jungles of Sandakan is written as a feature length melodrama that commensurate a historical record and a love story, the time constrains of the short film genre is not feasible.

In view of such lack of interest in Australia of screenplays written from a different cultural angle, it seems the American screenwriting market may offer better opportunities for my screenplay. The American screenwriting market actually encourages and facilitates screenwriting competition in attempts to locate new writers both within the United States and abroad. This
then, reflects the overall writing style of my screenplay, a writing style that identifies with the Hollywood model.
Chapter 3

Experiencing the script

In the Introduction to Story, renowned screenwriting teacher Robert McKee writes:

at first glance telling story [sic] for the screen looks deceptively easy. But moving closer and closer to the center, trying scene by scene to make the story work, the task becomes increasingly difficult, as we realize that on the screen there’s no place to hide (1999:5-6).

McKee touches a nerve about the realities of writing the script. Indeed, at first glance it looks not only deceptively easy, but invitingly so. Write what you know. Write about something that only you know about ... says screenwriter, Anna Sandor, in Elizabeth English’s article, ‘When the actor writes’, in Screentalk, (July/August 2001, pp.71). Richard Guilliant, in his article, ‘A Life you wouldn’t believe’, in The Sydney Morning Herald magazine, Good Weekend, writes of writer-director, Tony Ayres: fragments of Ayer’s life are scattered throughout his films and scripts. Ayers himself admits: I keep going back to my life, because it is the most interesting story I know ... (September 14, 2002, pp.47).

Similarly, Jungles of Sandakan is a story I know. I grew up listening to my parents talk about the war, and what happened to them during the war. The story was told, repeated, grown over many times with more and more details as relatives and friends added their part of the
story during the decades of my youth and adult life. Familiarity with the story makes it appealing, and watching the war veterans march in their parade on Anzac Day year after year, with banners bearing the A.I.F. logo and representing the places they fought in, like Borneo, Singapore, Burma, New Guinea among many others during the war years of 1939-1945, is a reminder that this war that occurred in Sandakan nearly 60 years ago is also a part of Australian history. However, as I have said, this is a largely unscripted story, and so it invites the opportunity to write. So I decided, I would write the script as my mother had told the story. It seems logical to narrate the story from my mother’s point of view because the story of the war, as I knew it, came from her:

We’d never seen so many white men before, so skinny, they didn’t look white, their faces were blackened and red with sunburn, dirt and sores. They saw us when they marched by the market place, some of them winked and whistled at us, we giggled. The Japs watched their every move, pointing guns at them, and pushed them away from the crowd when they came too close. They were treated like dirt, like flies to be swatted away, caged up like animals. They were made to work on the road. Then, after a year or so, we began to see dead Australians or British, we couldn’t tell the difference between the two, but they were Europeans, tall, skinny to the bone, dead, leaning against small trees in the shrubs, we smelt the rot, heard flies buzzing
around those corpses. The Japs didn’t like the Europeans. Your father looking like a European ... well, you were captured, weren’t you, to work in a Jap ship?

Father nods quietly confirming the story, and listening.

Your Uncle Alex was executed for helping the Australians to smuggle firearms, medicine and food into the prison camps. Your grandmother grieved for over twenty years. Your Uncle Johnny and Uncle Paddy were prisoners of war, they would have been killed too had the Australians not come. We were at my father’s rubber plantation. We grew our own vegetables, we had chickens, sometimes we’d trap wild pigs and dig up tapioca at the plantation, sometimes, we’d get snakes, alligators, whatever we can trap or find, it’s food. One time, the Japs came and took our pig. We let them take it because if we didn’t, we’d be slaughtered along with the pig. We did alright, but my mother got very sick and died just before the Australians came. One time, my sister and I were walking on this small track, there was a small wooden bridge across the creek, we saw two Malay men sitting on the edge of the bridge with their backs to us, one of them leaned his bum to the side and fingered out his testicles. As we passed, they giggled. Men! The Japs went on a rampage killing the prisoners, a lot of local people were killed
too. There were the traitors among the local people. I heard one man was killed by some of the women whose husbands he betrayed to the Japs. Then, in about August 1945, the Japs surrendered. There weren’t many white men left.

As my mother finishes the story, a smile spreads across my father’s face.

I kicked one Jap officer’s bum when they were taken to the padang (football field), I believe he was Hoshijima, my father said.

Yes, mother’s recount of the war was a compelling story, and even more compelling is that this story presents a remarkable opportunity for me to write, and to experience it as a screenplay. I have wanted to write this story for a long time, and have been in search of a mode, a genre, of writing that would not only sustain the narrative to present information as a connected sequence of events (Lacey, 2000:13), but more importantly, I wanted a mode of writing that encompasses a language, a language as Roland Barthes would describe it, that has no relevance of its own, but instead provides in the sphere of writing a human horizon, a source of communication from which to solicit the raw materials of the author’s personal and secret mythology, that is to say, a language that does not hinder this communication, but nonetheless lets communication come forth from the depth of the craft (Barthes, 1993:32). For me, the craft of the screenplay in this regard seems congruent with a writing genre where language seems subordinate, or even redundant, thus
allowing me to make the story my own, a writing genre that would come alive from within me, one that is natural for me to write, one that would inspire and entertain me as the writer, and one that would make me want to sit on this chair and write, and to work for the months, or even years, that it would take to complete.

Now, it seems that awakening, that strange and irresistible desire that captivated my imagination to practise, to write script after script, has equipped me to experience writing the story as a feature film script. As a screenplay, the story seems to have its place. For me, it seems, above all else, a natural way to tell the story.

The First Draft

Perhaps it would be appropriate here to include the first 15 pages of the first draft of Jungles of Sandakan. According to Goldman, in Adventures In The Screen Trade, the first fifteen pages are the most important in any screenplay (1983:106). There are a number of reasons for looking at these pages. Firstly, to illustrate and discuss McKee’s point of the apparent ease of writing for the screen while at the same time, from the writer’s perspective, observing the difficulties that arise as the story gets underway, and as the characters begin to reveal themselves, and something peculiar takes shape. Secondly, to discuss the appropriateness of the script and its function as a narrative, whether or not, or at what point, it constitutes a script. Last, and by no means least, to examine the intrinsic role structure
plays in a script, and as such, the issues and contingencies that drastically altered the first draft, and resulted in the script that accompanies this dissertation.

The first draft of Jungles of Sandakan:

FADE IN:

EXT. SEA SHORE – NIGHT
A brilliant full moon hangs over gentle waves splashing onto the warm tropical beach.

Trees sway up high.

Silhouette of a young Malay girl, LIAH, about 12, watching the calm, serene moonlit horizon. Her eyes are alert, watching, reading the surroundings as some villagers gather cockles in the shallow waters.

Several small boats float about in the background and on the dim horizon, a ship, the Ubi Maru, sails slowly by.

EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY
In the sultry midday sun, rubber seeds burst in the trees high above, ‘showering’ onto branches and dropping onto the ground.

Tapioca tubers are being pulled from the ground, and black birds are trapped in a sticky substance on sticks.

CHING, 16, raven-haired, bright-eyed young woman, in plain Chinese-styled clothes, throws the tubers into a home-made basket, and her younger brother KONG, 14, in plain shirt and shorts, a sling-shot dangling from his neck, gathers the black birds and places them into the same basket.

A monkey’s call attracts Ching’s attention, she looks up to the trees and returns the call, cupping her hands and blowing a sound.

CHING
Hoohoo...
Younger brother, MING, 12, and sisters, LING, 10, and YEE, 7, are giggling and chasing one another as they ‘help’ gather food from the ground.

Their parents, KWAN YI, 40s, and LI ONN, also 40s, are tending to rows of green vegetables. Ling runs, turning to look at her parents as Ming chases her.

LING
(Screams)
Mama! Papa!

Mama and Papa look up, wave to Li Ling and the others, then return to their work.

YEE
(Giggling, in Hakka dialect)
Ching, juk ngai yeah.

SUBTITLED
(Ching, catch me)

With her hands blackened with dirt, Ching chases her sisters and brother.

They laugh and scream as they run through the shrubs.

EXT. DIRT TRACK AT RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY

GEORGE, 16, thin, Eurasian, enters, riding his bicycle, slowing down as he watches Ching chasing her siblings.

He is mesmerised by the young woman.

EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY

Ling sees George.

LI LING
(Giggling, teasing)
Kuei lau, ere...gee jung yi yeah, Ching.

SUBTITLED
White man, he likes you.
EXT. TRACK AT RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY

George’s eyes are on Ching as he rides off the track and collides with Ching’s neighbour, HIONG, 16.

EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION

Ching and her siblings laugh at George and Hiong.

EXT. HARBOUR – DAY

It’s crowded.

Groups of Chinese, Indian and Malay, mostly men are stretching their bodies and necks, looking at the port and murmuring among themselves.

George enters on his bicycle, and rounds a bend.

He brakes suddenly, eyes wide as he sees nearly 1500 Australian prisoners of war, haggard from captivity, disembark from the Japanese warship, Yubi Maru.

SUPER: Sandakan, British North Borneo, July, 1942.

Japanese soldiers watch the prisoners’ every move, pushing rifles into the weaker men to quicken their steps.

Some of the men are wounded, and hobbling along on crudely-made crutches.

Scattered among the prisoners are PTE. AUSTIN, 19, tall, brown hair, PTE. ANDERSON, barely 17, blonde hair, blue eyes, PTE. BOTTERILL, 20, thin, tall, dark hair, BDR. BRAITHWAITE, 20s, tall, blonde hair, GNR. CAMPBELL, 20s, shortish, dark wavy hair, CPL. EMMETT, 20, red hair, PTE. GUNTING, 18, dark hair, BDR. W. MOXHAM, 20s, stout, PTE. REITHER, curly dark hair, 20s, PTE. SKINNER, 19, freckled-face, red hair, W/O STIPPY, 20S, tall, stout, brown hair, SGT. WALLACE, 20s, tall, dark hair, CPL. WEBBER, 20s, reddish hair, and PTE. SHORT, 20, wavy brown hair.

Some of the prisoners are cheerful despite their terrible condition.

Anderson and others stretch their tired bodies and legs.
Anderson is just happy to get off that ship, jumps up and down, yelling.

ANDERSON
Ground at last ... Cooeee!

Short and Austin see Anderson.

SHORT
Hey Andy, over here, mate.

Anderson turns, jumping to see from the crowd of men.

ANDERSON
There you are, Shorty.
Hey, Austin.

Anderson joins Short and Austin.

As the prisoners assemble, CAPTAIN MATTHEWS, 30s, tall, commanding, addresses them. CAPTAIN NICHOLS, 30, is at his side.

CAPTAIN MATTHEWS
Our circumstances shall not weaken us...

LIEUTENANT KATA, 20s, stern, spiteful, pushes Captain Matthews rudely with his rifle.

LT. KATA
Go!

Captain Matthews turns and glares at Kata.

The prisoners stand to attention, salute their captains. Their captains salute back at them.

EXT. MARKET PLACE – DAY

Local women, men and children, some squatting, others standing at their vegetable, fruit, meat and fish stalls and other merchandise, stop their selling and bargaining as they stare at the prisoners thundering by.

An elegantly dressed KOH, 40s, in white shirt and tan trousers is among them.
Anderson, Short and Austin, marching side by side, smile and give little ‘salutes’ at the locals staring at them.

They see the variety of food at the stalls.

SHORT
Mate, look at that food!

ANDERSON
Yeah, well, the Japs did say this is a better place than Changi.

Among the locals are some members of the ‘Underground’, LAGAN, Filipino, 30s, WONG SU, 20s, Eurasian WILLY, 20s, are strolling casually, and watching the movements of the Japanese and prisoners.

AUSTIN
No bullshit, eh?

SHORT
The sick blokes could put their feet up too, they said.

Anderson looks at the local girls, and nudges Austin.

ANDERSON
(Giggling)
Mate, pretty sheilas too.

Anderson whistles and winks at the girls.

The girls giggle shyly, covering their mouths with their hands.

SHORT
We’ll be home by Christmas, I reckon.

The men giggle as they march on.

Lagan turns to Wong Su and Willy.

LAGAN
Wong Su, Willy, get word to the others, the allies have landed.
As Willy and Wong Su turn to leave, they see acquaintances, LO, 20s, Chinese, cigarette in his mouth, and BAK CHIK, Indian, also 20s, both standing inconspicuously in the crowd.

Willy acknowledges them.

WILLY
Lo...Bak Chik.

Lo grunts, and Bak Chik nods at Willy.

EXT. “SANDAKAN CIVIL HOSPITAL” - VERANDAH - DAY

A dresser, AH CHAI, 20s, sees the prisoners and guards marching by, turns his head to the door.

AH CHAI
Dr. Taylor, come see.

A short, chubby Australian, DR. TAYLOR, 40s, in white shirt and trousers, a stethoscope hanging from his neck, enters.

Ah Chai points at the prisoners.

Dr. Taylor stares at the sweat-soaked prisoners thudding by as he rests his hands on the banister.

He notices some of the men are wounded and some limping by with crutches.

DR. TAYLOR
Ah Chai, these men will quite invariably be victims of malaria, beri beri, dysentery and god knows what else. Store up quinine, aspirins, bandages.

AH CHAI
Yes, Dr. Taylor.

Dr. Taylor and Ah Chai watch the prisoners marching by.
EXT. GRAVEL ROAD – DAY

The sun beats down on guards and prisoners alike.

Drenched in sweat, the guards hold their positions with the prisoners as storm clouds gather in the sky, and thunder rumbles in the distance.

Botterill, Campbell, and Skinner march steadily on. George, hiding behind thick bushes, follows the movements of the men.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

The smell of rotting flesh engulfs the prisoners as they match towards a 40ish, tall, thick-set CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA.

Some of the prisoners squeeze their noses at the smell.

BOTTERILL
(squeezing his nose)
God Almighty, don’t these people bury their dead?

Captain Hoshijima stands on a platform, his hands behind his back, looking sternly at the prisoners as they assemble before him.

The silence is deafening as he looks over the exhausted, haggard men.

Captain Hoshijima’s body trembles as he speaks.

CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
I am Captain Hoshijima, Commandant of the Sandakan camp. You are prisoners of the Imperial Japanese Army.

The prisoners look straight ahead at Captain Hoshijima.

CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
You will obey my orders and the orders of my Officers guarding you! You may have been good soldiers for Australia, but now you are slaves for Japan.
Campbell coughs.

    CAMPBELL
    Bastards!

Campbell spits on the ground.

Skinner looks at him.

    SKINNER
    (Gritting his teeth)
    Owen!

    CAMPBELL
    (Defiant)
    We’re no slaves to them Japs,
    Skinner!

Captain Hoshijima stops and looks at Campbell and Skinner, signals a guard.

The guard slams his rifle butt on Campbell’s head. Campbell collapses.

The guards surround the prisoners, aim, ready to shoot anyone who dares to move a muscle.

The prisoners stand rigidly still, looking straight ahead at Captain Hoshijima.

Captain Hoshijima stares at the prisoners.

Captain Hoshijima continues.

    CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
    You have been brought here to
    construct an aerodrome for the
    Japanese Co-Prospereity Sphere.
    You will be diligent in your work.

George slowly and cautiously moves from the bushes, casually gets on his bicycle, and rides away.

    CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
    You will not escape, if you do,
    the jungle will consume you or
    you will be shot...
    (Smirks)
    Take a good look at those who tried.
Captain Hoshijima directs the prisoners to look at the surrounding shrubs and bushes.

Severed and rotting heads of Chinese and Malay men mounted on sticks with flies buzzing around and maggots wriggling on them, serve as warning to the prisoners the consequences of escape.

Huge rain drops begin to fall.

Campbell, bleeding from the wound in his head, realises, as do the men, where the smell of rot is coming from. They look at one another, horrified.

CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
You will work and you will be fed. No work, no food.

Heavy rain falls, drenching prisoners and guards alike. The prisoners hold out their arms, welcoming, embracing the rain, their first ‘shower’ in so many months.

The men wash themselves in the rain, opening their mouths wide to drink the fresh rain water.

Some of the men are dancing in the rain, tossing their hats in the air, laughing and embracing one another.

The Japanese guards, and Captain Hoshijima now sheltering in his jeep, watch the men as they glance at one another, baffled at the ‘merriment’ of their prisoners.

EXT. DIRT TRACK # 1 – DAY

The rain eases.

George, wet from the rain, rides his bicycle as fast as he can.

Suddenly, Wong Su and Willy, both wet, dash out from the wet bushes, startling George.

GEORGE
(Gasps)
What the ...

They collide, falling on one another, and into puddles of water.
WILLY
Watch where you’re going, little brother.

Willy and Wong Su pick themselves up as George picks up his bicycle.

GEORGE
(Eagerly)
Willy! Wong! The Australians are here, and the Japs are making them build an aerodrome.

WONG SU
Yes, we saw them.

WILLY
We must get the family out of here, George.

GEORGE
(Nods)
Yeah.

EXT. ATTAP HUT – DAY

MARY, Eurasian, 40s, in a flowery dress, emerges from the hut, cigarette in her mouth, as her daughters AGNES, 20s, and MARTHA, also 20s, laze in the sun, sneering at one another. MARTHA is looking into a hand-held mirror, plucking her eyebrows.

Daughters-in-law ANNE, Eurasian, 20s, carrying her 6-month-old baby in a ‘sling’ on her back as she gathers dried wood, and FLORA, also Eurasian, 20s, about 5 months pregnant, takes dry laundry off the line, her 5-year-old son, EDDIE ‘helping’ her.

Mary sees her sons and Wong Su.

MARY
Willy! George! Where have you been?

Agnes, Martha, Anne and Flora look up.

Anne drops the wood as she sees Willy, runs to him.
Agnes and Martha giggle as Wong Su walks towards them.

WONG SU
(Smiling)
Hi, Martha. Hi, Agnes.

AGNES
(Giggles)
Hi, Wong Su.

MARTHA
(Cheeky)
Hi, handsome.

Willy takes Anne into his arms, kisses her.

WILLY
Hi, my lovely wife.

He takes his baby into his arms, kisses the baby.

ANNE
(Whispers, insisting)
Willy, please get me out of here.

WILLY
I will, Anne. It will take a little time now.

Anne turns to look at Agnes and Martha, still giggling at Wong Su.

Willy looks at his sisters, then turns back to his wife.

WILLY
(Sighs)
I know, dear, my sisters just laze around all day, do nothing, but look at themselves in the mirror.

George leans his bicycle on a small tree, then walks quickly towards Mary.

GEORGE
(Eager)
Ma, we got to get out of here!
Mary sighs.

MARY
Give me one good reason why we should. We've already moved four ...

GEORGE
(Interrupts)
The Japs have taken the Australians ... hundreds, maybe thousands of them!

EXT. DIRT TRACK # 1 – DAY

George and Willy's father BEN, Chinese, studious, 50s, with friends, JU MING, also 50s, brothers LOW LI SENG, 40s and LOW LI CHAI, also 40s, CHEW HENG, 50s, and Koh are back from gathering food, each carrying bunches of tapioca tubers, rabbits, catfish and various other wild vegetables.

They laugh heartily as they walk.

EXT. ATTAP HUT – DAY

George sees Ben and Ju Ming bidding their friends goodbye and walk towards him.

GEORGE
Pa!

Ju Ming stops momentarily, turns to Koh.

JU MING
Oh, Koh, we do the Islands next week.

Koh nods and waves to Ju Ming.

Ben and Ju Ming move towards George.

GEORGE
Hi, Uncle Ju Ming.

JU MING
Hi, George.
WILLY
(To Ben)
Hi, Pa.

Willy kisses Anne, hands baby back to her, moves towards Ben and Ju Ming.

WILLY
(To Ju Ming)
Hi, Uncle Ju Ming.

JU MING
Hi, Willy.

BEN
(To Mary)
Mary, cook these up.

Mary nods as Ben hands her the tapioca and catfish.

GEORGE
Pa, the Japs have hundreds of Australian prisoners marching to the Mile 8 camp.

Ju Ming turns to Ben, George and Willy.

JU MING
I hear these Japs are after anyone who looks European.

Ben and Ju Ming look at George and Willy as George and Willy’s hazel eyes stare at them.

Ben and Ju Ming turn to look at Agnes and Martha, then at Mary as she disappears into the hut.

INT. ATTAP HUT – DAY

Mary enters, and heads to the makeshift ‘kitchen’ and starts cleaning the fish and tubers.

Flora is giving Eddie a bath from a bucket in the corner.

Flora turns to Mary.
FLORA
Ma, I don’t like this talk about
Australian and British soldiers
being captured. God only knows
what John’s doing out there
with them.

MARY
John, Willy, Henry and maybe George.
(Shakes her head)
My sons would want to get
involved somehow, and there’s
not much I can say to stop
them.

Flora dries Mel with a towel.

EXT. ATTAP HUT – DAY

Ben turns Ju Ming.

BEN
I must find a way to get my family
out of here.

JU MING
You too, Ben, must go. You’re
the town magistrate. The Japs
would want your head too.

Ben rubs the back of his neck, nervously.

BEN
Hmmm ...

JU MING
Go to my house at Sandala.
I’ll stay and look after things
here.

Ben pats his friend on the back.

BEN
Thanks, Ju Ming.

Ben, Ju Ming and George walk towards the hut.
Willy sees his older brothers JOHN, 20s, Eurasian, tall, and HENRY, also 20s, walking towards them.

    JOHN
    The POWs are on their way,
    is everyone ready to move?

    WILLY
    Yes, John.

EXT. KAMPONG (VILLAGE) – DAY

Children are chasing one another, dogs barking and chicken roam freely in the yard.

Malay men work at fashioning spears and other hunting daggers, and the women clean wild berries and fern like vegetables as a wild pig is being barbequed in the background.

    VILLAGE WOMAN
    Liah, mari sini.

    SUBTITLED
    (Liah, come here)

LIAH, in a simple dress, emerges from an atap dwelling, goes to the woman.

    LIAH
    Ya, Ma?

Suddenly, Japanese soldiers, in jeeps and on foot, enter with rifles and bayonets. Their stern, angry faces terrify the villagers.

Liah and her mother run into an atap dwelling as everyone else flees into bushland.

The soldiers seize their food, chicken, dogs, the almost done barbecue, and rampage into the atap dwellings.

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The writing experience

Guided by the story my mother had told, the script began. One sentence led to another, one scene led to the next, and without thinking I was immersed in the world of creating, imagining, working, and living in that buoyancy of space where dreaming is integral with writing. An array of theories became apparent (theories of gender, of race, of sexuality, ethnicity, colonialism, postcolonialism, imperialism, to name a few), theories that I researched and wrote about in my undergraduate work, theories which could be used as working tools to create the story. Here exist the adventures of working, of writing, of creating, scene after scene, where the array of theories employed from the outside, utilised to work with imagination, can result in something phenomenal, as if the judgements and rules of the outside, confronting and forbidding one’s actions, speech, or thoughts, have no relevance.

George Bataille writes about this phenomenon in Inner Experience (1988). He refers to the extraordinary inner encounter with communication, when the boundaries of the dominant forces of thought that shut down communication with one’s inner world are suspended, and the experience of communication is like an inner experience of communication with the mystics. Likewise, when the script began, my experience was remarkably similar to that described by Bataille:

I thought that the sweetness of the sky communicated itself to me and I could feel precisely the state within me which responded to it. I felt it to be present inside my head
like a vaporous streaming, subtly graspable, but participating in the sweetness of the outside, putting me in possession of it, making me take pleasure in it. ... At that moment, I thought that this dreamy pleasure would not cease belonging to me, that I would live from that moment on, endowed with the power to enjoy things in a melancholy way and breathe in their delights. I must admit today that these states of communication were only rarely accessible to me (Bataille, 1988: 112).

The sweetness of the sky Bataille writes about here is the extraordinary inner world one experiences when one suspends the dominant forces of the everyday, the differend that Lyotard refers to that set up the barriers of the governing codes of the social world that usually control our behaviour as well as our inner thoughts. In the moment of the suspension of the governing codes of the social world that knows no reality other than the established one, the governing codes that shut us out, alienate and separate us from one another as well as from our own dreams and inner thoughts, one reaches a deeper level of encountering the inner world (Lyotard, 1988:4). One is absorbed in the sweetness of being in that inner world; a state one enters without thinking of it (Bataille, 1988:113). In this state of being, and without thinking of the imposition of regimens of the outside, writing enters into the sweetness, and, absorbed into the moment, writing flows as if it were a natural act. It is here that may lie some of the clues as to why writers write, and indeed, the reasons driving the desire to experience this writing. It is an experience, while in this state of being, that is not of this world, as the moment seizes me, wanting me to belong in it, taking me home to where dreaming exists, where the silence and
solitude of that great natural wonder, which holds me dutiful to bear witness, to presume to speak for that mountain, for a battered single mother in an urban ghetto, for a crippled Vietnam vet, or for a couple of quirky strangers who meet by chance and fall in love (Suppa, 2002, pp.30), or for the women toiling at CD manufacturing factory. It is here also, as I write my screenplay, that I experienced the possibility that to stray from the form is still to stay within the confinement of the format itself. As one learns to adopt, and adapt to, the formalities of structure and format, the act of writing itself makes room for endless possibilities to imagine, to create, and to dream. And, when passion takes over, and work is no longer work, but a way of being in the sweetness, one is consumed with writing. The entity itself seems to direct the story, the characters, and the writer, as writing flows through the pen, or keyboard, as if it were a natural act. This is work.

Now, having made its presence known to me, and before this communication fades back into the wind, back into the nothingness, I must write the story, bring it to the outside, to reveal its voices and secrets. In the quiet of my thoughts those years ago when I pondered miserably along with my contemporaries the uncertainties of the world, anxious about what may lie ahead, the entity revealed itself to me, seducing me to partake in its adventures, adventures that captivated me, wanting me to belong, where my thoughts rhymed with the sound, where my voice roared with the wind, where work is no longer work, but a way of existence, a way of being with the inner of
experience. There is no place else for me that offers this kind of encounter with the inner world, other than this place here in writing, where to exist is to bear witness, to give voice, to represent, to entertain, and most of all, to write on its behalf, and bring it to the outside.

The traumas of writing

It is the private portion of the ritual, it rises up from the writer’s myth-laden depths and unfolds beyond his area of control (Barthes, 1993:32-33).

Is Barthes implying that writing has a tendency to run amok in a way that is beyond the writer’s will, that deep within writing’s inner world, secret truths disguised as myth, unbeknownst to the writer lurk, awaiting release? How would this hold true for Jungles of Sandakan? The first draft fades into the sweetness of a tranquil moonlit tropical scene with imagery of native life, as the Japanese cargo ship, the Yubi Maru, sails silently into shore in the background. Then, onto scenes of family activities where boy sees girl, and onto scenes of the Australian and British prisoners of war as they disembark the Yubi Maru, and their encounters with the local people. What could possibly hamper the attempts to tell, to recount, my mother’s story in script form? As the writing moves deeper into the story, and the characters reveal themselves, and emerge as human beings, in the flesh, with voices and behavioural characteristics unique only to them, the realisation of responsibility to represent a people caught in a horrific war that really did happen begins to haunt.
As filmmaker Elie Chouraqui said in an interview with Renfreu Neff in Creative Screenwriting, about his new film, Harrison’s Flowers, which is similar in tone to Jungles of Sandakan in that a war forms the backdrop for a love story, and the central character will stop at nothing for the one he loves, when you make a movie like this, involving a real place and an experience as real as war, you have a duty to respect the truth of the terrible experience that people really did live through (2002, pp.14-15). How would duty to respect the truth translate in writing?

A deep sense of inadequacy and guilt surface as writing solicits the deeper and inner world of the characters who live in this world. The inadequacy is the realisation that the characters representing the local people are not merely characters, but are actually flesh and blood family members: mother, father, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandfathers, grandmothers, many are long gone, and some still living. Their voices are familiar, yet strange, and their language familiar, yet foreign. Their actions though are according to my mother’s story, but at the same time reflect some of the historic accounts in Don Wall’s Sandakan, The Last March, Lynette Ramsay Silver’s Sandakan, A Conspiracy of Silence, and Jack Wong Sue’s Blood on Borneo. Suddenly, the questions emerge from me, their descendant living in a postcolonial age: what are my relatives, and the many local people of Sandakan, doing in this war? What are they fighting for? For whose causes are they fighting? The colonised fighting the colonisers’ war? There is also the realisation, a reminder of a kind, that although these characters are my
actual relations and exist in consciousness, many are also distinctively unfamiliar, unrelated. Who are these people masquerading as my relations? And yet, there is a desire, a bias, and an obligation to represent them in a good light. The guilt arises along with the anxieties of misrepresentation, telling truths that may not be truths at all, or truths better left untold for the good of keeping faith with family. How does one portray close family members with the knowledge that there may be personal secrets in truths that may be sensitive to immediate family members, truths that may be disrespectful to air in a film script? What right does one have to write, to portray family, in writing? Would the living family members of those who died tragically approve of the way their forebears are represented? Would they find cause to litigate against this story, this script, if misrepresentations are found to defame the characters of those who died tragically? So concerned was I of the potential for the misrepresentation of my own relations’ characters, that while writing the script, I deliberated, and conspired, with my own conscience, to change their names, to not only protect them, but their living family members left behind in the tragedy of war, with the aim also to detract any possible litigation against me, should they not approve of the way the story is scripted.

There is also the desire of sisterhood, to take a feminist stance and look for ways to elevate women’s roles in order to keep faith with political bias, and not portray women in the stereotypical roles of the 1940s, where women were typically confined to home and hearth.
This is done as much from anyone’s beliefs as it is in order not to attract critiques from women’s groups. The same inadequacies and guilt likewise arise with the portrayal of the prisoners of war, who in this story, written today by me, in Australia, are no longer white men or foreigners caught on foreign soil, but fellow Australians with familiar voices, and a language that is embedded in the very nuances of this writing. Does this writing, this story, represent them adequately? Would their living relations approve?

Further, the portrayal of George and Ching’s characters may appear unacceptable, or uninteresting, as there seems little, or no conflict, between them. Conflict, conflict, conflict, Straczyncki insists, and nothing drives a story as well as conflict, which is designed to drive one scene into another (1998:26). I realised I was not writing with conflict in mind between these two characters, but to portray the relationship between them, resulting from the different social worlds they were born into, the different sets of life circumstances they lived and worked in, and which brought them together. How would the critics see this portrayal of difference, a difference-driven script instead of a conflict-driven script? Trinh Minh-Ha writes in Helena Reckitt’s Art & Feminism, Theme & Movements:

I have often been asked about what some viewers call the lack of conflict in my films ... My suggestion to this so-called lack is: let difference replace conflict ... One can further say that difference is not what makes conflicts. It is beyond and alongside conflict. This is where confusion often arises and where the challenge can be issued (Trinh, 2001:245).
What could Trinh mean by *difference* replacing conflict? Could it be along the lines of how I was writing, to portray the differences between George and Ching’s characters, and the way their *differences*, rather than *conflict*, actually facilitate their relationship? Conflict certainly surrounds them, living in a war-torn environment that separates them, culminating with adversities within the family which is in conflict with their relationship. The *conflict*, thus, is not between George and Ching, but the circumstances of conflict surrounding, and external of them, that brought them together in their differences to each other. This is what I wanted to portray, these were some of the kinds of thought processes that impeded the writing, and yet generated the characters and the relationship between them. In this regard, Barthes’ observations indeed throw some light onto the myth-laden force that arbitrarily rears up *from the depths of writing* to elicit something else, something more that is quite beyond the writer’s initial plan; in this case, telling a story that seems already known and well rehearsed through the decades of family storytelling, but is now being retold in a feature film script. And yet, until writing begins and enters into its own depths, something unforeseen in the planning stages looms, *something crude*, as Barthes said, *with no clear destination*, something quite beyond the writer’s grasp, the *product of a thrust* that stirs and teases, the *writer’s thing*, that holds her captive and paralyses her, as McKee’s words now deafen: *on the screen there’s no place to hide* (Barthes, 1993:32; McKee, 1999:6).
Trinh is a filmmaker who particularly uses the concept of difference to express her views in her work (2001:245). As such, it may seem unsettling here to refer to her work in conjunction with my writing experience of *Jungles of Sandakan*, which follows the traditional Hollywood model. The experiment here, nonetheless, is to try to work within the conventional, but also using the idea of difference rather than conflict to resolve the relationship of the characters of George and Ching. The question here then is, would this idea of difference work within the traditional conflict driven script? Would using Trinh’s idea of difference to facilitate George and Ching’s relationship, rather than a conflict that opposes them, actually work and find recognition as a viable script?

Writing wanes to an uneasiness, a reluctance to proceed further, and into unfamiliar, or perhaps forbidden territory, a distance further than what has already been planned. As bell hooks writes in *Talking Back*, *what was slowing me down had to do with disclosure* ... *It had to do with revealing the personal. It has to do with writing – with what it means to say things in print* ... (1989:1). The uneasiness and reluctance reflect the fact that *Jungles of Sandakan* is no longer an assignment, or an exercise in experiencing a mode of writing. It is the writing of a story, as Paul Thompson said in *Between Generations*, that constitutes a intergenerational transmission of disclosure of family (1993:13):

Telling one’s own life story requires not only recounting directly remembered experience, but also drawing information and stories
transmitted across generations, both about the years too early in childhood to remember, and also further back in time beyond one’s own birth. Life stories are thus, in themselves, a form of transmission; but at the same time they often indicate in a broader sense what is passed down in families (1993: 13).

Yes, this is the life story of family, of recollections of family members passed down from one generation to the next, and here lie the dilemmas of telling, or indeed transmitting a family history that stretches back before one’s own existence. What does one know about family histories if one has not been told, or read, about them in some form? Perhaps this is what Barthes means about the form, or style, of writing, that its frame of reference is biological or biographical, as indeed, Jungles of Sandakan is becoming an experience of writing quite beyond just a simple exercise of telling a story that I know about (1993:32). It is becoming a story about where writing is taking me, to a place, and a war, that took place before my birth. I had not known the war like my parents did. However, I had a place in it nonetheless, and it is also my story to tell.

I was born in that very part of the earth where thousands of soldiers, Australians, British, Japanese alike, and local women, men and children, perished in abject circumstances, on a part of the surface of the earth that was later to be myself and my brothers’ playground. As children free to roam the jungles after the soldiers and the prisoners had gone, and the war was but a distant memory, we dug up torn and worn out combat boots, rusty, spent bullet shells and bayonets: items and objects left
behind to become collections of toys and play things. That is where the writing wants to go, to the childhood memories of hide and seek, and war games with siblings, cousins and neighbours, to conversations and interactions with long-gone relatives. Writing wants to go there, to unsettled, undisclosed, family feuds, sex scandals and drunkenness. Writing wants to go there, to brothers betraying brothers, to sister disputing sister over husbands and lovers, to mother forbidding son his true love, writing wants to go there. Who is speaking thus? as Barthes asks, in The Death of the Author, in reference to Balzac’s story, Sarrasine ... Is it the hero of the story ... Is it Balzac, the individual furnished with personal experience ... Is it Balzac the author professing ‘literary’ ideas ... (1977:142). Similarly, such questions could be posited here. Is it the ghosts of the past? Could it be my mother, or history, or my own awareness and consciousness of life stories transmitted through the generations, or simply writing itself that stirs its own course?

Is the First Draft a script?

There is an inkling of dread as the first draft of Jungles of Sandakan progresses into this world. Reading Foucault’s What Is An Author? increased the dread even more as it becomes evident that the experience of writing, that is, the anxieties over appropriate representation of characters, as well as the sweetness of the experience of writing, may have no relevance when the critics descent upon the script. Foucault writes:
the task of criticism is not to bring out the work’s relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships (1984:103).

Reflectively, the feeling of dread, although it touches on the revelations of the inner world of the characters, and representation of those characters, also bears within it an uncanny feeling of unease about how the script may be received, indeed read, as a script. Certainly, there is a tremendous sense of satisfaction of having accomplished a task, a task that took over a year of constant research, writing, rewriting, editing, persevering, then finally, completion. However, something about the script remains unsettling. As Linda Seger, in *Making A Good Script Great* writes, you’ve just finished 115 pages of a terrific script. It’s good ... But you have a gnawing feeling that something isn’t quite right (1994:18). Similarly, the first draft was terrific simply in the sense that it accomplished its goal. After the year long task of journeying into a world where horrific things really did happen, and carrying on one’s shoulders the responsibility of duty of respect, and anxieties of appropriate representation of characters, to finally see *The End*, for any writer, is the most terrific feeling of all.

The terrific feeling of accomplishment nonetheless also accompanied a feeling of dread. *The End* on the first draft made its appearance on page 165. This seems far too long, as most screenwriting books would tell you.
According to Goldman, the ideal length for a screenplay is a hundred and thirty to a hundred and thirty-five pages (Brady, 1981:89). In The Screenwriter's Bible, it is about 110 pages (Trottier, 1998:5). Yet, what was so dreadful about the first draft being 165 pages long? Trottier writes: most beginning writers just begin writing without any thought of story structure—where it’s going or how it will end (1998:5). Goldman, in Adventures in the Screen Trade, says: screenplays are structure (1983:459). The dread then of the first draft is that it is impoverished of structure, and accordingly, does not function as a script should. This is because, as the Hollywood model dictates, writing a screenplay is a craft, like carpentry, that needs structure to support the construction, and must have a spine, the character arc, that drives the story (Goldman, 1983). Writing instructor, Richard Krevolin, in Screenwriting From the Soul, said the character arc must be constructed in such a way that:

the protagonist journeys through a series of experiences which lead to a climatic moment toward the end where he learns something, discovers something about himself that he could have known all along, but was blind to. This discovery comes as such an emotional shattering blow that it changes the entire course of his life—and that must change for the better (1998:40).

The journey that the protagonist takes ultimately leads to the discovery of himself: it is the Aristotelian structure, as Krevolin puts it is, which sets the convention that all stories must have a beginning, a middle and an end, the basic three-act structure
(Krevolin, 1998:40; Trottier, 1998:5). Without such a structure, that is, without the rules of the outside intruding upon the sweetness, and the anxieties of the experience of writing governing the validity of the script, then the script as such, seems to have no relevance.

What is a work? Foucault asks. Is it not what the author has written? And what about the rough drafts of his work, he continues. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Is it a work, or not, why not? (1984:103). The first draft of Jungles of Sandakan certainly has generated many rough drafts, rewrites, editing, shuffling, and reshuffling of scenes. It is written in accordance with a story of oral origin, and supported by materials from a historical context. It is a story I know about, but does the first draft of Jungles of Sandakan, written in the context of its oral origin and historical context, constitute a script? The hierarchy of the picture business may scoff at such claims, and their voices would forever doom its validity and significance as a viable film script.

A work is doomed when such voices of authority do not recognise its worth without its application to structure. Structure is what makes a work according to its copy, and the authorities view the validity, or appropriateness of a work only according to its internal set of rules, its structure. All else does not matter. This then, raises the point of Jean Baudrillard’s contention of the incessant brute fascination of modern media with senseless multiplication of images, or reproduction of reproduction to the point, that images ultimately have no
finality and proceed by total contiguity, infinitely multiplying themselves according to an irresistible epidemic process (1993:194). This fascination of contemporary media with endless replication resonates here also in the voices of the production hierarchy for structure in a script. Structure insists upon copying, for the purpose of reproduction, of replication and multiplication, which at the same time effectively reduces the joy of writing, and indeed the meaning and story of the script. Does this set-in-concrete view of seeing a work, this obsession with structure, of reproduction and multiplication, not call for concern especially when this obsession with copying is the force, as Professor of Film and Literature, Andrew Horton said in Writing the Character-Centered Screenplay, that compels studios [to] endlessly recycle films that unimaginatively copy previous films (1994:1)?

Could this obsession, which leaves no room for writing, for imagination, not actually be a concern with structure as such, but rather a form of habitual copying that is overrun by a tradition? A tradition, as Raul Ruiz, in Poetics of Cinema writes, that has not only invaded the world but also imposed its rules on most of the centers of audiovisual production across the planet ... [along with its own] theologians, inquisitors, and police force (1995:15). The rules of structure, with the voices of authority that police the rules of the game, over-ride all else. Baudrillard’s discontent with reproduction of images again resonates here in the endless unwrapping of images (literally: without end, without destination) which leaves images no other destiny than images
(1993:195). The result of this obsession with structure, and with copying, as Goldman indicates, is one of the reasons why there are so many bad movies, and that the truth behind the relentless, and deliberate production of bad movies is that people get paid not on the success of the movie but on the existence of it (Brady, 1981:90).

The implication here then, is that the actual work of the writer, the personal and emotional investments of disclosures, anxieties experienced in appropriate representation of characters in the story, and much less the success of the completion of a work, are not at issue. As long as the protocols of structure are imposed, and unless the voices of authority deem it worthy of existence, my first draft of Jungles of Sandakan, without such protocols and structure, would be discarded, and the experience of writing the script silenced. Hence, in accordance with the protocols of writing, and the particular structure imposed upon the conventions of writing, I could not recount my mother’s story from its oral origin, and I could not tell the story as I had known it in script form. I had to invent storylines, that is, fictionalise, exaggerate the tale, and tell lies to fit the model. As Goldman said in Which Lie Did I Tell?, We must [lie] ... Story ideas surround us, but they need shading, shaping and climaxes, beginnings; that’s our job. What we must try and learn is which are the best lies ... (2000:x). As such, I have structured some best lies in the script that accompanies this dissertation in order to appease the system of telling a story for the screen, an activity much to the dishonour of the first draft, which kept faith with the characters, and story.
Chapter 4

The situation of the writer

In the opening line of his article ‘So you wanna write a movie?’ in the Sydney Morning Herald, Louis Nowra writes: The first lesson is to know where you are in the food chain (April 12-13, 2003, pp.34). What might Nowra be implying, and why does he allude, in an article on writing a film script, to a Darwinian theory such as survival of the fittest? It brings to mind a high school biology class: those stronger in the food chain will dominate and devour those who are weaker. The remark seems to insinuate that the writer will find her position in the food chain daunting, as it may not be amongst those that are the stronger. She may have to fight for her right to exist. There seems also an air of ridicule in the remark. Nowra describes the scenario whereby he is ushered into the theatre at the premier of the film of his screenplay, Cosi. He continues, I ended up in the front row in a seat so far to the right that I had to twist at an angle to see just some of the screen. I noticed that the people sitting in the reserve seats were a motley collection of producers, actors, B-grade celebrities and others who had nothing to do with the making of the film (April 12-13, 2003, pp.4).

The scenario seems comical, yet pitiful at the same time as it illustrates the fact that within the production hierarchy, the writer indeed exists at the bottom of the food chain. In Nowra’s case, he is banished to sit in a dark corner, away from the reserved seats of the picture
business. This presents an awkwardness, and demonstrates a hegemony within the production hierarchy, indeed, the appalling way in general in which the writer is regarded, even though the screenplay (the result of the writer’s work) that ultimately becomes the film is the focus of attention on the screen. It certainly illuminates something unpalatable about the industry even as it satirises the writer’s situation within the production hierarchy. The ridicule points in the direction of the reserved seats, but its effect, subversively, also seems reserved for the beginning writer, as if to dissuade her from pursuing her interest in screenwriting, and suggesting that there is no place for the newcomer. This ridicule seems to be a process of shutting her out, smothering her, disallowing her to participate in the craft as experienced, which further alienates, confuses and disheartens her with the state of affairs in regards to her script, and her predicament within the production hierarchy.

The years of dedication to her work still leave her in an awkward position in the scheme of production. She learns, as she perseveres through the pleasures and turmoils of research and writing, as she finally completes the task, in this case the task of the writing of *Jungles of Sandakan*, that it is a task that held her duty-bound to represent and respect the history of a horrific war, but still does not give her real recognition of the authorship to her own work. In fact, she discovers that she has not written a script so much as a legal document that requires her to surrender ownership of her work. Should a producer, or director, or literary agent
solicits interest in her script, the option, which is the legal document that binds the writer and producer in its terms of agreement, is not in the writer’s favour. The option will almost inevitably be exclusive and will belong to the producer, not [the writer], writes Bruce Pulsford, legal adviser of the Australian Writers’ Guild, in his article, ‘Whose Option Is It Anyway’, (2003, pp.38). The fact that a producer should show interest in a work reflects that the producer is the one in pursuit of, and dependent on, the writer’s work. It is then the producer, personification of the production hierarchy, that sought the writer’s work, the lifeblood of the picture business, so that there will actually be a film to produce, a production that creates employment, and furthers various careers (Lazarus, 1993:33). Why then, is the writer ostracised when the results of her work are the point of interest and solicitation? According to Lazarus, this is to stave off litigation by non-professional writers who historically have insisted that their ideas were ‘stolen’ by the studio (1993:34). Such generalisations are toxic, as they vilify all writers, especially the so-called non-professionals, who might in fact have dedicated years of study and practise to perfect their craft. At the same time though, Lazarus does not mention that the problems of copyright infringement of the writer’s work might be the issue that brings about the studio’s anxieties of litigation against them.

The story of Brian Webster, a dedicated, talented and unproduced screenwriter, is a case in point. Melody Jackson’s article, ‘Jingle All The Way to the Bank, A
Real Life Screenwriter’s $19,000,000 Story’, in Creative Screenwriting reports:

[Brian] called my office to inform me that his producer, Robert Laurel of Murray Hill Publications, Inc., had just been awarded $19 million by a judge and jury for a lawsuit against 20th Century Fox for copyright infringement on Brian’s original script titled Could This Be Christmas. Apparently, Jingle All the Way, the big-budget holiday film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was suspiciously similar to Brian’s script (March/April 2002, pp.12).

While it may be in the unproduced screenwriter’s favour to be awarded such a substantial sum of money against a studio that typically has experts to deal with lawsuits, does it not by the same token reflect something unsavoury about a professional body, in this case, a major Hollywood studio, investing in a movie starring a world renowned actor, yet resorting to such unethical, inappropriate measures to acquire the unproduced, or non-professional writer’s work without proper authority from the writer (Jackson, March/April, 2002, pp.12)? The example of Webster’s story is not an isolated incident, as studios have to constantly engage in legal representation to defend their case. Why would a professional body with all the resources at their disposal to attain rights to stories and screenplays resort to such deviant acts as screenplay theft (Jackson, March/April, 2002, pp.12)? It makes no sense other than the studio, or the production hierarchy, assuming their right of power to assert the rationale of domination over the amateur. Such rationales of power to dominate, seemingly give the studio the right of authority to
devour a non-professional writer of his work, simply because they are the authority.

In The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer write about the rationale of domination, with its absolute power of capitalism exercising its authority over the masses (1993:30). Such a rationale, it seems, is entrenched in the microcosm of the film world in its hegemonic stronghold. This resonates with what bell hooks writes about in Talking Back. We live in a world in crisis, she says, crisis that brought about a world governed by politics of domination, one in which the belief in the notion of superior and inferior, and its concomitant ideology—that the superior should rule over the inferior (1989:19). The crisis here in the film world reflects the superior-inferior complex of the macrocosm, in which the studio assumes absolute power of domination over the inferior, the non-professional writer. The studio thus brazenly assumes authority over the inferior, simply because they have the right to do so, and in which case the non-professional writer must surrender her will.

This is not to suggest that Jungles of Sandakan would meet such fate as Webster’s Could This Be Christmas, which brought a lawsuit against a Hollywood studio and won $19 million dollars. In fact, it was unthinkable in the experience of writing my screenplay that it could end up in a courtroom battle. The main fear of litigation, in the case of Jungles of Sandakan, concerned those responses of living relatives unhappy with the portrayal of their loved ones, not against a professional body with
all the experience and might of a hierarchy, that would resort to such impropriety as theft. This is not to suggest that all film producers would operate in such deceitful manner, but Pulsford’s advice, your producer will most probably insist on the right to bring on other writers to re-write your script, certainly alludes to something suspicious if the writer is put in the position where she must surrender all rights (2003, pp.38). How should one, especially a non-professional writer with little or no experience in playing the politics of the game, react to such requirements that demand that she simply step away from her work, and allow another writer with no personal investment, or connection to the experience of writing her script, to interfere with her work, with the sole purpose of rewriting it at the producer’s orders?

Hunter Cordaiy’s article, ‘Scriptwriting is rewriting’ in the Australian Writers’ Guild, Storyline, makes a valid point: that the rewrite gives distance and objectivity from the writer’s ultra-subjectivity to her work:

all writers are very personally attached to their work, and feel protective, even precious about it. This is a form of ultra-subjectivity which does not give the writer enough distance from the work to have an objective (and honest) response to what it says and how it is that message is expressed. At some stage the script is going to be given to strangers. It only belongs to the writers for a short time and being over-protective is entirely understandable but is often not in the best interests of the script and its chance of being made (2004, pp.9).
Yes, it is reasonable that the purpose of rewriting would aid to give distance and objectivity, and perhaps even add further dimensions to the characters and story, and a better chance of [it] being made. My concern though, rests with the practice of rewriting. Would it not also dilute, or silence, the writer’s unique voice, or style of writing? Moreover, would the practice of rewriting itself be subscribed in such a way that insists on improving the script only to end up imposing the regime that impresses the same stamp on everything (Adorno & Horkhemier, 1993:30)? Such regimes of uniformity, and conformity, render the writer (or indeed the rewriter) as no more than just another technician on the assembly line, as writer/producer Robert Gregory-Browne, writes in his article ‘Taking The Plunge’ in Screentalk, writers who, like the workers toiling at the CD factory, must kowtow to the bellows of the taskmasters (July/August, 2001, pp.12). In this sense, the writer, like the factory worker, is cajoled back into the world of objects where she must surrender herself to appease the beast. Suddenly, it seems that in the experience of writing the script, as the regime of specialisation, or indeed alienation, invades the form, the sweetness of the experience dissipates (Fromm, 1966:96; Bataille, 1988).

The writer surrenders

Apart from taking on the role of writer/director/producer, is there no other way of handling a script that allows the writer’s voice and style of writing to integrate with the collaboration of production? Has the writer no say in what happens to her
Screenwriter Amy Holden Jones, of the screen credit *Indecent Proposal*, said in an interview:

> If you write for any studio, even if it’s an original script, you have to be prepared to change it. I think that’s one of the biggest problems that stops a lot of screenwriters: They can’t change [the system]. I can really sympathize with not wanting to change something you really believe in ... You’re going to have to make it work for the director, the studio, the stars ... (Engel, 1995:62-63).

Similarly, editor and author Bryn Colvin writes in his article, ‘Tips for Scriptwriting’:

> The production of a play is a collaboration between writer, director and performers but by the time you reach that point, you have little say and the script is at the mercy of others (www.performanceartsnews.com, 2003, pp.2).

A closed system. It cannot be changed. Not only is the beast of structure to be appeased, but the collaborators, the real holders of power, must not be neglected in the appeasement (Adorno & Horkhemier, 1993:32). The writer is trapped, has little or no voice to represent herself, and must abide. The domination from above is steadfast. A discussion about collaboration between interviewer Joel Engel and screenwriter Nicholas Meyer confirms this. What upset screenwriters is the sense that their vision is taken from them, says Engel. Meyer’s reply though, you begin by accepting that movies are collaborative ventures. If you’re not prepared for the perils, pitfalls, and joys of collaboration, then movies are
probably not a very good venue for whatever it is you want to do, insists that the collaboration must function in such a way that their seal of approval to changes must be stamped upon the script (Engel, 1995:83). The writer must surrender, expect, and be willing, to let go of her work, and let the powers from above do their tasks. The voice of Barthes registers here yet again: Who is speaking thus? (1977:142). It is no longer the writer who speaks, nor the characters in the script, but the ones in the production hierarchy that wield the most power.

An interesting point here is related by Nicholas Meyer speaking about the experience of his first screenplay, Assault on a Queen, based on a novel by Jack Finney, and starring Frank Sinatra. Terrible movie, says Meyer, but my screenplay followed the book ... I sat there watching it, stunned by how bad it is. I assumed that they really screwed it up because of whatever endless demands Frank Sinatra was making (Engel, 1995:81). Similarly, as Amy Holden Jones says, changes to the script often occur at the whims of an actor. She says of Indecent Proposal, I live with it because Redford is who he is ... If you’d had Michael Douglas play the part, it would have been totally different. The third act would have been much different, because Douglas would have been willing to do stranger things ... (Engel, 1995:67). It is sometimes unclear how or who commands, or distributes, power in a film production. One would think the director holds the reins. Sometimes, as the situation commands, it may not be the director or producer that commands the production, but the actor who flexes his power on the screen, as Meyer and Jones indicate. No mention though of the
writer, who is banished to the dark corner to watch in silence, and in anguish perhaps, over how badly her script might have been ravished, an act to which she has no right of response. And, least of all, any conscience on the part of the audience, who must passively consume what is projected before them.

*Screenwriters are, notoriously, a heavily exploited branch of the movie industry,* writes Geoffrey Atherden, former president of the *Australian Writers’ Guild,* in his article, ‘*Writing Poor ...* ’ (2003, pp.13). This does not reflect well on screenwriting as a profession, if one has to constantly guard against exploitation. In my own experience, for example, as I workshopped writing screenplays at a filmmaking school, the first, and most important advice on the list of *must haves* from the screenwriting teacher was, *get a good entertainment lawyer.* This imprints on the writer’s mind that she will have to fight her case to protect her work at all times. Even in the slim chance of success, the profession will still defeat her. Atherden continues, *for the screenwriters an Oscar may give a considerable immediate psychological boost but will not guarantee future success or employment* (2003, pp.13). One would think that such a prestigious award, which brings recognition to one’s work, would at least assure some measure of confidence to continue writing, but it seems it does not. What in the world of the script has brought this about?
Peculiarity of the script

Edward Azlant writes in the Introduction to his PhD thesis, *The Theory, History, and Practice of Screenwriting, 1897-1920*: Screenwriting is considered a major phase of filmmaking ... [and] perennially reported to be the first creative phase of filmmaking proper (1980:1). There seems a sense of urgency in Azlant’s remark. It should remind filmmakers that the script is important, and must exist prior to any contingencies of film production, as indeed confirmed by director Steven Spielberg that, it all begins with the written word (Lazarus, 1993:33). This should clearly place the script in a favourable, and prominent position, way before production eventuates. Yet, as Azlant continues, it is a routinely ignored fact that fiction films pass through some manner of written formation subsequent to their possible existence as literary or dramatic material, and most important, prior to their production in film (1980:2). This makes no sense. On one hand, there is the acknowledgment that the script, which writing brings into existence, is essential so that a story exists in order to enable a film production. On the other hand, along with the writer, the script is denied recognition, even dismissed, as an integral part of the production. The interplay of such awkwardness about the script as that of the lowly existence of the writer in relation to the importance of her work, compounded by it being a much ignored entity, evokes something odd about the circumstance of the script.

Could it be the seemingly trifle beginnings of the script that has determined its fate? The script was not regarded as an essential part of filmmaking in the first decades of cinema. Could this effectively reduce the script’s significance, and subsequently, position it as an ignored aspect of filmmaking? It was an unthought-of contingency of filmmaking in the beginning. When screenwriting, or scenarios, as screenplays were referred to in the early 1910s, became normal practice, they were, as Azlant writes, probably not actual screenplays but rather skeletal outlines used in pre-production design (1997:229). There were references in the early days that the script was essential in pre-production, even though only in skeletal form, but it was not recognised as an integral part of production.

Here perhaps, lies a clue to the peculiarity of the script. It was an unthought-of contingency of filmmaking,
deemed unnecessary in the beginning as those primitive one and two reelers were shot in a couple of days by directors who had a rough idea of the story and who improvised as they went along (Brownlow, in Azlant, 1997:228). The non-existence of the script in the beginnings of cinema could possibly have helped determine the view that the script is unnecessary, and as filmmaking progressed over the decades, helped cement its status as lesser in the contingencies of filmmaking. Flashback, to the Sydney Morning Herald headline in 1940, ‘Men who ‘make’ Pictures, the brains behind all films’, by Lons Jones, credits the director as perhaps the most important person in the film industry (February 6, 1940, pp.14). This implies only the director (predominantly male) as the brainchild behind the production, which further instils the notion that only the director is assured power and superiority in the production hierarchy. The writer of the production was not mentioned, nor was anyone else involved in the production.

The script occupies a strange and complex environment, in a world where it creates myths and heroism, but its own existence seems dependent on manipulation by those whose position, by the same token, are dependent upon the script’s existence. Such interdependency of the script to the manipulation of the production hierarchy, and vice versa, however, is not necessarily in the screenwriter’s favour. This then highlights the peculiarity of screenwriting, which perhaps also affects the way screenwriters themselves view their work. Understandably, in the view of the rhetoric about the circumstances
surrounding the (ir)relevancy of the script, and its writer, screenwriters themselves often seem hesitant, or uncomfortable, in their own approach to their work. Prominent screenwriters like William Goldman refer to their work as a movie rather than as a script. This seems to highlight even more the (ir)relevancy of the script as well as its writer. Referring to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Goldman said, The feel of it was a movie (Brady, 1981:88). This seems to suggest that the script, or the very act of writing the script, as part of the process of the movie, is void. The script is surpassed, and the very act and processes of writing often deserve no mention in the contingencies of film making, even by screenwriters. This, according to Azlant’s studies of Hugo Musterberg’s work, produces a curious attitude toward the screenplay and the role of the writer (Azlant, 1980:20). What could this be? Munsterberg, in Azlant explains:

The work which the scenario writer creates is itself still entirely imperfect and becomes a complete work of art only through the actions of the director ... (Azlant, 1980:22-23).

Azlant’s study proceeds to reveal that:

not only is the scenario impure, being composed in another medium, it is, unlike the musical score or theatrical play, incomplete. The scenario, being totally dependent on transformation into another medium for its perception as art, is incomplete (1980:22-23).

The script, as Munsterberg and Azlant indicate, is an incomplete work, and one could not hold the screenwriter
in contempt for referring to her work as movie rather than as script. It seems logical to talk about one’s work as a complete entity rather than plots of unfinished projects. This would surely put the screenwriter and her script in an uncomfortable position. The script exists in a position of dependency on other mediums of transformation, which then reflects its awkwardness in the contingencies of filmmaking. The screenplay is, in and of itself, incomplete, imperfect, and potentially worthless. This would certainly conjure up anxieties about the screenplay, and in fact the whole concept of screenwriting, especially in a world where the concept of completion, or perfection, rules the game. The writer’s work, thus becomes a work that must be scrutinised, manipulated because of its imperfection, or incompleteness.

The story of Ted Nelson, an Attention Deficit Disorder sufferer, comes to mind. Nelson’s life is so full of incomplete projects that it might fairly be said to be built from them. He has written an unfinished autobiography, and produced an unfinished film. His houseboat in San Francisco Bay is full of incomplete notes … writes Gary Wolf in his article ‘The Curse of Xanadu’, in Wired (1995, pp.137). Nelson’s sensitivity to interruptions, which causes him to forget and halt his projects, is problematic in a world that does not tolerate such ailments. He wanted to be a writer and a filmmaker, Wolf continues, but he needed a way to avoid getting lost in the frantic multiplication of association his brain produced (1995, pp.138). Not suggesting, of course, that all writers suffer from this disorder, but
the very concept of incompletion gives the illusion that because a work is considered incomplete, it is naturally imperfect, or worthless. In Nelson’s case, his concept of Xanadu, a computer program comprising a global hypertext publishing system [that] could keep track of all the divergent paths of his thinking and writing ... is sometimes treated as a joke (Wolf, 1995, pp.138). The joke, incidentally, Wolf continues:

was meant to be a universal library, a world-wide hypertext publishing tool, a system to resolve copyright disputes ... putting all information within reach of all people ... (1995, pp.137-138).

Does Nelson’s concept of Xanadu not look, or sound, familiar today? Is it a joke today that we have access, and work with such information technology, in our day-to-day work activities, and even our home lives? Is it a joke today that the hypertext that sustains the World Wide Web at our fingertips, may have been produced initially from the mind of an individual who produces incomplete works, only to have the idea mushroom in such a way that it has taken over the world? My point here is that Nelson’s works were initially seen as a joke because they were incomplete, and therefore, deemed worthless. The screenwriter’s work, likewise, is considered incomplete, and worthless. Thus, the script in its state of incompletion, and worthlessness, must be descended upon and be subjected to a plethora of manipulation until the idea of completion is satisfied, or it is ignored, dismissed altogether as worthless. The joke that the writer must endure lies then not with the quest for the perfection in her script, but in her query letter to the
studio executive who sieves through the barrage of other query letters to greenlight her work. The writer must show passion, not in her work, but in her passion to appease the executive, in that her passion must show through in every word, every comma, and even the paper and [choice of ink used], not in the writing of her script, but in the query letter. Mistakes are not tolerated as they mean you aren’t passionate enough to be perfect, says the executive. You’ve got to wow me with the letter ... bad queries inevitably mean bad scripts. [I] tend not to ask for scripts when the letter is sent on cheap-looking paper. Nice paper impresses me, writes Wendy Moon about the demands of the executive in her article, ‘What Agents Look For In Your Query Letter’, (www.hollywoodnet.com, 2003, pp.2).

Passion takes a different path, it seems. Passion in detailed research, dedication to writing and portrayal of characters is not considered passion, but it is the aesthetics of the packaging, the exterior representation of the script, which is. Certainly, it makes sense to show professionalism in a letter, just as one takes pride in constructing a job application reflecting one’s abilities and skills. It seems abhorrent, however, in the case of the screenplay, that after the many sleepless nights of research and writing, which actually demonstrate passion and dedication to one’s work, that the passion of writing the script at the time of inquiry for production is irrelevant. Is the scheme of the query letter set up purposely to defeat the writer? It appears a work is only perfect when it is packaged in such a way that satisfies the idea of passion, passion in
representation, not what is actually in the core of the package. It, of course, disregards the rough drafts, the notations of plans, or conferences and discussions of the work, references, lists of work, or tutorials engaged in relation to, or alongside the work, the day to day activities of living whilst the work is in progress (Foucault, 1984). All this is not considered an essential part of the incomplete work. The query letter representing the writer must be flawless, yet the characters in the script the writer creates must be flawed to reflect what are inherently human flaws. We’re all flawed. We all make mistakes, says Amy Holden Jones (Engel, 1995:62). This does not seem to register with the executive’s stance on perfection. It seems, because the writer’s work is already flawed, considered an incomplete work even when she has reached The End, that the script, and the writer are inherently subjected to the whims of those sanctioned by the economic and technological authority of production. Suddenly, the interdependency of the production hierarchy on the script to produce a film, and the script on the production hierarchy for its transformation into film, places the script on a vulnerable, sometimes hostile, unlevel playing field.

The script is written

Despite the uncertainties, and anxieties, associated with the plethora of measures of controls and manipulations concerning the script, Jungles of Sandakan, as an experience of writing, achieved its goals. Through the trials and tribulations of research, writing, rewriting, reading, re-reading, and editing, it reached The End.
Although, still incomplete in the scheme of the production, it is, nonetheless, written, and the blueprint of a film production now exists. As the sigh of relief evaporates into the air, one ponders, in the scheme of things, given the rhetoric gone before in regards to the script in the picture business, what are its chances of production? Lazarus writes:

The odds are prohibitively long that your work will find professional representation ... That studios are selective with what they buy is understandable ... To get to that point, a screenplay usually has to jump a series of hurdles at the studio. Initially, an agent or attorney must submit the script for the studio to even consider it. Unsolicited material will be returned in most cases without being read (1993:34).

Lazarus describes a typical scenario of the fate of a screenplay. What might the prohibitively long process involve? It seems a daunting process. One senses the process might be designed in such a way that readily refutes a script simply because it is now dependent on, and subjected, to the economic mechanism of selection of the studios, which may involve a plethora of selection processes that enslave the script (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1993:32). The rationale of the enterprise, the studio, with its absolute power of capitalism, and technology, now flexes its authority of selection over those at its mercy (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1993:30). As such, the script, as is indeed the non-professional writer, is completely subjugated, and subservient to the whims of the production hierarchy.
What might be the series of hurdles that the screenplay must jump at the studio for it to be considered for production? The unsolicited script, as *Jungles of Sandakan* currently is, would have no chance of gracing the desktop of a studio executive. Instead, if it found its way onto the executive’s desk without his or her request, it would be returned unopened, unread, for fear of litigation. For the script that is solicited, the selection process initially delivers the script unto the hands of the reader. Lazarus continues:

If the studio elects to consider a project, it will customarily give the script to a reader whose job is to synopsize it in a page to a page and a half, and then a half-page of personal recommendation. If the reader is unimpressed, the script will be rejected without further consideration ... Should the reader endorse a screenplay, it will generally be read by one or more production executives ... (1993:33-34).

Who might the reader be, and with what qualifications might the reader be endorsed to pass judgement on any script? One scrambles through the plethora of screenwriting books for such information, only to find in J. Michael Straczynski’s, *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, that most readers are either in college or fresh out of college, still trying to figure out for themselves what makes a good story (1996:186). I must stress here that this is an American source material, and may not reflect the readership in Australia. But, in response to the American source, should the writer cringe? Has the writer not earned an iota of respect for having written the script, only to be humiliated in such
a manner? But still, a relevant inquiry here, as the college students struggle with their own abilities to figure out good stories, is, how would this apparently flawed readership affect the ways in which scripts are selected, or not selected? Straczynski illustrates a scenario:

Once a curious journalist submitted a retyped copy of the script for *The Maltese Falcon* to dozens of studio readers. The readers not only didn’t recognize the script, but they actually rejected that script on the basis that they didn’t think it would make a good movie (1996:186-187).

Who is flawed in this instance? The writer, represented by her query letter to the studio executive, must be flawless, and ironically, how well she writes is no longer relevant if the script, by some ghost of a chance, makes it onto the selection process. Should it not be feasible then, in retrospect, to reciprocate some measures of competency, reflective of the executive’s stance on perfection, to provide readership that is as flawless as the writer’s query letters? Incidentally, if readers cannot recognise a good script, such as the retyped copy of *The Maltese Falcon*, how then, or what is it, that readers read, or are instructed to read for, in a script? Trottier writes, *you’ve heard the horror stories of readers, agents and executives reading the first few pages of a script and then tossing it on the dung heap* (1998:12). Does it get any worse? Is the script tossed away after only a reading of the first few pages because it is unreadable, or could it be the flawed reading skills of those who *read*? Surely, it is not as
drastic as this. The script after all, as Azlant said previously, is considered a major phase of filmmaking and the first creative phase of filmmaking proper (1980:1). As this could also spell career moves, or perhaps even fortunes for those who recognise the script’s potential, would it not be in the reader’s, or indeed the studio’s interest, to exercise a little more enthusiasm, exert a little more insights, to read a little further, and absorb a little deeper beyond the first few pages albeit the barrage of other screenplays they supposedly receive on any given day (Lazarus, 1993)?

But, the script is also simply a text, a communication between writer and reader. Umberto Eco, in The Role of the Reader, makes a valid and interesting point, that the writer must codify a communication in such a way that enables the reader to recognise the communication:

Its author has to rely upon a series of codes that assign given contents of the expression he uses. To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has to foresee a model of the possible reader ... supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them (1987:7).

In the case of the script, what might the series of codes entail? Trottier says, one way to avoid that [script being tossed in the dung heap] is for something to happen in the first ten pages (1998:12). This is repeated in both Goldman’s Adventures Of The Screen Trade (1983), and Linda Seger’s Making A Good Script Great (1994) that the
first ten to fifteen pages are the most important. This is because these pages, which are also the opening of the first act, involve the set-up. Seger writes:

The purpose of the set-up is to tell us all the vital information we need to get the story started. Who are the main characters? What’s the story about? Where is it located? Is it a comedy or drama, farce or tragedy? The set-up is designed to give us a clue about the spine or direction of the story. It begins to focus the situation into a coherent storyline. It gives movement to the story. It also helps orient the audience ... (Seger, 1994:21).

It was with the design of the set-up, in which to share the text in order to orient the reader with the story, that the first draft of Jungles of Sandakan underwent a series of editing workshops. Although it was clear to me in the first draft where the story was located and who the lead characters were, and I understood what I wanted the story to be about, there was some confusion with sub-plots, which led to the lead character, George, being overshadowed by his brothers and other characters in the story. I soon realised I was writing the story according to some of the accounts in Wall, Silver, and Sue books, particularly that of my father’s family, and superimposing my mother’s account in the script. The story is about the central character George, not his brothers or others, and as such, according to structure, the character arc and spine, I must bring George up close and personal. In doing so, other vital elements of the script had to be edited as well to codify the text in order to appeal to the reader. For example, the edited screenplay that accompanies this dissertation does not
contain the subtitles that were originally intended. This is so the reader is not distracted and is instead provided with an uninterrupted flow of reading. The script is thus edited in such a way, codified in such a way, that the reader recognises it in such a way that it may survive the selection process. In doing so, regrettably, the voices of the colonised, are yet again silenced. Yet, in the end, the writer has no choice but to abide by the rules, that is, write in accordance to structure, appeal to the reader in codifying the first ten pages in such a way that pleases the reader’s model of reading, all in the hope that the script may survive the selection process.

In all of this, as the regime of the selection process commands, the writer remains a non-entity, and has no voice in representing herself, or indeed her own work. She requires representation by agent or attorney. Lazarus writes:

> If a certain screenplay clicks with the decision makers of the moment, the studio will endeavour to cut a deal with the writer’s representative. This process will involve another team of players from the business affairs or legal departments. New hurdles must be overcome at this time ... (1993:34).

The selection process, and the imposition of those seemingly immeasurable high hurdles, not only seems endless, but they appear to keep the writer at the furthest distance possible from her own script, and from the production hierarchy. It seems a cruel state of affairs that even after the persistence of hard work, of
research and writing the script, her position as writer still keeps her at odds with the production hierarchy. The writer seems at every turn an individual surpassed by the production hierarchy even though her script, the mere blueprint, is also the lifeblood of the picture business (English, July/August 2001, pp.72; Lazarus, 1993:33). How does one persevere in such adversity? As a reminder for writers to keep faith with their craft, and indeed the odds that their scripts might survive the selection process, Ernest Lehman, writer of such films as North by Northwest, and Sound of Music, poignantly made this comment when he accepted his Honorary Award on Oscar night, 2000. He said, quoted in R.E. Paris’ article, ‘Ernest Lehman, Auteur’, in Screentalk: we have suffered anonymity for too often. I appeal to all movie critics and feature writers to please always bear in mind that a film production begins and ends with a screenplay ... (May/June, 2001, pp.52). Such comments certainly give hope, and remind writers that their work, and contribution to a film production is important, for without writers to write the scripts no film production will begin.

Interestingly, even with as stringent a scrutiny as the selection process demands, and the seemingly unconquerable hurdles placed in front of the script, it seems ironic that film critics should have any unfavourable remarks to make about the movies they see. Matt Buchanan’s article, ‘Critical Massacre’, in the Sydney Morning Herald says:

There has been for a long time a perception among film critics that the general quality of
Hollywood movies is not set merely on a downward curve, but that the gradient of decline is becoming steeper by the year. The fact that increasingly millions have been drawn to the apparently magnetic trash served up in cinemas over the decades has done little to diminish this perception (Buchanan, December 14-15, 2002, pp.8).

What is going on here, and how is it possible for the quality of any film to decline when the script is subjected to such stringent rules that insist no unsolicited scripts, or scripts that readers reject, should slip through the selection process? What indeed drives the critics to appreciate a film? Is it not the same criteria the studio places upon the script in the selection process? Perhaps not, as Buchanan reiterates film critic Pauline Kael’s article, ‘Why are movies so bad?: Kael did not merely warn us Hollywood movies would become more sensation-dependent, she also pointed out why this would be and why it wouldn’t change. Marketing departments, she argued, had taken over the studios, demanding movie executives narrow their focus to a few basic categories ... (December 14-15, 2002, pp.8-9). In reality, it seems neither the writer, nor the production hierarchy, perhaps not even the structure of the craft, or the selection process, has any real influence over the demands of the market. Here, once again, is a reminder, that the writing of the script, and the production of films, as the market demands, must be manufactured in such a way that appeals to the market, not the studio executive, or the production hierarchy. Writing, or indeed the production of films, in this sense, is no more than a means to appease the world of objects, in which the writer is cajoled back into the capitalistic
There seems no escape from this cold world of commerce that has so imprisoned us in its web of political economics, and which denies us our inner world of imagination and dreams. What is a starting-out writer to do in all of this? Never write solely for money. Write for the love of the process, the story itself, the characters who won’t go away, and for the joy of research and creation, said screenwriter Regina Rain Richardson (English, July/August 2001, pp. 72). As Goldman said, if all you do is write screenplays, then it becomes denigrating to the soul ... your life is constantly tromped [sic] on by directors who are insecure or stars who want to have their parts made bigger (Brady, 1981:172).

It seems just writing the screenplay, in the real scheme of things, is not conducive to the soul, and neither should it be the writer’s prime objective. The screenplay, in this instance, is just the beginning of a contingency of the experience of writing. The writer should perhaps look beyond writing, to other avenues alongside writing, as continuity, and contingent to the experience of writing. This suggests to me that my experience of writing Jungles of Sandakan may be just the beginning of a journey that could venture beyond the script. In the meantime though, I shall take solace from the experience of writing this script, and acknowledge that this experience has not been in vain. The transcendence into the sweetness which enabled this experience of writing, and which brought about this story, is testimony to the fact that the limits and
barriers set up by our external world are really only illusions that can be dissolved. For this experience alone, the experience of transcendence from the external world of limits and barriers, into the inner world of imagination and dreams where the entity roams free, is really the reason for writing. As Lazarus said, remember you are a writer if you write, not if you have an agent, or sell a work, or have a script produced. Writers write ... if that’s what you want to do ... do it! (1993:48). And, as Cixous bellows from her turbulence of wild acts ... Write! (1991:9). Absolutely.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The experience of writing the screenplay *Jungles of Sandakan*, and the subsequent dissertation *Screenwriting: An Experience Of A Writing Genre*, was initially one of elation. The elation lay with the opportunity to research, and to experience writing the screenplay in the Doctor of Creative Arts portfolio in which to bring to fruition, not just research and writing, but also the experience of an existence, which has been shaped by a dream that ignited a passion from beyond the beginning of the project, and now, through to *The End*. Prior to the initial phases, much work in preparation has already been experienced. Learning to write (and read) screenplays began from the time the call came that October morning in 1997. It seems so long ago as the dream drifted into learning, learning into practice, and practice into writing. Then, as the project began, writing into an existence that brought about the experience of a writing genre. Where has the time gone? What has been achieved?

Countless reams of A4 paper (not to mention trees), litres of ink, units of electricity, words exchanged with colleagues and supervisors at seminars and conferences, and food and beverages ingested and digested in between, have been poured into this obsession. Time seems to have collapsed, as so much has gone on during the project associated with life along with the many pleasures, as well as the anxious moments associated with research and writing. Three and a half years have gone by, and even with the apparent *indepth* knowledge acquired in the
process of research and writing, I am still somewhat perplexed and uncertain as to how, or where, this experience will take this obsession in the grand scheme of things in film production. It must be made clear here that, as everyone experience things and life differently, this research, and this writing, address only the experience of this project, and does not assume that all starting-out screenwriters experience identical, or similar situations in their pursuits of the craft. As things in the film business are ever-changing, and evolving in response to filmmaking technologies and market demands, not to mention changes in the whims of the production hierarchy, writing the script may likewise change accordingly. The interests, and accessibility to digital technologies, or the digital evolution, as Gregory-Browne puts it in Screentalk, for example, has made filmmaking affordable, and quite within grasp of the starting-out writer, who potentially could make a film on her own from a home computer:

The great thing about the digital evolution is that the cost of making movies can drop dramatically. No expensive film stock ... no development cost ... and most importantly, desktop editing that can be done on your home computer.

Hundreds of writer/director hopefuls around the world are catching on to the fact that what was once impossible for the average Joe is now a reality. We can make movies ourselves ... 
(July/August 2001, pp.13).

A profound concept is it not, to have within your grasp the technology to go it alone in an industry that seems impossible to penetrate because of the there’s no way in, and you’re fucked attitudes towards the new writer? How
pertinent this now seems. The vital component required that any film production simply could not do without, the script, which in the case of this starting-out writer, is already written, making the concept we can make movies ourselves so much more relevant, encouraging the writer to keep on writing. With a handful of inexpensive [pieces of] equipment, a few passionate and dedicated actors, and a lot of intestinal fortitude, you, too, can turn that beloved script into a movie, continues Gregory-Browne (July/August 2001, pp. 13).

Suddenly, it seems the desire to write, to experience writing a screenplay, may not be just a dream after all, but the possibilities of writing into production may actually be within grasp. The Australian film The Finished People, co-written and directed by Khoa Do about homeless youth in Cabramatta is the most recent example of the accessibility of digital filmmaking. The film, writes Shaun Topp in his article, ‘The Finished People’ was shot on digital and with a cast and crew virtually working for free (www.dosagemag.com, 2003, pp.1). Further, as more and more writers now claiming such titles as writer/producer (or writer/director—hyphenates as Straczynski refers to them), writers now have even more possibility to empower their work, and themselves, by writing, producing, and directing their own scripts (1996:16). As Goldman said, there’s almost nobody in the world who just want to be screenwriters. They want to be producers, they want to be directors. They are using screenwriting as a stepping-stone to some other source of power (Brady, 1981:172). It is inspiration like this that makes writing, and the contingency to go beyond the
script into an actual production, so much more invaluable and poignant.

Nonetheless, the position from which *Jungles of Sandakan* is written needs to be address. The position of the writer, especially that of the aspiring writer, as constructed by social forces, may not allow the recognition of her writing as a form of professional work, nor worthy of production. It appears the primary perception in the contingency of film production is that, in the case of a writer who has had no history of credited work, as is my case, their screenplay naturally would not attract commercial interest, or be recognised as a viable and producible script. Given the different cultural angle from which the screenplay is written, in that it features ethnic Australians as the lead characters, it may not be recognised as a quintessential Australian film. The perception is still that Australian films, especially the melodramatic feature film, must contain Anglo-Australians in leading roles, and the story must inevitably be narrated from the dominant cultural perspective.

As an alternative piece, *Jungles of Sandakan* does quite the opposite. It depicts migrant Australian citizens from within multicultural Australia, representing themselves (playing leading roles) in their own stories, in this case, a story of their own experience of aiding Anglo-Australians (who play secondary roles) in their country of origin in war time. This is a story of a war that involved Australians that the migrants had known all along, though they had no venue or public speaking
position from which to tell the story. Thus, to tell this story, especially in recalling details to authenticate certain events, I had to develop it from my own history, and make the story my own. As Pat Torres, in Conversations with Women Writers (1995) said:

I had to be proactive. I had to go out and do research. I had to find my own stories. I had to make sure I developed it from my own perspectives, then I had to produce it in order to make the book a reality.

Similarly, I wanted to write. The document produced here is not a book, but an account of an experience of writing, and the research of a story for a screenplay. I wanted to write, and here I have produced my experience of writing, in the form of a feature length film script, a script that may not (yet) be recognised as a fair dinkum Australian film.

Moreover, as a representation of the voice of ethnic women, especially in this genre of writing, which seems largely unrepresented in the dominant Australian context, my experience of this writing process may resonate with Moraga and Anzaldua’s This Bridge Called My Back (1981). Anzaldua writes: As first generation writers, we defy the myth that the color of our skins prevents us from using the pen to create (1981:163) And, in the same book, Hattie Gossett, says: who told you anybody wants to hear from you, you ain’t nothing but a black woman (1981:163). These are challenging words from Third World women of colour, whose work seems from the dominant point of view irrelevant, as the dominant social forces undermine the
legitimacy their work. My work, similarly, may meet with such fate, as who indeed, would want to hear from me?

For the time being though, and as reality dictates, the project may have come to The End as far as this dissertation is concerned. The script, however, is by no means complete until it is produced, and screened in the cinema. Until such time, Jungles of Sandakan, as it is presented here, remains incomplete, a work-in-progress, subject to further rewrites and editing. As such, there are still unrealised experiences like the development hell, which occurs after the sale of the script. It’s that time after you’ve sold a script, said Gregory-Browne, in which the forces of the creative bureaucracy put you through your paces. More often than not, you wind up tearing your hair out (July/August, 2001, pp.12). I cannot imagine at this stage what the development hell will actually be like, but I shall brace myself for the experience. Pitching, that is telling, or selling the story to the studio executive in five minutes, who, according to Goldman, views you as an impediment to either his lunch or his tennis game, but ... knows you might help his career as he would rather live in a world where he didn’t have to listen to you, but nonetheless, according to Carlos de Abreu and Howard Jay Smith, in Opening Doors to Hollywood, you are expected to articulate the high points and the hook of your story idea, is another unrealised experience which might send the writer into another form of hell (2000:269; 1995:103). So, too, are the necessary evil[s] of the story outline, or treatment, in short story form in eight to twelve pages that highlight the specifics and
character arcs, and the log line that summaries the story’s content in two or three sentences (Straczynski, 1996:39; Abreu & Smith, 1995:157). All these are the necessary requirements to motivate, and to seduce the production hierarchy to take notice and usher the script into production. Such requirements, necessary as they are, may also be the unnecessary periphery of writing the script, but requirements nonetheless, to test the writer’s willingness to conform, to commit, to submit, and to endure the incessant baptism of fire issued by the forces of authority.

Nonetheless, there is still the elation of having experienced a dream, although one now complicated, and agitated, with some degree of despondency, disillusionment and dejection, because of the confinement experienced within the protocols of writing and, as mentioned before, the level of kowtowing a writer must endure, culminating with the pedantic views of the studio executive’s stance on passion, in that a script must be flawless in the way it is packaged, or presented, rather than the passion inflected in the research reflective in the writing. There is, however, still cause for the joy that brings closure to this project. Finishing your script, as Horton says, is cause for celebration (1994:181). Yes, it is. It may appear that the objective of writing a script is to insist upon its production. Indeed, this would be every writer’s dream, and would seem that the success of this project is to include a grand, premier screening of the movie entitled Jungles of Sandakan, in the cinema. This, however, is not the objective of this dissertation. The project sets out to
experience a writing genre, that is, the writing of a
screenplay. The screenplay is written as a result. The
task, therefore, has been achieved.

Relevancy of the experience

Roland Barthes writes:

myth is a system of communication ... it is a
message ... Every object in the world can pass from a
closed, silent existence to an oral state, open
to appropriation by society, for there is no
law, whether natural or not, which forbids
talking about things ...
It can consist of modes of writing or of
representations ... (1993:93,94).

Barthes seems to infer that anything may be defined as
myth so long as it bears a message, and that any scenario
that is closed, or silenced, may be brought into
existence by a mode of writing. This gives scope to the
screenplay Jungles of Sandakan. As a writing mode, the
script opens up a story, a set of discourses, which has
lain dormant even though it has, for decades, been a
focus of reminiscence of family life in war-time. The
writing, as it progressed, consequently became a
representation of an experience of writing in the form of
a feature film screenplay. As there is no law forbidding
writing in this form, an agenda representing an
intergenerational transmission of family history, the
experience quite implicitly seems also to inflect the
rational to write in this form (Thompson, 1993). But for
the writer, the genre may utter something else. The
writing, as it submerged into imagining, emerges as a
voice that has been craving to speak, not just any voice, as hooks writes, but one that could be identified as belonging to me (1989:5). As a mode of communication, the script is a form that seems natural, for me, as a platform in which to speak, to represent, or indeed to express a voice, or voices, that may otherwise remain in the shadows of existence.

The Gurus’ enterprise

In considering all the barriers and power plays in the film world confronting the script and writer, is it futile to follow one’s dreams, and continue to live the passion regardless? In the interview, in Screentalk, ‘Inside the killer’s mind’, Homicide Detective Sergeant turned screenwriter Simon de Waal, and publisher/editor Eric Lilleør, tapped into something that seems to me quite astonishing, and provokes the notion that perhaps all is not lost. On the subject of the golden rules of the script, and especially of its structure, which seem so zealously guarded, and taught by those gurus of the industry that, incidentally, have spawned a million dollar enterprise of books, software, tapes and seminars (July/August 2001, pp.11), Lilleør asks:

Is there a real need for those so-called story gurus?

de Waal’s reply:

Yes and no ... There are many good books that can help you focus on problems and solutions. The no part of the answer is that when you don’t have the “X-factor” (creativity with talent...)—you’ll never learn to write a good script from a book alone. Theory and practice
are miles apart in writing. The only good thing you’ll end up with is a script that applies all the formal rules, but just isn’t a good script (Lilleør, July/August 2001, pp.11).

What is de Waal implying? He seems to illuminate something quite extraordinary about the penchant for standardising a script by implementing a particular format. While the instruction-styled books churned out by the dozens by the so-called gurus may help resolve writing problems, and help generate a well-structured script, those resolutions alone do not necessarily result in good scripts. But, why not, if the well-structured script is the epitome of what the production hierarchy looks for in the enterprise? Might there be something missing, or might the gurus be concealing something in their teachings, and advocacy of the standardised-structured script? It seems that there might really be some thing like the X-factor, as de Waal puts it, that is probably unteachable, that the gurus seem to have overlooked. As Straczynski writes, in The Complete Book of Scriptwriting, this is a book that cannot teach talent or persistence (1996:v). Could this be where the challenge seems to tilt in the writer’s favour: to write, not disregarding the formalities of structure altogether, but to tap into the creative energies imbued in the X-factor, and push the boundaries beyond habitual copying? If so, how does one push such boundaries, when the collaboration of the enterprise that seems so inoculated by the gurus’ teachings, that to write any other way would render the script unacceptable? How does one even attempt to alter, or weaken, the stronghold of the gurus’
million-dollar enterprise that has so entrenched their gospel in the industry?

The naked truth

Citing the experience of writing Jungles of Sandakan alone, much expense has been spent in attending seminars to listen to, and to note, the gurus’ methods of writing the script. The screenplay has also gone through a series of editing workshops, which has drastically changed the original 165-page first draft to the standard 111-page script (which for some might still be too long) that accompanies this dissertation. One could debate whether, or not, the application of the rules of structure has indeed improved the script, or ruined it.

Certainly, the protocols of writing were applied: the basic 3-Act structure supported by the character arc, or the spine, which were both employed as the protagonist journeys through emotional turmoils that change his life, made the script seem more readable, or more acceptable. However, I always felt a sense of betrayal in relation to the first draft, which had taken considerable time in research, and writing, only to be ravished when structure was imposed in the deletion of the many scenes for which there was no room in the script that had been streamlined to fit the model, the model that was plagiarised from the gurus’ enterprise. When the task of writing Jungles of Sandakan was completed, and as the dissertation progressed in its chapters, the screenplay was read and evaluated by a script assessor, and film producer in Australia. It has also been seen by a film director in
the United States, and was submitted in a screenwriting competition, for which a Certificate of Merit was awarded by the American Screenwriters’ Association, for its participation in the competition (see APPENDIX I).

Ironically, none of these delegates of the industry, who would be the equivalent of the studio executive who wanted to be impressed by query letters written on nice paper, made any such comments about the requirement for, nor the need to be wowed, by such letters. The comments of the script assessor, Barry Gamble, in Metro Screen – Onsite Script Assessment (see APPENDIX II) concentrated on the core of the story, that is, on the drama concerning the internal struggles of the characters in the narratives. The suggested improvements that could be made on the next draft were concentrated on character development and stylistic concerns to do with the portrayals of the characters (Gamble, 2003). There were no comments on the aesthetic presentation of the script, nor any special mention of structure. The film producer also offered no such comments, apart from the fact that there was no market for such a screenplay, or story, or simply they were not making such a genre of film at present. There it is again, the market. It is what the market wants that dictates a script, and which seems to determine something else other than writing to structure, or pleasing the studio executive by making the script, or query letter, look pretty.

One sighs, and scratches one’s head, pondering such questions as: who or what drives the market? No one knows, it seems. Goldman’s comments that the single most
important fact, perhaps of the entire movie industry (and he stresses this in capital letters) that would have the studio executive and those in the production hierarchy scurrying for cover as the naked truth of the game reveals itself, is that:

NOBOBY KNOWS ANYTHING (Goldman, 1983:39).

Is it as drastic as that? Nobody knows anything? No one person in the entire motion picture field knows for a certainty what’s going to work, continues Goldman (1983:39). Does this give hope to my screenplay, that someone (perhaps even myself) might take a chance, take a risk, and make it into a production that is going to work? After all, it was taking the chance to allow the dream to flow through from the awakening, and to experience writing it in the first place, bringing about its existence. Without a script, as Lazarus implied, there is no film production (1993). In the case of Jungles of Sandakan, and in the case of this research, the script is here, and production is then really quite possible. As in Frensham’s Teach Yourself Screenwriting, the book that presented itself to me at that most ordinary of suburban shopping plazas, it is in lifting the mystiques that the media create about themselves and their working methods that one [demystifies] the process (1996:1). This certainly makes it possible to transcend those illusions of perfection that seem so stoically imposed on the craft that leave the starting-out writer shattered.
**Something else lurks**

As one reviews the intensity of surveillance of a script (that is, the format it must be written in, who approves of it, how and why) one gets the sense that something else lurks here that might be quite outside the sphere of the film world itself, yet still governing it. There seems something about the X-factor that is not well-explained, nor talked about by those who teach, those who advocate the writing of the structured screenplay. Even as I workshops my screenplay in filmmaking training institutions, the X-factor has not been a subject of discussion. It seems a topic that is not even in the curriculum of matters for discussion. Yet, as de Waal said, in Lilleør, all the gurus’ enterprise would not equip one to write *if one does not* have the X-factor (July/August 2001, pp.13). What is the X-factor, and what is it about the X-factor that makes those who teach screenwriting, pass over what is perhaps the most fundamental element alongside the writing strategies?

Margaret Boden, in *Dimension of Creativity* writes:

> Creativity is a puzzle, a paradox, some say a mystery. Inventors, scientists, and artists rarely know how their original ideas arise. They mention intuition, but cannot say how it works. ... the apparent unpredictability of creativity seems to outlaw any systematic explanation, whether scientific or historical (1994:75).

In Ake E. Andersson and Nils-Eric Sahlin’s *The Complexity of Creativity*, Ingar Brink reiterates that, *creativity is a notoriously evasive concept, and it is used to cover a*
lot of different phenomena (1997:5). de Waal’s X-factor by definition then, is creativity, in fact, creativity with talent [and persistence], and without it, one cannot write a good script (July/August 2001, pp.13; Straczynski, 1996). Both Boden and Brink’s descriptions seem to suggest creativity as something unpredictable, as an entity itself apparently without foundation. No one, it seems, really knows how, or from where, it derives. Apparently, the X-factor has no regard for any rules that might be set upon it, and as an entity, is quite ungovernable. As the film world, like no other, by its very nature creates illusions for its productions, it seems uncanny that it should elude discussion on such an important issue as the X-factor.

Why? Might there be an external base that makes those in the film world react to the entity by avoiding the subject altogether? Perhaps, like no other, the film world is the one that creates illusions from fantasy, the writer’s fantasy. As screenwriter David Koepp said in his interview, ‘The Panic Room’ with David Goldsmith in Creative Screenwriting, ... movies are two disparate ideas that bang together (March/April, 2002, pp.16). Loosely put, but essentially, that is where writing, and subsequently movies, originate. Ideas spark from fantasy in the writer’s mind, and that essentially, makes movies. Thus, the X-factor—creativity, fantasy, idea—different only in terms but really also relating to the writer’s myth-laden depths to which Barthes referred, from which the private portion of the ritual arises and unfolds beyond control, also intrude upon the writer’s initial plan (1993:32-33). The X-factor, which one cannot learn
from the gurus’ books alone, but which seems to bestow itself upon the writer through the gifts of creativity, the origins from where ideas spark into fantasy, seems to be the cause of the hysteria among those in the film world in their demands and manipulations of the script. Thus, if the origins of movies, via the scripts, are evoked from fantasy, or the X-factor, or creativity, whichever term one uses, why then do those who teach the craft, and those in the production hierarchy, concoct such controls and practice such scrutiny over the script, whilst also imposing the measures that would keep the writer at the furthest possible distance from presenting her own work? What is it about the fantasy that makes those who depend on the entity for the creation of their own enterprise fall silent on the subject?

Perhaps the X-factor is seen as a kind of madness. Like the turbulence that knocked the wind out of [her] and inspired her to wild acts. “Write”, and she wrote because she had no control over its calling. It came to me abruptly ... It captured me. I was seized ..., said Cixous. (1991:9). The same sweetness of the sky, that made Bataille feel it to be present inside his head like a vaporous streaming ... making him take pleasure in it ... (1988:112). So he took pleasure in it, and he wrote. The same madness that inspired this writing that held me captive, filled my head with the obsession to write, and to experience, regardless of the consequences. So strong is the passion to write, to fantasise, that the passion to write can even get past triple walls of interdiction, triple walls of difference (Suleiman in Cixous, 1991:ix).
Fantasy, likewise, in its own volition knows no boundaries as it transcends all barriers. It does not obey rules, or recognise any such thing as structure. Could this fantasy diagnosed as *madness* be the culprit that unsettles those in the million-dollar enterprise so that they would devise ways to silence it?

In *The Birth of the Asylum*, Foucault wrote:

madness belonged to social failure, which appeared without distinction as its cause, model, and limit ... the indifference and silence of all those around him, confined him in the limited use of an empty liberty; he was delivered in silence to a truth which was not acknowledged and which he would demonstrate in vain ... (1984:150-151).

Foucault’s discussion of the practices of the social world which fears madness reflects the categorisation of people into *Normal* and *Abnormal* and illuminates many of the strategies society uses to confine the entity: because the rest of society must be protected, social police are assigned to control those in confinement (Foucault, 1984; Fillingham, 1993; Lechte, 1994). Likewise, the film world in its microcosm, unconsciously perhaps, mirrors the macro world in its imposition of controls on the script and writer. Yet, as an institution of creativity, should it not be in the very nature of film productions, and the powers vested within them, to push the boundaries of those prevailing fears and anxieties of *madness* that society imposed upon them, and go beyond the confinement? There are, of course, a myriad of issues concerning fantasy, and *madness* that are beyond the scope of this piece of writing. However, it is in
recognising the anxieties towards the *madness* as the possible *external* factor that seems to have such a stronghold on those in the film world that they would voluntarily silence it, that we can give a voice here. To keep the entity suppressed, the writer vested with the gift of the entity, therefore, must also be seized upon and confined, confined to write in a certain way that guarantees the confinement of the entity.
Tribute

It seems poignant now, as this project draws to a close, that the screenplay pays tribute to my father, who passed away recently. The books that refer to the Funk family, particularly the Funk brothers, do not include him. It's as though he never existed. But, he did. Dad’s silences were his way of communication, the uttered message from which to create myth and story.

The screenplay, thus, as a mode of communication, speaks of those silences, and also commemorates not just a voice that may otherwise have remained silent, but also a life missing from the pages of a family history. It also works to satisfy the craving to speak, not only on behalf of my father, but also on behalf of myself, as it is also my voice, with which to claim a heritage that may give meaning to my own existence, and indeed the meaning of why I must write the story this way, at this point in my life. It is perhaps the need for making oneself visible, to be counted in a world that would rather ignore a past because it was unpleasant.

So too, as the voices of the forgotten men of Australia and Britain sleep in their eternal resting places in the jungles of Sandakan, the screenplay speaks of them and commemorates their existence. In the sentiments of columnist Ron Suppa in Creative Screenwriting: it is something that says I was here. And I tried. And this is what I did when I was here (March/April 2002, pp.30). The sentiments appear to be a marker, for some kind of relevance, for validation of having lived a life, or
perhaps even an attempt at a gesture for immortality. It would be pertinent then in regards of those sentiments that this screenplay may also be a marker for those who have existed, and that which pays a tribute to a life, or indeed lives, that once upon a time graced the face of our world.
“Jungles of Sandakan”

by

Grace H Funk
FADE IN:

EXT. SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, BURWOOD PARK – DAY – PRESENT DAY

75-year-old, GEORGE, strolls slowly, arm in arm with his wife, CHING, also 75.

MEG (OS)

Pa! Ma!

George and Ching turn.

MEG, 40s, points eagerly at a memorial structure.

George and Ching move to Meg.

CHING

What is it, Meg?

MEG

Look!

As they move, George and Ching see the word “SANDAKAN” on the structure.

Ching gasps, looking at George as he puts his glasses on.

CHING

Ohh ... George.

George and Ching stop, then slowly and deliberately move around the structure, reading the names on the plaques.

CHING

(Gently)

Remember any names, George?

George shakes his head, frowning slightly.

GEORGE

(Softly)

Andy? Anderson?

They stop at a plaque.
INSERT - THE MEMORIAL PLAQUE

"IN MEMORY OF
1800 AUSTRALIANS OF THE 8TH DIVISION
A.I.F. AND 750 BRITISH TROOPS, THEY
FOUGHT GALLANTLY IN THE DEFENCE OF
MALAYA AND SINGAPORE DURING WORLD WAR II. FOLLOWING THE FALL OF SINGAPORE,
THEY BECAME PRISONERS OF THE JAPANESE
AND WERE TRANSPORTED TO SANDAKAN IN
BRITISH NORTH BORNEO, NOW SABAH, IN
1942 TO CONSTRUCT AN AIRFIELD, WHERE
900 DIED OF ILL-TREATMENT.
BY THE END OF 1944, WHEN ALLIED
FORCES WERE WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE
OF SANDAKAN, THE JAPANESE COMMAND
ORDERED THE REMOVAL OF PRISONERS
INLAND TO RANAU, 165 MILES (265
KILOMETRES) WEST. ON JANUARY 1945,
470 PRISONERS GUARDED BY 500 JAPANESE
MARCHED TOWARDS RANAU. THOSE UNABLE
TO CARRY ON WERE KILLED...

BACK TO SCENE

George stares at the plaque, straightening up, and sighs.

GEORGE
I want to sit down.

Ching and Meg take George by the arm, and move to the
bench and sit.

Meg turns, checking out her two young boys playing with a
ball.

MEG
Boys, don’t go far.

Then, turns to George.

MEG
You alright, Pa?

George nods slightly, thinking, recalling, as birds chirp
and squawk in the trees.

George looks up into the trees, watches the birds.
EXT. JUNGLE – DAY – FLASHBACK

Monkeys shriek and play in the trees as 16-year-old GEORGE, a thin, pampered, Eurasian boy, lies on the ground, smoking, and watching the monkeys.

His friend, ARTHUR, a slightly older Chinese boy sits up, stubbing out his cigarette.

George looks at Arthur

GEORGE
You’re off then?

ARTHUR
(Nods)
Yep.

GEORGE
When will you be back?

Arthur gets up, shrugs.

ARTHUR
God knows.
(Looks at George)
The Volunteer Force could use more men. Sign up, George.
(Smiles)
Just think, it’ll be like boarding school again.

George yawns.

Then, George gets up, stubbing out his cigarette and picking up his parang (a traditional Malaysian shrub cutting blade of about 1.5 feet long).

George looks around, parting the tall grass with his parang as he moves.

He goes to a tapioca bush, jabs at the roots with his parang, loosening the earth.

As he pulls the tapioca foliage, roots and tubers emerge from the black earth, and a huge chunk of earth rolls to his feet.

George looks at the ball of earth, kicks it gently.
Then, his eyes pop wide open as he realises the chunk of earth is a decomposing human head.

GEORGE
(Gasps)
Ohh ...

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD – DAY

George picks up his bicycle, jumps on the saddle and takes off.

Then, he slows down as he sniffles, rubbing his nose at the smell of rot in the air.

George gazes at the shrubs, then freezes in horror at the decaying corpses leaning against small trees.

George puts power to the pedals and gets away, fast.

Further down, George slows down as he passes a dusty “Mile 8” post.

PRISON CAMP

George gazes pensively as he slowly passes the barbed wire fences enclosing the crudely built rows of huts and small wooden buildings.

SUPER: “SANDAKAN, BRITISH NORTH BORNEO, APRIL 1943”

George sees Japanese soldiers at the guardhouses on both sides of the wooden gate with machine guns mounted on the verandah, and guards patrolling the grounds.

He also sees some Australian prisoners of war in terrible condition working in the compound, and men confined in crowded cages in the hot sun.

On the far side of the rows of huts are numerous graves cluttered with crosses, and native coolies and some prisoners burying the dead.

A guard in the guardhouse sees George.

GUARD # 1
(Loud)
Oi!
George lifts his head to the guard. The guard gestures angrily with his rifle at George to move on.

GRAVEL ROAD - OFFICERS’ QUARTERS

George pedals forward.

Adjacent to the prison camp, he sees a sleazy Chinese man, LO, 30s, nodding and taking small packages from the tall, stout, Japanese CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA, 40s.

George frowns.

GRAVEL ROAD

George rides on, seeing more graves cluttered with wooden crosses in the shrubs.

Then, he sees Japanese guards on bicycles and about 50 Australian prisoners of war walking alongside the guards moving towards him.

As they get closer, the sweatsoaked guards stare curiously at George.

The pimple-faced guard, STINKY, 20s, stops.

STINKY
You!

George stops.

STINKY
British?

George shakes his head.

STINKY
Australian?

George shakes his head.

Stinky stares at George, then continues on.

George turns to the young, but old and tired looking Australians in torn and tattered uniforms. Their faces are bruised and cut, and feet with painful ulcers jut out of their limp and torn boots.
Among them are BRAITHWAITE, large-framed, 25, ANDERSON, baby-faced, blonde-haired, 17, CAMPBELL, stout and shortish, 20s, EMMETT, red-haired, freckle-faced, 20s, WEBBER, brown-haired, tall, 20s, and BOTTERILL, tall and slender, 20s.

Some of the white men nod at George.

   ANDERSON
   G’day.

George nods.

   GEORGE
   Hello.

Stinky interrupts rudely.

   STINKY
   (To the prisoners)
   No talk, go!

Anderson sees George grimace at the guard’s bad breath.

   ANDERSON
   (Whispers)
   We all smell, but he’s worse.
   Stinky.
   (Gestures)
   Phew!

Then, about 50 British prisoners of war, escorted by guards, march by in the opposite direction.

The Australians proudly stiffen their bodies, saluting their British counterparts. The British salute back.

A guard from the British side slaps one of his prisoners.

   GUARD # 2
   (Angry)
   No salute! Go!

Stinky and the guards prod their prisoners forward.

   STINKY
   Go! Go!
EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION - DAY

Tapioca tubers emerge from the ground as black birds are trapped in a sticky substance on a stick.

CHING, 16, a beautiful, bright-eyed, raven-haired Chinese girl, throws the tubers into the homemade basket.

Her younger brother KONG, 14, with a slingshot dangling from his neck, gathers the blackbirds and places them into the basket.

A monkey’s call turns Ching’s head. She looks up at the trees, cupping her hands and returns the call.

    CHING
    Hoohooo.

Then, Ching chases her younger sister, LING, 10.

Kong sees them and joins in the chase.

They laugh and scream as they run through the bushes and tall grass as their parents, LI ONN, 30s, and KWAN YI, also 30s, work on the rows of green vegetables in the background.

GRAVEL ROAD

George is mesmerised, slows down.

RUBBER PLANTATION

Ling sees George looking at Ching, turns to Ching, and sees her looking at George.

Ling giggles and teases.

    LING
    White man, he likes you, Ching.

GRAVEL ROAD

George’s eyes are fixed on Ching as he collides with Lo, knocking the packages from Lo’s arms.

George and Lo tumble into the bushes.
LO
(Angry)
Look where you’re going!

George sees Lo’s packages of dried fish and other food items scattered on the ground.

Lo glares at George.

RUBBER PLANTATION

Ching and her siblings laugh at George and Lo as they pick themselves up.

INT. WOODEN HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY

George enters.

MARY (OS)
George

George turns and sees his Eurasian mother, MARY, 30s, sitting on a sofa, and his stoic Chinese father, BEN, 40s, sitting next to her, holding her hand.

As George moves to his parents, he passes the photograph of Ben in the legal robe of a town magistrate, and several other family snapshots on the mantelpiece.

GEORGE
(Curious)
Mummy?

Mary grabs George and holds dearly onto him, as tears fill her eyes.

MARY
(Gasps)
George.

George turns to Ben.

GEORGE
(Concerned)
Pa?

BEN
(Quivers)
The Japs got your brothers.
George stares at his dad.

GEORGE
Where are they now?

BEN
Kempei Tai headquarters.

Mary sniffles, wiping the tears from her eyes, still grasping onto George’s arm.

MARY
(Quivers)
George, I don’t want you ...
(Gasps)
going anywhere near the Japs, you hear?

George nods, bends over and kisses her forehead.

EXT. WOODEN HOUSE - YARD - DAY

George sees his older sisters, ROSE and LIZIE, both 20s, sitting in the shade, arguing.

ROSE
(Annoyed)
He’s loves me, Lizie!

LIZIE
(Meekly)
Well, he married me.

George giggles at his sisters.

Then, he turns and sees his sisters-in-law, FLORA, Eurasian 20s, with her 5-year-old son, ED, staring at him as she takes the laundry off the line, and ANNE, 20s, also Eurasian, with toddler by her side, collecting firewood.

George goes to Anne, holding his arms out to her.

Anne smiles wearily as she sees him.

GEORGE
(Concerned)
I just heard the news, Anne.
Anne nods sadly as she puts the firewood into George’s arms.

ANNE
I hope they won’t hurt him ... (Sees Flora approaching) them ... too much.

FLORA
(Sneers at George) Mummy’s boy!

Flora storms off with the laundry, turning to her son.

FLORA
Ed.

Ed goes with his mother.

George looks at Anne, shrugging at Flora’s remark.

George carries the firewood into the house, then emerges from the house and joins his sisters in the shade, sits between them.

Rose looks at him.

ROSE
George, tell your sister (Points at Lizie) that Michael should’ve married me!

George turns to Rose.

GEORGE
Rose, Lizie didn’t have a choice, (Looks at Lizie) did you, Liz?

Lizie shakes her head sadly.

LIZIE
It’s just as well Michael ran off with that songstress. Mummy made me marry him because his family has money.

The sisters look at one another.
ROSE
(Sighs)
God only knows what will happen
to Paul and Don.

LIZIE
They only kill Europeans, don’t they?

GEORGE
The Japs will kill anyone who’s
against them. I saw more dead
Australians at the Mile 8 camp.

Rose and Lizie look at George.

GEORGE
I dug out someone’s head today.

LIZIE
(Disgusted)
Ohh ...

ROSE
There’s no way Mummy will let you
out of her sight now, George.

George lies on the ground, tucking his hands under his
head.

GEORGE
(Shakes his head)
I’m not going anywhere.
(Smiling)
I saw the most beautiful girl
today.

Rose and Lizie look at George, giggling.

LIZIE
Wooo ... baby brother is in love.

George giggles with his sisters.

Flora is at the window, watching, listening.
INT. KEMPE TAI HEADQUARTERS - ROOM - NIGHT

DON, 20s, bruised and bloodied, lies motionless on the floor.

A hard-faced SERGEANT MAJOR EHARA moves to Don.

Don’s lifeless eyes stare at the sergeant as blood oozes from his badly beaten face.

Sgt. Major Ehara turns to the guards.

    SGT. MAJOR EHARA
    Bring the brother.

The guards turn and exit.

MOMENTS LATER

The guards enter with PAUL, 20s, in chains.

Paul sees Don’s bloodied and lifeless body on the floor.

    SGT. MAJOR EHARA
    (To the guards)
    Leave.

The guards bow at the sergeant and exit.

Sgt. Major Ehara looks at Paul, smiling slightly, and pacing.

    SGT. MAJOR EHARA
    Well, Paul Huang, like I said to your
    (Turns to Don)
    now dead brother, Don.
    Give me the names of your people, especially the Australians and
    British, and I will spare you.

Paul stares at the Sgt. Major.

    PAUL
    (Defiant)
    Well, Sergeant Major Ehara,
    fuck you!
Paul’s face crashes hard into the wall, then a strong hand lifts him by the hair, and his face crashes into the wall again and again.

Then, Sgt. Major Ehara forces Paul to kneel on the sharp edge of an angular piece of wood.

Blood, sweat and tears pour from Paul’s face as he grimaces and screams, his eyes rolling back as the wood grinds and cuts into his knees.

PAUL
Arrrrhh ... arrhh ... arrhh!

INT. WOODEN HOUSE - DINING TABLE - NIGHT

George and family are having dinner of boiled tapioca, fish, and wild vegetables served on good china plates, and eating with spoons and forks.

Mary stares at her plate as Ben scoops more food onto it.

MARY
(Gasps)
They’re killing our boys, Ben.

Mary looks at George, reaches for his face, strokes his cheek.

MARY
My lovely boy.

Flora sneers at Mary’s affection for George.

MARY
You stay close to home, you hear?

George nods as he chews his food.

FLORA
(Smirks)
So, George, tell us about your girlfriend.

George is startled, looks at Rose and Lizie.

They look at him, shaking their heads, and looking at one another.

All eyes on George, particularly his mother.
MARY  
(Matter of fact)  
You already have a girlfriend,  
George.

FLORA  
Yeah, what’s her name?  
(Snapping her fingers)  
Uhhh ... uhhh ...

MARY  
Agatha.

FLORA  
Uhh, yes, Agatha.

MARY  
Beautiful Eurasian girl.  
I arranged for her just for you.  
(Points at George)

George looks at his mother, frowning a little.

FLORA  
Tell us about this girl you saw,  
George.

George smiles.

GEORGE  
She’s the most beautiful human  
being I’ve ever seen.

FLORA  
(Baiting)  
Yes, but what kind of girl is she?  
Eurasian, Malay?

GEORGE  
A beautiful Chinese girl.

Mary stares at her son.

MARY  
(Adamant)  
You’re not marrying a Chinese girl!

GEORGE  
(Turns to Mary)  
I just want to get to know her, ma.
George looks at his father.

GEORGE
Pa’s Chinese, you married him.

Mary slaps George across the face, pointing and raising her voice.

MARY
I don’t want you mixing with Chinese people!

George is stunned, drops his head, humiliated as Flora arches her eyebrows, smiling to herself.

INT. FLORA’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Ed is fast asleep on the floor.

Flora is on her knees by her bed, fingering her rosary.

FLORA
(Whispers)
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

She makes the sign of the cross, kisses the crucifix on her rosary, gets into bed, and stare at the ceiling.

FLORA
(Whispers) 
Jesus, please forgive me.  
I don’t want to feel this way about George.

EXT. AIRSTRIP – CONSTRUCTION SITE – DAY

Rain is pouring.

George is sheltering under the shrubs, watching about 50 scrawny Australian prisoners scattered about laying rocks and stones on the muddy ground. Some are dragging themselves tiredly through mud up to their knees, and carrying large rocks on the long soggy gravel strip.

George notices some of the men are gaunt and shivering.
GEORGE
(To himself)
Malaria, beri beri, dysentery,
they’ve got the lot.

A prisoner slips and falls, dropping rocks on Stinky’s foot, enraging him.

STINKY
Arrrhhh ... stupid!

Stinky slams his rifle butt on the prisoner’s head.

More prisoners slip and fall onto the muddy ground, and
the guards beat, kick and whip them mercilessly.

George sees the guards grinning at one other, taking
pleasure in their cruelty towards the prisoners.

GEORGE
Bastards!

EXT. RICE FIELD - DAY

Ching and her mother are caught in the heavy rain.

Kwan Yi is wheezing and sneezing as she and Ching gather
their work tools and run towards their hut.

EXT. JUNGLE – DAY

George cuts down a bunch of bananas with his parang
as his native friend, ALI, 20s, enters.

ALI
George.

George turns.

GEORGE
Ali, want some tapioca?

George points to his basket of tapioca.

ALI
No, we’ve plenty. I’ll trade you a rabbit I caught this morning for some bananas.
Ali and George clear a path with their parangs as they move through the tall grass, dragging the bunch of bananas and the basket of tapioca.

Ali notices George’s mind is elsewhere.

ALI
Something wrong?

George stops, looks at Ali.

GEORGE
Your wife, was she arranged for you?

Ali smiles.

ALI
Ya.
(Giggles)
I didn’t know what to do with her at first.

GEORGE
Were you in love with her?

ALI
I learned to love her. She’s a good woman. I know ... you Europeans want to fall in love first.

GEORGE
(Frowns)
European?
(Shaking his head)
I don’t know what I am.

George and Ali hear moaning, turn their heads and see a young Japanese soldier, HIDEO, behind a small bush, masturbating.

The young soldier moans and sighs as he ejaculates.

Ali and George giggle, startling the soldier.
The soldier flees into the jungle, holding onto his pants.

Suddenly, shots ring out, startling George and Ali.

EXT. SMALL TRACK

Ching and Kong look around anxiously as the shots echo in the air.

Two Australian prisoners covered in sweat and dirt, stagger from the bushes towards them.

PRISONER
(Out of breath)
Help!

Another shot rings out, the prisoner arches forward and collapses to the ground, scaring the shit out of Ching and Kong.

The other prisoner, unable to run anymore, collapses, and as he tries to get up, Japanese soldiers in a jeep come rushing as Ching grabs Kong, and flees into the woods.

EXT. SHRUBS

Kong and Ching keep low in the bushes, terrified and heaving out of breath.

ALI (OS)
(Urgent)
Ching!

Kong and Ching turn, and see Ali and George crawling towards them.

They hear the jeep screech to a halt and guards running, and voices.

GUARD (OS)
We told you, no escape!

From behind the bushes, Kong, Ching, Ali and George see the guards shove the prisoners into the jeep and roar away.

Ali and George turn, looking at Kong and Ching as they all rise carefully to their feet.
Ching sneezes hard.

ALI
What are you two doing here?

George stares at Ching.

CHING
We’re looking for you, Ali.
Ma’s very sick.
(Coughs)

Ali looks at Ching.

ALI
You don’t sound good yourself.

Ali studies Ching’s ashened face.

ALI
Okay, go home.
(Looks to George)
George, go with them.

George nods.

Ali turns to Ching.

ALI
I’ll come with the medicine man.

CHING
(Nods, grateful)
Thanks, Ali.
(Sneezes)

Ali notices George staring at Ching.

ALI
(Smiles)
George, meet Ching.

Ching blushes as she smiles at George.

George drops his jaw in awe, mesmerised at Ching’s flawless skin and bright eyes.
INT. THE LI’S HUT – DAY

Kwan Yi is motionless on the bunk as Li Onn sits by her side.

Li Onn turns as Ching and George enter.

CHING
Pa, the medicine man is on his way.

Li Onn nods, looking at George.

CHING
Pa, this is Ali’s friend, George. He walked us home.

Li Onn smiles, nods at George.

LI ONN
Thank you.

Ching sits on the bunk beside her mother.

CHING
(Softly)
Ma?

Ali enters with an old petite native man, the MEDICINE MAN, carrying a bowl in his hands.

The medicine man looks at Kwan Yi, feeling her forehead.

Kwan Yi opens her eyes weakly.

MEDICINE MAN
(Softly)
Kwan Yi, bad fever.
(Raises the bowl to her)
Drink medicine.

Ching helps her mother sit up.

The medicine man puts the bowl of herbal concoction to Kwan Yi’s lips.
EXT. WOODEN HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Ben is chopping wood.

George and Ali enter, carrying the basket of tapioca, bananas and a rabbit.

ALI
(To Ben, smiling)
Sir.

Ben turns.

BEN
(Smiles)
Ali.

Ed runs to Ali.

Ali picks him up as Ben looks in the basket.

ALI
Ohh ... big boy!

Ed giggles in Ali’s arms.

Flora watches and smiles as she gets water with a bucket from a barrel. Her eyes are on George.

BEN
Hmmm ... we’re having rabbit stew tonight, Flora.

A loud shriek makes Flora, Ed, Ben, Ali and George turn.

Anne is in a tropical fruit tree, picking and throwing the fruit to Rose and Lizie as they catch and playfully throw the fruit into a basket.

Flora, Ben, Ali and George laugh.

George takes the bananas and basket of tapioca and rabbit into the house.

Ali turns to Ben.

ALI
How’s ma’am Mary?
BEN
(Shakes his head)
Not good.

ALI
I’m sorry to hear that.

Ben nods sadly.

George emerges from the house.

Ali looks at George, moving to him as Flora watches them, eavesdropping.

ALI
George, the Japs have already
lost the war, but they won’t
surrender. We’ll ...

GEORGE
(Cuts in bluntly)
No!

George walks away, Flora watches him.

EXT. SHRUBS – DAY

George pokes in the bushes with his parang, then with
both hands pulls out a bunch of tapioca.

SMALL CLEARING # 1

A chubby LIEUTENANT MORITAKE, 30s, and guards, Hideo
among them, with rifles draped over their shoulders,
escort a small group of prisoners through the long grass.

Lt. Moritake stops and turns to the prisoners.

LT. MORITAKE
(Deliberately)
Sergeant Wallace, Corporal
Fairey, Private Harvey, Private
McKay have escaped.

SHRUBS

George moves carefully towards the voice.
SMALL CLEARING # 1

From behind the bushes, George sees the prisoners facing the firing squat.

    LT. MORITAKE
    There is no escape! My order is to kill those of you who sleep in the bunks next to them. You are those men!

George recognises Hideo.

The prisoners face the guards helplessly.

Birds watch from the trees.

    LT. MORITAKE (OS)
    Fire!

Shots ring out and the birds take flight, squawking into the sky.

George stares in horror as Lt. Moritake and the guards exit, leaving the bodies of the white men on the ground.

George sees a wild pig snorting towards the bodies.

He picks up a rock, throws it at the pig.

The pig squeals away.

INT. HOSHIJIMA’S OFFICE – DAY

Captain Hoshijima is at his desk, furious.

Lt. Moritake enters and bows.

    LT. MORITAKE
    (Proud of himself) It is done, Captain Hoshijima!

Captain Hoshijima blushes with rage, slams his fist on the table, startling the Lieutenant.

    CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
    (Yells) Lt. Moritake, get out!

Lt. Moritake bows and exits quickly.
Captain Hoshijima slides open the desk drawer, gets his binoculars.

He goes to the window and watches the camp with the binoculars.

**PRISON CAMP - VIEW FROM BINOCULARS**

Captain Hoshijima sees his guards patrolling the grounds, prisoners being prodded to work, and prisoners confined in the cages.

**EXT. WOODEN HOUSE - LAUNDRY - DAY**

Flora and Anne are at their tubs, scrubbing.

**ANNE**

I wish George wouldn’t wear white all the time.

Flora picks up a pair of white underpants from her tub, sneers at it and drops it into Anne’s tub.

**FLORA**

Here, this is his ...

(Disgusted)

yuck!

Anne looks at Flora.

**ANNE**

Why do you hate him so much, Flora?

Anne hears her toddler crying, looks at the house and as she gets up, a car slowly approaches them.

Anne and Flora stare curiously at the car.

The car stops.

Japanese guards get out of the car.

Slowly, a grotesque looking figure emerges from the car.

Paul limps weakly towards the women.

Anne only stares, her face ashened.
ANNE
(Loud, anxious)
Paul!

INT. GEORGE’S BEDROOM – DAY

George stirs under the covers, turning over lazily on his side.

He hears Anne screaming, seemingly from a distance.

ANNE (OS)
Paul!

George opens his eyes suddenly, jumps out of bed, goes to the window, and sees Anne running to his brother.

ANNE
Paul!

EXT. WOODEN HOUSE – YARD – DAY

Anne stares hard at Paul as she moves slowly to him.

ANNE
(Quivers)
What have they done to you, Paul?

Paul looks at his wife, softly touching the tear rolling down her face.

PAUL
(Gasps, softly)
Anne, I’m sorry.

Anne gently embraces her husband, as he rests his head on her shoulder.

PAUL
Please forgive me.

Then, Paul lifts his head to Flora and slowly moves to her.

PAUL
(Gently)
Flora, Don is dead.
Flora gasps loudly, staring at Paul, turns and runs away as Mary and Ben move anxiously to Paul.

Flora stops, turning to Mary and Ben.

    FLORA
    (Loud)
    Ma! Pa! Don is dead!

Mary and Ben stare at Flora in shock, turning back and forth between Flora and Paul.

    MARY
    (Motionless)
    Don? Paul?

Anne helps Paul towards Mary and Ben.

Mary reaches for Paul, staring at his blackened face and body.

    MARY
    (Shaking)
    Ohh ... Paul ...

    PAUL
    Ma.

Mary drops to her knees, wrapping her arms around Paul, sobbing.

Ben holds Mary up as he reaches for Paul.

Ben is shaking as he grasps onto Paul.

    PAUL
    Pa, I’m so sorry.

Ben shakes his head.

    BEN
    Paul ... Paul ... no ... no.
    I’m sorry. Paul, I’m sorry.

George, Rose and Lizie, just out of bed, run to their brother.

Ed and toddler are crying in the house.

Mary glares at the guards, then lunges at them.
MARY
(Screaming)
What have you done to my son?! Arrrrhhh!

UGLY grabs Mary’s arms, glaring back at her.

UGLY
Your son is lucky, he is granted his last request before execution!

MARY
(Loud)
Execution?! You already killed my Don!

Mary slaps the guard.

Ugly grabs her hand, and raising his hand.

The other guards grab him, holding him back.

George’s eyes are fixed on Paul as he moves to him.

Paul looks at George.

PAUL
(Whispers, defiant)
George, fight these bastards!

George stares at his bruised and battered brother, swallowing the spasm in his throat.

GEORGE
(Quivers)
Paul.

The brothers embrace as tears stream down their faces.

Flora watches them.

Rose and Lizie move to Paul, gently embracing him.

PAUL
Liz, Rose, look after each other.

Paul looks at his mother and father, tears streaming down their grief-stricken faces.
PAUL
(Quivers)
I love you, Ma ... Pa.

Mary embraces her son.

MARY
God Bless you, my son.

Ben looks at Paul, tears roll down his face, swallowing the lump in his throat.

Paul turns to Anne, gently taking her into his arms, and looks lovingly into her eyes as tears stream down their faces.

PAUL
(Softly)
Please don’t forget me, Anne.

Anne gasps.

ANNE
(Quivers, shaking her head)
Never.

Paul gently kisses her face and mouth.

PAUL
I love you.

Anne sobs, clinging to her husband.

Ugly prods Paul and pushes him towards the car.

Mary steps forward.

MARY
(Yells)
Where are you taking my son?!

Ugly turns to Mary.

UGLY
Your son is going on a journey.

MARY
Where?! Why?

Ugly glares at Mary.
UGLY
Your son is guilty of crimes
against the Imperial Japanese
Army!

MARY
What crimes?!

UGLY
Smuggling guns and radio into
the prison camp are very
serious offences against
the Imperial ...

Mary interjects.

MARY
(Mad)
To hell with your Imperial shit!
You’re ugly, you know that!

The guard stares at Mary, then turns and shoves Paul into
the car.

Ed and toddler are now screaming in the house.

Flora turns and runs to the house.

FLORA
(Sobbing)
Ed, mummy’s coming.

MARY
(To Ugly, loud)
Where are you taking my son?!

George sees Ugly turning back, staring at him as the car
moves away.

George turns to his family.

GEORGE
(Urgent)
We move!

The family turns to George.

GEORGE
Tonight!
INT. WOODEN HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY

Ben is at the mantelpiece staring at the smiling photographs of Paul and Don, swallowing the lump in his throat.

Then, he looks at the photograph of himself in his legal robe, and to his gavel placed among other family snapshots.

His body trembles.

He grabs his gavel from the mantelpiece, stomps to the door, and hurls it into the shrubs.

Ben sobs.

EXT. SMALL TRACK – NIGHT

Insects crick and toads croak in the darkness as George pushes his bicycle, with Anne’s toddler on the saddle, and Ben, Mary, Anne, Flora and Ed, each carrying their own small sack, move quietly and closely together.

EXT. WOODEN HOUSE – DAY

Ugly blushes with rage as his guards scurry before him, staring at him.

GUARD # 3
They are gone, Sir!

INT. LONGHOUSE – DAY

Several families live in this dwelling, each in their own family space on the floor.

Flora sees Mary mending a pair of trousers, goes to her.

FLORA
Ma.

Mary looks at Flora.

FLORA
(Anxious)
I heard Paul telling George to fight the Japs.

Mary keeps mending.
FLORA
Think of him avenging his brothers.
(Demands)
I want justice for Don, ma!

Mary looks at Flora.

MARY
I don’t want to lose George, Flora. No!

Flora storms away.

EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY

George paces back and forth, taking a deep breath, then moves boldly forward.

He loses his nerve, turns back abruptly.

George is mad at himself, hitting himself on the head.

GEORGE
(Frustrated)
Stupid, stupid, stupid!

George concentrates, then takes another deep breath. He marches forward through the tall grass and sees the Li’s hut drawing closer and closer.

The door opens suddenly, Lo emerges from the hut with Li Onn, startling George.

George dives into the bushes.

He watches curiously, then his eyes pop wider as Ching emerges after Lo and her dad.

George’s face contorts with jealousy.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD – DAY

Lo walks forward, smiling, daydreaming.

Suddenly, George charges from the bushes.

GEORGE
(Determined)
Arrrrhh!
George crashes into Lo, knocking the both of them flying into the bushes, cutting themselves.

George picks himself up forcefully, and gets on his bicycle, staring at Lo who is dazed and gasping in shock.

EXT. STREAM # 1 – DAY

George is brooding as he throws a fishing line into the water.

    ALI (OS)
    George.

George turns and sees Ali with baskets of foodstuffs. His wife, MINNA, 20s, and children are by his side, smiling at him.

    GEORGE
    Minna.

    MINNA
    (Smiling)
    George.

Ali sees the cuts on George’s face.

    ALI
    What happened to you?

    GEORGE
    Nothing.

EXT. AIRSTRIP CONSTRUCTION SITE – DAY

The steamroller gets bogged in the mud.

A furious Lt. Moritake is yelling at the prisoner operating the steamroller.

    LT. MORITAKE
    Oi! Oi!

The steamroller engine is deafening as the operator tries to unbog it.

    LT. MORITAKE
    Oi!
Lt. Moritake leaps onto the steamroller and pulls the startled prisoner down, bashing him with everything he has.

A WHILE LATER

Lt. Moritake and some of the guards buy food from Ali and George with Japanese bills.

As Lt. Moritake and guards settle in the shade with their food, some of the prisoners gather around Ali and George, buying food from them.

Among them are Anderson, Campbell, Emmett, Weber, Braithwaite and Botterill.

Anderson smiles at George and Ali as he exchanges his Japanese bill for fried noodles.

ANDERSON
G’day, I’m Andy, Anderson.

ALI
Hello, Andy, Anderson, I’m Ali.

Anderson turns to George.

GEORGE
(Smiles)
Hello again, I’m George.

Stinky prods the prisoners.

STINKY
(Rude)
Oi! Buy, eat, no talk!

Stinky pushes the prisoners away from George and Ali.

Lt. Moritake and guards giggle as they watch their fellow guards force about 20 prisoners to pull the steamroller out of the mud.

The prisoners, emaciated with sickness and malnutrition, struggle hard to move the steamroller.

As the weaker men fall, the guards punch, kick and whip them, causing lacerations across their backs.
George and Ali see Lt. Moritake and the guards laugh, thoroughly entertained at the show of brutality being performed on the prisoners.

George turns to Ali.

GEORGE
Do you think they’ll finish this airstrip?

ALI
I hope not.

LATER

as the sun glares down mercilessly, the prisoners are forced to march up and down the strip compacting the surface with their worn out and torn boots. Their feet are swollen with ulcers.

Ali and George watch helplessly.

ALI
This is all about race and hate, George. Some of these Formosan guards are worse than the Japs.

George looks at Ali.

GEORGE
Australia and England are powerful countries. Why don’t they fight the Japs and rescue their men?

ALI
(Shakes his head)
I don’t know.

EXT. THE LI’S HUT – NIGHT

George is well groomed, leans his bicycle against a tree, and nervously adjusts his shirt collar and tie.

A neatly dressed Ali turns to George.

ALI
Did you bring anything?
GEORGE
(Shakes his head)
No.

Ali looks at him, sighs.

GEORGE
What?

ALI
It’s customary to bring the
girl a gift.

George looks at Ali awkwardly.

Ali dips his hand into his shirt pocket, and hands George
a small box, shaking his head, sighs.

ALI
I know you too well, George.

George takes the box, looking at it curiously.

GEORGE
What is it?

ALI
Perfume for the girl.

Ali turns to the hut and yells.

ALI
Li Onn!

The door creaks open.

Li Onn emerges, giggling, slightly inebriated.

LI ONN
Ali, come in, come in.

INT. LI’S HUT – LIVING AREA – NIGHT

Kong and Ling are seated at the round table, giggling as
they see George and Ali enter.

Ali turns to Li Onn.
ALI
Li Onn, you remember my friend, George?

LI ONN
Yes, welcome, George.

George smiles and shakes Li Onn’s hand.

GEORGE
Thank you, Sir.

KITCHEN
Kwan Yi checks the rice steaming in the cooker.
Ching is at the wok stir-frying vegetables.

KWAN YI
(Smiles)
He’s here.

Ching smiles at her mother, blushing slightly.

KWAN YI
This is the first time we have a European in the house.
(Turns to Ching)
And, he’s here to meet you.

CHING
He’s Eurasian, Ma.

KWAN YI
Eurasian? What’s that?

CHING
His Pa is Chinese and his Ma’s English and Malay.

LIVING AREA
Li Onn looks at George, giggling, impressed with his good manners, turns to the kitchen.

LI ONN
Kwan Yi.

Kwan Yi emerges from the kitchen, drying her hands with her apron, smiling.
LI ONN
(To Kwan Yi)
You remember George?

George shakes the woman’s hand, smiling.

GEORGE
Mrs. Li.

Kwan Yi smiles kindly at George as she shakes his hand, noticing how well dressed he is.

KWAN YI
Yes, yes, George, the boy who walked Ching and Kong home. Thank you and welcome.

Ching emerges from the kitchen.

All eyes are on Ching, as she blushes brightly.

Kong and Ling giggle cheekily at her.

Ali nudges George, indicating the gift.

George looks at Ali, dips his fingers into his shirt pocket, and hands Ching the gift.

GEORGE
(Smiling brightly)
For you.

Ching takes the gift.

CHING
Thank you.

The Li family, and George and Ali, sit down to dinner of stir-fried vegetables, rice and meat with bowls and chopsticks.

Ali nudges George.

George looks at Li Onn and Kwan Yi.

GEORGE
(Nervous)
Mr and Mrs Li.

Li Onn and Kwan Yi look at George.
GEORGE  
(Clears his throat)  
I would like your permission  
if I may ...  
(looks at Ching)  
to be Ching’s friend and take  
her out sometimes.

Suddenly, a pig squeals loudly outside, startling everyone.

EXT. FENCED ENCLOSURE – NIGHT

Ali, George, Ching, Li Onn and Kwan Yi rush in, out of breath, they stare at Stinky and Hideo savagely beating the squealing pig with clubs.

KWAN YI  
(Yells)  
You don’t touch my pig!

Stinky moves towards Kwan Yi with the club in his hand.

Ali steps forward, shielding Kwan Yi from the guard and raising his arms.

ALI  
Take, take the pig.

Stinky slams his club onto the pig, killing it.

INT. THE LI’S HUT – NIGHT

Li Onn and Kwan Yi lie on their bunk, staring at the ceiling.

KWAN YI  
We can’t just let the Japs  
come and take what they want,  
Onn.

LI ONN  
(Sighs)  
They’d do more damage if we  
stopped them, Yi.

Kwan Yi turns to Li Onn.
KWAN YI
Do you think George is good for Ching?

LI ONN
Lo has asked for her hand.

KWAN YI
That would make it easier. Lo is poor and Chinese like us.

Li Onn giggles.

LI ONN
He called me sir.

KWAN YI
He has nice clothes, good looking boy, too.

Kwan Yi looks at Li Onn.

KWAN YI
How much of that moonshine have you had?

Li Onn giggles.

INT. LONGHOUSE – NIGHT

George enters.

Mary looks at him.

MARY
(Concerned)
Where have you been, George?
It’s almost midnight.

George smiles.

GEORGE
I went to see my girl, Mummy.

MARY
George, I told you ...

George interrupts, taking off his tie.
GEORGE
(Insists)
Mummy, Ching is the girl for me.

George sits in his sleeping space, takes his shirt and trousers off, and lies down to sleep.

LATER
Mary tosses and turns.
She gets up.
George is snoring.
Flora edges close to George, looking at him longingly.
Slowly, she slips her hand into her nightgown and caresses her breasts, her abdomen and crotch.
Then, disgusted with herself, she tears away.

DOORWAY
Flora is surprised to see Mary sitting on the steps, staring out into the darkness.

FLORA
Ma?

Mary turns to Flora.

MARY
Flora, come sit.

Flora goes to Mary, and sits.

MARY
(Slowly)
I’m thinking about what Paul said.

Flora looks at Mary.

EXT. STREAM # 1 – DAY

Arthur drops a fishing line into the water as he smiles at George and Ben.
George and Ben also drop their fishing lines into the water.

ARTHUR
(Looks at Ben)
George will be ok, Mr. Huang.
Don’t worry.

George turns to his father.

GEORGE
I don’t want to do this, Pa.

George sees tears fill his father’s eyes.

BEN
(Slowly)
I haven’t been a good father, George. I didn’t know how to feel when the Japs took your brothers away. Every inch of me wanted to protect them,
(Quivers)
but I just froze.

Ben looks at his son, swallowing the spasm in his throat.

BEN
Every part of me says it’s wrong to want revenge. Revenge belongs to the Lord, says the good book, or let justice takes its course.
(Shakes his head)
Maybe there’s no God or justice in war.
(Quivers)
I can’t let Don and Paul’s death be for nothing.
(Stares at George)
You understand, Son?

George looks at his dad, nods.

BEN
I know you’ll survive very well in the jungle. That’s all you have to do, Son ... survive.

George and Ben look at each other.
Ben reaches for his son and takes him into his arms, holds him tight, as tears roll down his face.

EXT. MARKET PLACE – DAY

Mary, Anne, Rose and Lizie are looking at wilted fruit and vegetables at a stall.

Flora sees Lo in the crowd, turns to the others.

FLORA
Wait here.

Flora goes to Lo.

FLORA
Lo, hey, Lo.

Lo turns to Flora, smiling widely.

LO
Flora, how are you?

FLORA
Good, Lo.
(Inquisitive)
Lo, do you know a girl named Ching?

LO
You mean the Li’s girl, Ching?

FLORA
Uhh, her father owns a rubber plantation.

LO
(Nods)
Ya, I know her.
(Turns and points)
That’s her there.

Flora turns, sees Ching and Kwan Yi selling vegetables.

She glares at Ching.

She gets herself together, turns to Lo, smiling.

FLORA
What do you know about her?
Lo smiles.

LO
Well, I’m her man. I’ve asked her father for her hand.

FLORA
(Pleasantly surprised)
Oh, good!

The smile on Lo’s face dissipates.

LO
But,
(Shakes his head sadly)
I can’t marry her.

FLORA
(Frowns)
Why not?

LO
I don’t have the money to pay for the wedding.

FLORA
(Without hesitation)
I’ll give you the money.

Lo’s jaw drops, amazed.

LO
Flora, I’m a poor man. I can never pay you back.

Flora smiles, patting Lo on the back.

FLORA
Consider it a gift. You’re a good man, Lo. I want you to be happy.

Flora sees Mary and the others at Ching’s stall.

She and Lo go to them.

Lizie, Rose and Anne see Lo and Flora approaching.
ROSE
(Whispers to Lizie and Anne)
I can’t stand the sight of that man.

They giggle.

LO
(Smiles)
Hi, girls.

The girls turn to one another, rolling their eyes, ignoring him.

Lo looks at Mary.

LO
Mrs. Huang.

Ching glares at Lo as Mary turns to him.

MARY
Lo, how are you?

LO
(Smiling)
Okay, ma’am. Any odd jobs at your property?

MARY
(Shakes her head)
No... maybe after the war.

Mary picks up a couple bunches of fresh green vegetables.

MARY
(To Ching, bluntly)
How much?!

Ching smiles.

CHING
Ten cents, ma’am.

Mary buys them from Ching, sneering at her and Kwan Yi.

MARY
You people smell!

Ching and Kwan Yi’s jaws drop as they stare at Mary.
EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

About 10 American bombers roar in the sky, raining down bombs, exploding in the trees and on the ground before the sirens blare.

SUPER: “OCTOBER 1944”

Men, women and children scream as they scurry from their huts.

EXT. AIRSTRIP CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

Bombs blast a fleet of Japanese aircraft and their arsenal, spraying metal parts everywhere.

INT. HOSHIJIMA’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Captain Hoshijima is naked except for his loincloth hanging between his legs as he hurriedly gets into his pants.

He screams for his Lieutenant.

    CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
    Moritake! Moritake!
    (Heads to the door)
    Moritake!

The door bursts open as Captain Hoshijima slips into his shirt.

Lt. Moritake enters.

Captain Hoshijima and Lt. Moritake stare at one another, trembling as they and everything else rock and shake with the explosions outside.

Captain Hoshijima struggles to keep his pants up.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Bombs explode in the trees and on the ground, spraying dirt and debris everywhere as Ben and family, Minna and her children, the medicine man and villagers run into an underground shelter.
MOUTH OF UNDERGROUND SHELTER # 1

Mary watches the bombs explode in the dark jungle as ants crawl up her legs, biting her.

She screams, beating the ants off her.

MARY
Arrrhhhh!

Despite the bombs, Mary dashes out, screaming like crazy, beating the ants.

SHRUBS

Mary screams hysterically as bombs explode around her.

MARY
Arrhh... Hail Mary full of Grace... arrrhh...

MOUTH OF UNDERGROUND SHELTER # 1

The villagers, Ben and family watch in horror as Mary runs madly into shrubs, still beating the ants off her.

They laugh.

BEN
Mary!
(Laughs)

Ben and some of the villagers go after Mary.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

In the commotion of bombs, fire and people screaming and scurrying everywhere, a young BOY is lost, bewildered, screaming for his mother.

BOY
Mama! Mama! Mama!

George, armed with a rifle and knapsack on his back, sees the boy.

As he tries to grab the boy, a piece of shrapnel slices into the boy’s tiny body, killing him.

George freezes.
ALI, also armed with a rifle and knapsack on his back, grabs George and pulls him away.

Japanese soldiers bearing firearms rush frantically everywhere.

UNDERGROWTH

George is in a frenzy, firing a machine gun, tears streaming down his face as he mows down dozens of Japanese soldiers.

GEORGE
(Screams)
Arrhhhh!

Ali, along side George, Arthur and others anxiously blast the Japanese soldiers with grenades, sending body parts flying into the bushes.

EXT. PRISON CAMP - CAGES - NIGHT

Weak and crammed together, the prisoners are ecstatic, cheering loudly as the pitch-black jungle ignites with bombs exploding, and sounds of machine guns rattling in the dark.

Some of trees are ablaze.

INT. PRISONERS’ HUT - NIGHT

Braithwaite, Anderson, Campbell, Botterill, Webber, Emmett and many others lean out the window, laughing and cheering as the bombers roar overhead.

CAMPBELL
(Laughs)
It’s the bloody Yanks!

WEBBER
Cooooeee.

BOTTERILL
Bloody marvellous!
(Laughs)

Suddenly, a violent explosion rocks the hut, throwing the men on the floor, on the bunks and against the walls.
EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

George, Ali and the Volunteer Force move in the dark, advancing towards the enemy.

INT. UNDERGROUND SHELTER # 2 - NIGHT

Ching, her family and Lo, and many others huddle together as dirt and debris rain down on them.

As the bombs explode above ground, shaking, rattling everyone and everything around them, a hand is slowly writing the word, “Tree” on a soiled piece of paper.

CHING (OS)
Tree.

Ching smiles at Ling, handing her the pencil.

CHING
Here, you try it.

Ling takes the pencil, and writes, “Tree”.

LING
(Excited)
Tree!

CHING
(Smiles)
Very good, now write what I showed you yesterday.

Ching turns her head to the walls vibrating around her as Ling writes, then she drops her eyes back on the paper and sees “George”.

CHING
(Gasps)
Ling!

Ling giggles.

LING
(Looks at Ching)
What’s school like?

CHING
The nuns didn’t teach us much. Just plenty of chores.
The bombing stops.

Slowly, dirty and terrified faces of men, women and children emerge from the dirt, their frightful eyes wait for more explosions.

Ching gets up slowly, checking on her parents, younger brother and sister, patting dirt off them.

Lo is in the background, terrified.

INT. HOSHIJIMA’S QUARTERS – NIGHT

The ashen-faced Japanese officers stand rigidly to attention.

CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA (OS)
(Nodding)
Yes, General, yes, yes, General.

Captain Hoshijima hangs up the phone as he gets up. His face blushes with rage, he slams his fist on the desk.

CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
(Screams)
No surrender!

EXT. DIRT TRACK – NIGHT

It’s quiet and smokey, some of the shrubs are still ablaze.

Ching, her family, Lo and others walk closely together, anxious at the devastation around them.

As they walk, they see burnt bodies parts of dozens of Japanese soldiers in the shrubs.

George emerges from the shrub, filthy from the fighting, looking at Ching.

GEORGE
Ching.

Ching is startled, as George moves to her.

GEORGE
(Softly)
I had to see you.
Ching looks at George, as he takes her hands into his.

GEORGE
I’m a Private in the Volunteer Force. It won’t be for long.

Lo watches them jealously.

LO
Ching!

Ching looks at Lo and her family.

George glares at Lo.

Ching turns to George, looking into his eyes as he looks lovingly into hers.

CHING
I must go, George.

GEORGE
I’ll be back, Ching.

Ching nods, smiling slightly.

George watches her go to her family, then glares again at Lo.

EXT. SHRUBS – NIGHT

George and Ali sit, leaning against a tree, resting their rifles on their laps.

George looks up at the smoke clouding out the moon, turns to Ali.

Ali looks George.

ALI
You have a good aim, I saw the way you gunned down those Japs.

GEORGE
I’d rather be with Ching, Ali.

Suddenly, Japanese soldiers ambush the Volunteer Force, startling George and Ali.
George and Ali scramble in the dark.

George runs into a soldier and freezes.

The soldier aims his rifle at George.

Ali fires at the soldier, then grabs George.

George and Ali run, hurdling over small bushes.

Out of breath, Ali and George keep low in the bushes, watching the exchange of fire between the Japanese and the Volunteer Force.

Suddenly, Japanese soldiers pounce on them.

In the struggle, George shoots a soldier as Ali lunges at the other with his knife.

More soldiers charge towards George and Ali as they dive into the bushes, scurrying, crawling in the undergrowth, then taking off into the dark with Japanese soldiers hot in pursuit.

INT. HOSHIJIMA’S QUARTERS – DAY

A map of British North Borneo is spread out on the table.

CAPTAIN TAKUO (OS)
(Stern)
The General has given the order!

A handsome CAPTAIN TAKUO, 40s, glares at Captain Hoshijima.

CAPTAIN TAKUO
Captain Hoshijima you are relieved of your duties!

Captain Hoshijima hangs his head in shame as Lt. Moritake, a hard-faced, bespectacled CAPTAIN YAMAMOTO, 40s, Stinky and Ugly stare at their new captain.

CAPTAIN TAKUO
We will move the prisoners from this camp!

Captain Takuo moves to the map on the table.
CAPTAIN TAKUO
The natives we hired to cut out a track have done their jobs well. We follow this route. (Points on the map)
The prisoners must construct a road from here, Ranau to (Points) here, Tuaran, then on to (Points) Jesselton.

Stinky looks at Captain Takuo.

STINKY
Captain Takuo, Ranau is 165 miles from here. How would we get the men there?

Captain Takuo looks at Stinky.

CAPTAIN TAKUO
(Deliberately)
We march them there!

Captain Takuo turns Captain Yamamoto.

CAPTAIN TAKUO
Captain Yamamoto, you take charge of 500 men. March them in parties of ten, fifty men in each. One party leaves a day after the other.

UGLY
What about the rest of the men, Sir?

CAPTAIN TAKUO
They stay here as targets for their allied bombs!

INT. HOSHIJIMA’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Captain Hoshijima sits at a small table, throwing saki down his throat, and staring at the photograph of his wife in his hand.

He gasps, as tears fill in his eyes.
CAPTAIN HOSHIJIMA
(Whispers)
My sweet wife, this is my fate.
I cannot come home to you.

EXT. JUNGLE – DAY

In the shrubs, a Japanese soldier grasping dearly to his rifle, sweat dripping from his face, stares anxiously around him.

Suddenly, a hand from behind cups his mouth, and breaks his neck.

George runs from the bushes, heaving heavily, looking at Ali and the dead soldier.

George and Ali’s hair and beard are longer now.

It begins to rain.

Ali grabs the dead soldier’s rifle and ammunition.

EXT. SMALL CAVE – DAY

A collection of rifles and ammunition is piled in the background.

Ali looks at George as they eat their rations of sardines and rice.

George turns to Ali.

GEORGE
What?

ALI
(Gently)
You know this jungle well, George.

George stares at Ali.

ALI
Use it to your an advantage.

George and Ali look at one another.
GEORGE
(Slowly)
I don’t want to be here, Ali, but I can’t disobey my father. My mother would not be happy unless I do as she says, marry the girl she has chosen for me.

ALI
You don’t want that?

George shakes his head.

GEORGE
No. I love Ching.
(Serious)
I must stay alive for her.

EXT. DENSE JUNGLE – DAY

Heavy rain drenches the majestic rainforest.

EXT. TRACK THROUGH JUNGLE – DAY

Rain pours onto overflowing puddles of water.

Muddy feet in rubber slippers, soggy and worn out leather boots, and bare swollen feet with ulcers tread through the puddles as heavy rain beats down on the thin and sick prisoners with wet matted hair and beards.

Some of the men are coughing, sneezing and wheezing.

SUPER: “SANDAKAN TO RANAU DEATH MARCH, JANUARY 1945”.

Like beasts of burden, the prisoners bear heavy loads of ammunition slung on their chests, bags of rice and military equipment on their backs.

Some of the men carry packed boxes slung on carrying poles, one man at each end, as they negotiate the slippery path and sharp rises.

Japanese officers and guards, equalling the number of prisoners, prod them along like cattle. Suddenly, sounds of gunshots pierce the air.

The men lift their heads to the sounds echoing in the trees.
INT SMALL CAVE – DAY

George opens his eyes, sits up.

GEORGE
Did you hear that?

Ali sits up too.

ALI
Ya.

EXT. SWAMP – DAY

The rain has ceased, humidity fills the air.

A huge python slithers down a tree as orang-utans dangle and shriek in the branches high above.

Black leeches on blades of grass and rotting wood wave their “tails”, sensing the movements of the men, then leap onto their human hosts.

A deer pricks up its ears, looking at the barely recognisable prisoners as they trek wearily knee-deep in the mud.

Botterill stops, gasping for air and coughing as a big stick slams onto his back. He tumbles into the mud.

GUARD (OS)
Prisoner Botterill, no stop!

As Botterill struggles to his feet, more prisoners slip and fall with the heavy rice bags and equipment.

The guards beat them mercilessly with rifle butts, sticks and fists.

Botterill sees dark red lines on the back of some of the men’s legs.

He quickly checks his arms and legs, and sees slimy black leeches clinging onto him.

A shot rings out, startling Botterill.

The deer lies dead on the ground with a gunshot wound to its head.
A guard raises his rifle in triumph, laughing, then gestures with his rifle at a sick prisoner to pick up the dead deer.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

George and Ali, with rifles draped over their shoulders, come upon about 100 bodies of Australian prisoners with gun shot wounds, some of the dead men’s eyes stare at them.

ALI
These men are from the Mile 8 camp.

GEORGE
What are they...

ALI
George, look.

Ali points to the mountain ridge.

George looks up and sees the prisoners struggling with their heavy loads up the steep rise.

SHRUBS

Camouflaged in the undergrowth, George and Ali watch the prisoners struggling on the track above them, coughing, wheezing and moaning in pain as they go.

A guard urinates on the edge on the track, dribbling onto the foliage, and onto George’s face, startling him.

George sees the guard and slaps the disgusting pee off his face.

GEORGE
(Gritting his teeth)
Bastard!

George uncaps his canister and pours water on his face, washing the pee away.

ALI
(Whispers)
Save the water!
GEORGE
I don’t want Jap piss on my face!

TRACK THROUGH JUNGLE

The prisoners struggle forward.

A sick prisoner carrying a heavy box slung over a pole, slips and tumbles in exhaustion, twisting his friend on the other end of the pole.

SHRUBS

George and Ali see the commotion as the men lose balance and fall, throwing the box over the edge of the track, and the weight of the box drags the men down the steep slope.

The men fall just a few feet from George and Ali.

TRACK THROUGH JUNGLE

The other prisoners burdened with their own exhaustion and heavy loads watch helplessly as the guards force them forward, prodding rifles and bayonets at them.

Officers and guards hurry to the edge of the track and see the two men gasping and moaning in pain at the base of the slope.

SHRUBS

George and Ali see the box lodged on the smaller man’s leg, and the other, a slightly taller man, lying still.

They look up and see an officer gives the order to shoot the men.

The guards aim at the sick and wounded men, and fire.

TRACK THROUGH JUNGLE

Braithwaite sees his party of men struggling ahead.

He slows down, looking around him. There is no one around him. He looks again at the party of men, now a little distance ahead of him.
He stops, cupping his hands over his mouth, muffling his coughs, he’s weak, unable move on. He lowers his load.

A guard appears suddenly, standing over Braithwaite, still coughing uncontrollably.

The guard moves on, then stops, turns and sees Braithwaite crouching over at the edge of the track.

He moves to Braithwaite and stands behind him.

GUARD # 4
Prisoner Braithwaite!

Suddenly, Braithwaite swings around with a large branch, slamming it hard across the guard’s face.

BRAITHWAITE
Arrhh... take that, you bastard!

The guard falls heavily on his back and without hesitation, Braithwaite bludgeons the guard with all the strength he has.

Braithwaite heaves heavily over the unconscious guard, trembling.

BRAITHWAITE
Three fucking years, you
(Gasps)
you made slaves of us, starved us.
(Tears flow from his eyes)
You tortured and murdered my mates. Well, no more!
Arrrrhh!

Enraged, Braithwaite continues bludgeoning the unconscious guard, killing him.

Braithwaite collapses and rolls down the steep slope.

INT. SMALL CAVE - DAY

George lays the smaller man’s lifeless body down, the man’s blue eyes stare at him.

The taller man is gasping weakly as Ali lays him down.
Ali tears open the white man’s already torn shirt and presses on the wound.

George uncaps his canister and hands it to Ali.

Ali tries to give the man water, but the man gasps and moans weakly

Ali and George look at one another, helpless.

Ali searches the man’s pockets, finds only holes.

**ALI**
(Shakes his head)

No ID.

The man moves his mouth.

**ALI**
(Gently)

What’s your name, Sir?

The man just stares.

**EXT. SHRUBS – NIGHT**

Ali marks the two graves with crosses made from tree branches.

George makes the sign of the cross.

**EXT. TRACK THROUGH JUNGLE – DAY**

Three American aircraft roar down low, sending prisoners and guards scurrying for cover.

In the commotion, Campbell, Emmett, Webber, and Anderson, discard their loads and grabbing small bags, take off into the woods.

**SHRUBS**

The aircraft roar over the dense tropical trees.

Ali and George are cheering and laughing, looking up at the bellies of the planes.

**ALI**
(Yells)

Americans!
The roar of the planes drowns out their laughter.

TRACK THROUGH JUNGLE

The aircraft are gone, but Captain Yamamoto’s eyes are fixed to the sky, sliding left and right as he and the guards move on with the prisoners.

Captain Yamamoto turns to LT. TATSUO, 20s.

CAPTAIN YAMAMOTO
Five missing.

Lt. Tatsuo nods, looking skywards.

CAPTAIN YAMAMOTO
(Calmly)
Get them.
(Looks at Lt. Tatsuo, deadly)
No one survives!

Lt. Tatsuo looks at his captain.

LT. TATSUO
(Nods)
Yes, Sir.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The guards spread out in different directions, each clutching onto their rifles, ready to kill.

The guards’ anxious eyes look carefully and deliberately behind giant trees and under bushes.

FURTHER DOWN

Braithwaite staggers forward, parched, exhausted and hungry.

BRAITHWAITE
(Gasping)
Australia, where the hell are ya?

Suddenly, he stumbles and slips into a slimy pond.

Snakes quickly coil onto him.
BRAINTWAITE
(Screams)
Arrrrhhhh!

Camouflagued in the bushes, George and Ali see Braithwaite scurrying out of the pond and staggering towards a tree.

George and Ali move cautiously towards Braithwaite. A large black scorpion crawling on a branch above Braithwaite falls onto his neck, startling him.

BRAINTWAITE
(Shrieks)
Erraahh...

Guards charge from behind the trees, surprising Ali and George.

Ali and George fire at the guards.

A shot hits Ali in the chest.

GEORGE
(Screams)
Ali!

Ali and the guards drop to the ground as George dives for cover, crawling into thick bushes.

Lt. Tatsuo and guards charge forward, and see Ali alongside their fellow guards on the ground, dead.

Lt. Tatsuo looks at Ali’s face.

He turns and glares at the bushes.

UNDERGROWTH

George keeps rigidly still as the guards brush against the foliage just inches from him.

LT. TATSUO (OS)
(Loud)
Whoever gets in the way of the Imperial Japanese Army, dies!
NIGHT

George sits by Ali’s body, sobbing quietly, as he takes his shirt off and covers Ali’s face.

Tears stream down George’s face as he looks into the darkness, listening and clutching onto his rifle.

EXT. RIVER BANK – DAY

George pulls his head out of the water.

His hair and beard are long and matted now, and his clothes are torn and tattered.

FURTHER DOWN

Braithwaite keeps low in the tall grass, trying to stay awake as hungry crocodiles move in the water.

From behind a large tree, George sees Braithwaite in the bushes. He also sees Lt. Tatsuo and guards just a few feet from Braithwaite, watching the crocodiles.

LT. TATSUO
(Points at the crocodiles)
These ugly things will eat them.
(Laughs)

George disappears into the bushes.

SHRUBS

George works quickly, cutting thin and thick vines from the trees

RIVER BANK

George picks berries from the bushes and eats. He hears a swishing sound, turns and sees a small native man paddling down the river.

He goes to the water’s edge, looking cautiously around him as he waves to the man.

The man steers the boat towards George.

George goes to the man.
GEORGE
(Points)
There is a white man in a bad way downstream.

The native nods.

GEORGE
Japs are everywhere.

Suddenly, shots hit the boat, grazing George in the thigh. He doubles forward, grabbing his thigh as blood oozes from the wound.

George grimaces in pain, then spins around, firing at the guards as the native turns his boat around quickly and paddles steadily away.

George keeps firing, prompting the guards to go after him.

FURTHER DOWN
Braithwaite stirs as he hears the gun shots.

He pushes himself up with all the strength he has and sees the native paddling towards him.

He gets to his feet, waving to the native.

EXT. UNDERGROWTH – NIGHT
George is chewing, and struggling to keep awake as he slowly binds and threads a vine around several small rocks.

Then, he teases and arranges the ball of vine into a bunch.

He spits out a pulp-like substance from his mouth, and puts it on the wound in his thigh.

He lies down and is asleep in no time.

EXT. JUNGLE – DAY – GEORGE’S DREAM
It’s quiet and everything seems to be in slow motion.

Ching emerges from the shrubs in a wedding gown.
She looks solemn as she moves forward reluctantly, then she turns and moves in another direction.

George, the groom, turns to his best man, Ali.

**GEORGE**

Where’s she going?

George looks at Ching moving away from him.

**GEORGE**

Ching, I’m here.

Ching does not see or hear him.

George goes to her and sees tears run down her sad face.

**EXT. UNDERGROWTH – NIGHT**

George opens his eyes, tears run down his face.

**EXT. SHRUBS – DAY**

George is finishing the bow he is making.

He tries out his new weapon, aiming at a tree a short distance away.

The arrow hits its target.

Then, George moves quietly and cautiously in the bushes.

He sees movements in the undergrowth, readies his bow and arrow.

Slowly, a wild pig emerges, snorting at the ground.

George aims at the pig and shoots.

George moves quietly, carrying the pig over his shoulders.

As he moves, he hears moaning from a thick bush.

He lowers the pig to the ground, readies his bow and arrow.

Slowly and cautiously, he moves to the bush as the moaning gets louder.
George moves forward and sees a young Japanese soldier wearing only a loincloth, shivering and sweating.

George recognises the soldier. It’s Hideo.

George moves to him, aiming his arrow at him, startling him.

HIDEO
(Screams)
Arrhhh! Arrrrhh!

George quickly cups Hideo’s mouth, muffling his screams.

HIDEO
(Muffled)
Arrhh ...

GEORGE
Shut up!

Hideo is hysterical.

George punches him, knocking him out.

George looks at the unconscious soldier’s body twitching, glistening in sweat, and his face blushing with fever.

George looks around him.

All is quiet.

George turns to Hideo, aims the arrow at him, keeps aiming, then lowers his weapon.

George turns, walks a few steps, stops, walks a few steps more, stops, sighs and turns back.

George uncaps his canister and slowly pours water on Hideo’s face, waking him.

Hideo opens his eyes, sees George looking at him and sponging him.

GEORGE
Shhh ...
George unbuckles his knapsack and takes out a small bottle, uncaps it.

GEORGE
Quinine.

George lifts Hideo’s head and gives him the medicine.

SHRUBS
George strips a dead Japanese soldier of his uniform.

UNDERGROWTH
George helps Hideo sit up and dresses him.

Hideo smiles as George lays him down.

Hideo is exhausted and soon falls asleep.

EXT. RIVER BANK – DAY
George collects dried branches, twigs and leaves, covering the ground.

FURTHER DOWN
From behind the bushes, Emmett, Webber and Campbell see a small boat with a roof moving towards them in the river.

They look carefully and see two natives at the paddles.

One of the men is whistling a tune.

EMMETT (OS)
(Whispers)
Psst! Hey!

The men turn their heads as the Australians move from the bushes, waving to them.

The boat moves towards the Australians and as it nears the bank, Lt. Tatsuo and guards appear suddenly from the cover, surprising them.

WEBBER
(Screams)
Ahh ... Shit ... Campbell, Emmett run!
Emmett, Webber and Campbell scurry out of the water.

The guards aim and fire, hitting Webber in the head and Emmett in the chest.

CAMPBELL
(Screams)
Webber, Emmett!

George emerges from the shrubs with his rifle draped over his shoulders, parang strapped to his waist, and grasping his bow and arrows in his hands.

He sees Webber and Emmett face down in the water. The water bubbles with blood around them.

Then, George sees the guards running after Campbell.

George turns and takes off into the woods.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Soldiers emerge from the shrubs, responding to the gunshots.

TALL TREE

George sees a black snake coiled onto a branch as he climbs carefully towards it.

He looks down and sees about 20 soldiers in the shrubs below.

BELOW TALL TREE

A guard stops, looking around him, then slowly looks up and sees George dangling the huge cobra above him.

The snake strikes the guard in the face.

GUARD # 4
Arrhhh ...

George jumps off the tree as the guard drops to the ground, struggling with the snake.

FURTHER UP

Campbell heaves heavily as he struggles to get away from the guards.
The guards charge forward, closing in on Campbell.

Suddenly, George emerges from the foliage with his parang in hand, looking up at the trees.

With one hard blow, he strikes a vine with his parang.

The vine net drops heavily from the trees onto the guards, trapping them.

George takes off and runs right into Lt. Tatsuo.

Lt. Tatsuo fires, hitting George in the shoulder.

George drops to the ground.

GEORGE
Arrhhh ...

As Lt. Tatsuo charges towards him, George doubles forward and with every bit of strength he has, shoves the Lieutenant away with both feet.

Lt. Tatsuo stumbles and falls right into the foliage and onto a mount of ants’ nest.

Large bull ants quickly engulf Lt. Tatsuo, biting him all over.

LT. TATSUO
Arrhhh ... arrhhh ...

George gets up, staggers away, holding onto his shoulder.

EXT. CLEARING # 2 – NIGHT

George glistens with sweat as he and Hideo check the wound on his shoulder.

HIDEO
You lucky wound is clean.

Hideo points at the gash on George’s shoulder, front and back.

George nods, grimaces in pain.

George gets a bandage from his knapsack.

Hideo quickly takes the bandage from him.
George and Hideo look at one another.

Hideo places the bandage on George’s shoulder and starts bandaging the wound.

HIDEO
(Slowly)
I Private Hideo. I shame Japan.
I run away from Japanese Army.
Japanese Officer order me to kill prisoners. I don’t want to kill. You like to kill Japanese?

Hideo looks at George.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE
No.

HIDEO
Japan lose war.
(Shaking his head)
I cannot go home. I seventeen years old. I love girl, Yoshiko.

George looks at Hideo.

HIDEO
I have no honour to marry Yoshiko.
(Tears fill his eyes)
You love girl?

George nods as Hideo finishes bandaging his shoulder.

GEORGE
(Softly)
I think of her all the time.

Hideo stares at George.

HIDEO
You kill me.

George looks at Hideo.
EXT. JUNGLE - TALL TREE - DAY

George sits inconspicuously in the foliage on a large branch, looking carefully in the shrubs below and at the river.

RIVER BANK

Campbell, wearing only a loincloth is delirious, staggers forward.

    CAMPBELL
    (Gasping)
    Mum ...

He falls, hits his head on a log, and passes out.

A wild pig snorting in the bushes, comes across a blob of dark matted hair, sniffs down on the thin man’s arm and legs, then bites into a wound.

Campbell screams.

    CAMPBELL
    Arrrhhh!

Campbell sits up, grabbing a dead branch and slams it on the pig.

The pig squeals away.

TALL TREE

George turns to the sound of Campbell’s screams and sees the pig squealing away.

He turns to the shrubs and sees Japanese soldiers charging towards the river.

He readies his bow and arrow.

RIVER BANK

Campbell is near collapse as he sees two natives in a small boat paddling towards him.
TALL TREE

George sees soldiers charging towards the river and turning to the river, he sees the natives still paddling towards Campbell.

George turns back to the shrubs, and sees the soldiers stumble right into the covered slimy pond.

The soldiers scream as slimy snakes coil onto them.

George smiles.

RIVER BANK

Campbell staggers into the river towards the small boat moving towards him.

CAMPBELL
(Weakly, gasping)
Brother! Brother! Bro...

Campbell collapses into the water face down.

A strong pair of hands lifts Campbell’s thin body with his long wet and matted hair like a piece of rag from the water.

TALL TREE

George sees the natives take Campbell into their small boat and paddle away.

EXT. CLEARING # 2 - DAY

Hideo smiles as he sees George walk towards him.

HIDEO
(Smiling)
George, I catch rabbit.

Hideo goes to the fireplace and digs out bundles of cooked rabbit wrapped in banana leaves.

Hideo hands George a bundle.

Hideo looks at the scruffy looking George as they eat and drink.
GEORGE

What?

Hideo smiles.

HIDEO

You want cut hair and shave?
I barber. I make you handsome
for girl.

George looks at Hideo.

Then, locks of long dark matted hair drop to the ground as Hideo cuts George’s hair and beard.

At times, the blade comes dangerously close to George’s throat.

Hideo gets gel from a plant, rubs the gel on George’s face, and gives him a close shave.

Hideo finishes the shave and looks at George.

HIDEO

(Smiling widely)
Ahh ... girl will love you.

George looks at Hideo.

GEORGE

We go back to Sandakan tonight.

Hideo’s smile dissipates.

George gets up, bends forward and wipes his face on his shirt.

Hideo looks at George.

HIDEO

I dishonour Japan, dishonour
(Gasps)
Yoshiko. I must die here.
(Serious)
I want you kill me!

George looks at Hideo, shaking his head and frowning.

GEORGE

No.
Hideo drops to his knees, gasping, then glares at George and lunges at him.

HIDEO
Arrhhh!

George and Hideo roll on the ground, wrestling and punching into one another.

George pushes Hideo to the ground as he gets up.

HIDEO
(Screams)
I must die here! Why you can kill other Japanese and not me?
(Demands)
Why?!

George looks at Hideo.

HIDEO
(Pleads)
Leave me here, leave gun for me.
Please, George.

George looks at Hideo, then gets his rifle, unloads it, throws the bullets into the bushes and tosses the rifle to Hideo.

HIDEO
Thank you.

George turns to leave.

HIDEO
Live long happy life, George.

George stops and turns to Hideo, nods.

EXT. SHRUBS - DAY

George digs into the ground with his bare hands, and unearths a small stockpile of rifles and ammunition.

SMALL CLEARING # 2 - DAY

George stands at a grave, the handmade wooden cross with a simple scratching reads, “Ali”.
GEORGE
(Gently)
Ali, I’m going home now.

Then, George’s body flinches as a loud bang echoes in his ears.

George stares at Ali’s grave, he starts trembling, and drops to his knees.

He gets up, goes to the bushes and picks up a rusty shovel.

He starts to dig and dig and dig.

NIGHT
George lays Hideo’s body in the grave.

EXT. JUNGLE – NIGHT
George is exhausted as he moves quietly through the tall grass.

He is well armed with a rifle in hand, ammunition and bow and arrows strapped over his shoulders, and knapsack on his back.

He stops at a bush.

UNDERGROWTH – NIGHT
George crawls in, dragging his knapsack, ammunition, rifle, bow and arrows with him.

George lies down and closes his eyes.

EXT. RICE FIELD – DAY – GEORGE’S DREAM
Ling and Kong run in the tall grass as Ching chases them.

George smiles as he watches them.

Ching turns back smiling, waving at George.

CHING
George.
(Giggles)
George.
George chases Ching, they run and play in the field, laughing.

George catches Ching.

George embraces Ching dearly, and looking into her eyes. Ching smiles brightly at him.

George and Ching kiss.

EXT. UNDERGROWTH — DAY

George opens his eyes, and rolls over on his side. George stays there quietly, thinking, smiling.

EXT. JUNGLE — DAY

Gripping onto his rifle, George moves quietly and cautiously.

He comes upon about 50 decomposing bodies of Australian prisoners with gunshot wounds to their heads and bodies. Flies are buzzing and maggots are wriggling on the bodies.

EXT. STREAM # 2 — DAY

George soaks in the clear water in the undergrowth with his eyes closed. The wounds on his thigh and shoulder are healing nicely.

Suddenly, a loud gunshot pierces the air, startling him.

EXT. JUNGLE — DAY

Armed with his gear and clutching onto his rifle, George moves cautiously.

He comes upon Stinky and Ugly, dead with gunshot wounds on their heads and their rifles by their side in the tall grass.

Then, George comes upon a grave. The scratching on the cross reads “ANDERSON”.
GEORGE
(Whispers)
Andy? Anderson?

George stares at Andy’s grave.

TALL TREE # 2 – DAY

George puts his gear down on a large strong branch.

He looks hard to the ground and shrubs below, sees only
the foliage swaying in the wind.

He looks into the trees around him, and sees monkeys
shrieking and swinging from branch to branch, and from
tree to tree.

Then, he hears a plane in the distance.

He leans forward and gazes hard into the distance,
listening, then sees hundreds of leaflets fall out of the
plane.

SUPER: “AUGUST, 1945”

The leaflets glitter in the sun as they fly, swaying and
falling in the wind.

George’s eyes survey the ground below, looking as far as
he can see, nothing moves, but the foliage swaying in the
wind.

EXT. JUNGLE – DAY

Armed with his gear, George runs, breaking into giggles,
then laughter.

GEORGE
I’m almost home.
(Gasps)
Ching, I’m almost home.

George keeps running, hurdling over small bushes,
discard his rifle, ammunition and knapsack.

His laughter turns to tears.

Tears stream from his eyes as he runs and runs and runs.
EXT. JUNGLE – NIGHT

George keeps walking, eating tropical fruit and drinking from his canister.

Hours later, George staggers forward, then drops to his knees.

GEORGE
(Gasping)
Ching, I am so tired.

George drops to his side.

EXT. JUNGLE – DAY

Monkeys play and shriek in the trees as a small leaflet sway and float in the wind like a kite.

Slowly, the leaflet falls down, down, down, and lands on George’s face.

George scratches his face, opening his eyes and sees the leaflet in his hand.

George sits up and looks at the leaflet, it reads, “JAPAN SURREnders”

George lies back down, tucks his hands under his head, laughs, then the tears flow.

EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY

The Li’s hut is deserted and the rows of vegetables are overgrown with weed and tall grass.

THE LI’S HUT

George moves to the hut and stops at the door.

GEORGE
Ching.

George pushes the door open.

GEORGE
Ching.

George steps in.
INT. THE LI’S HUT – DAY

George looks around the quiet hut.

He recognises the round table he sat down to dinner with Ching and her family, and Ali about a year ago.

He turns his head and sees a small framed photograph of Kwan Yi at an altar and a crucifix, wild flowers and unlit candles by the photograph.

George is motionless, looking at the altar.

EXT. RUBBER PLANTATION – DAY

George moves quietly, looking up at the trees as seeds burst and shower onto the branches as they fall and drop to the ground.

A rubber seed rolls to George’s feet. He picks it up.

George sees Ling emerge from the shrubs.

Ling stops suddenly as she sees George, she runs to him.

LING
George!

GEORGE
(Smiling)
Ling.

Ling hugs George, looking at him.

LING
We thought you’re dead!

George bends over, looking at Ling, smiling.

GEORGE
I’m very much alive, Ling.

LING
I’m going to school soon, George.

George sees Li Onn and Kong moving towards him.

They are clearly surprised to see him.
George goes to them.

GEORGE
Mr. Li ... Kong.

LI ONN
George.

KONG
Hi, George.

George looks at the shrubs.

GEORGE
Where’s Ching?

Ling and Kong look at one other.

LI ONN
She’s not here.

GEORGE
What happened to Mrs. Li?

EXT. SMALL CLEARING # 3 - DAY

The headstone reads “Chong Kwan Yi 1909-1945”.

LI ONN
Pneumonia.

George nods sadly, then turns to Li Onn.

GEORGE
Where’s Ching, Mr. Li?

LI ONN
George, we didn’t think you’d come back.

(Shakes his head)
It’s not a good thing that you see her.

George looks at Li Onn.

GEORGE
I told her I’d be back.

Li Onn looks at George, sighs.
LI ONN
She lives at Mile 3.

EXT. SMALL HUT – DAY

George knocks on the door.

The door opens, Ching emerges from the hut, startled as she sees George.

George smiles lovingly at her.

George
(Softly)
Ching.

Ching is speechless.

Suddenly, Lo yells from inside the hut.

Lo (OS)
(Loud)
Who’s there?!

Lo emerges from behind the door, sees George and frowns angrily at him.

Lo
What are you doing here?!

Lo steps out.

George stares at Lo, then looks back and forth at Ching and Lo, perplexed.

George
(Looking at Ching)
Ching?

Ching trembles as tears well in her eyes.

Lo moves to George.

Lo
(Bluntly, pointing)
You stay away from my wife!

George’s body stiffens as he glares at Lo, his hands clenching into fists.
George’s face twitches with anger, jealousy, hate.

He punches Lo hard.

GEORGE
Arrrrhhh!

Lo tumbles to the ground, hitting his head on a post.

CHING
(Screams)
George!

George stares at Ching in shock, slowly moving backwards. Tears stream down Ching’s face as George moves away from her.

CHING
(Gasping)
George.

EXT. VILLAGE – DAY

George moves miserably with his head down, his eyes fixed on his feet, shuffling forward, one foot in front of the other.

MINNA (OS)
(Anxious)
George! George!

George looks up and sees Minna running anxiously towards him.

MINNA
George!

George stops, looking gently at Minna.

GEORGE
(Softly)
Minna, Ali is dead.

Minna’s body trembles.

George holds her as the villagers move slowly towards them.
GEORGE
I’m sorry, Minna.

Minna sobs in George’s arms.

INT. LONGHOUSE – DAY

George and the medicine man sit opposite each other on the floor. George takes the cup from the medicine man, and drinks.

MEDICINE MAN
Your family is well. They left the day Japan surrendered.

George nods, putting the cup down and gets up.

The medicine man rises to his feet.

GEORGE
(Grateful)
Thank you, Sir, for taking care of my family.

George shakes the man’s hand.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD – PRISON CAMP – DAY

George moves slowly past the “Mile 8” post, staring at the now abandoned rows of huts, guardhouses, small wooden buildings and empty cages that are now overgrown with weed and tall grass.

The barbed wire fences no longer surround the compound.

The cemetery has grown with wooden crosses cluttering the graves.

George turns to the cemetery in the shrubs, graves there too have multiplied.

INT. WOODEN HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY

Mary is washing her china plates and cups.

She looks out the window, then stares as she leans forward.
EXT. WOODEN HOUSE - YARD - DAY
George is walking towards the house with his head down.

INT. WOODEN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY
Still staring, Mary drops the plate.

MARY
(Screams)
George!

Mary runs from her chores as Ben, Lizie and Rose rush in.

MARY
(Loud)
George is home!

EXT. WOODEN HOUSE - YARD - DAY
Mary, Ben, Rose and Lizie hurry to George.

MARY
George!

BEN
George!

Mary wraps her arms around George.

MARY
Ooohhh ... my son ... oohh ...
(Kissing his cheeks)
George forgive me, forgive me.

Mary drops to her knees, sobbing.

George looks at his mother.

Ben too embraces his son.

BEN
Ohh ... George!

Rose and Lizie join in the embrace, tears streaming down their faces.

Mary grabs George’s face with both hands, kissing his cheeks over and over.
George only stares, then he turns to the house and sees Anne at the door smiling at him, and Flora staring at him from her bedroom window.

INT. FLORA’S BEDROOM – DAY

Flora turns around trembling, panicking, her hand cupping her mouth, gasping.

FLORA
(Panics)
Oh, God!

INT. GEORGE’S BEDROOM – DAY

George is fast asleep.

He sleeps and sleeps, lying on his back, turning on his side, and on his back again.

NIGHT

George still sleeps, his eyelids are twitching.

EXT. JUNGLE – DAY – GEORGE’S DREAM

George carries Ching’s lifeless body in his arms as he moves like a zombie through the tall grass and stepping into puddles of water.

He sees decomposing bodies of Australian prisoners in the tall grass as he moves.

The bodies come alive.

DECOMPOSING MEN
(Pleading)
Help, George, help!

George turns and sees Lo receiving gifts from Captain Hoshijima.

Lo turns and looks at George, laughing at him.

Then, Lo lunges at George, wrestling with him for Ching’s body.

LO
(Screams)
Stay away from my wife!
Ali and Hideo emerge from the shrubs with about 50 Japanese soldiers, staring at him.

Some of the soldiers have arrows protruding from their bodies.

Ali moves towards George, looking at Ching and at George’s sad and teary face.

Ali pats George’s shoulder, smiling.

Hideo also moves to George, smiling.

Then, suddenly, an angry Lt. Tatsuo, with red blotches all over him, grabs George by the collar, shaking him.

Lt. Tatsuo’s face contorts with rage as he screams at George.

**LT. TATSUO**

Arrrrhh!!!

INT. GEORGE’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

George’s sweat soaked body glistens in the dark as he screams.

**GEORGE**

Arrrrhh ... oohhh ...arrrrhh!

He wakes suddenly, sits up, his chest heaving heavily.

He gets up and looks around his darkened room.

His body trembles as he sits on his bed.

**GEORGE**

(Gasps, sobs)

Ching ...

George drops his face onto the pillow, muffling his sobs.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. DANCE HALL – NIGHT

Chandeliers glitter in the ceiling and champagne bottles pop as an elegant Chinese woman sings western songs from the 1930s.
Mary and Ben are among the Australian and British officers, and local ladies in exquisite evening gowns, and local gentlemen in evening suits, ties and bow ties, all waltzing to the song.

BOOTH # 1

Lizie sits, watching the woman sing, unimpressed.

   LIZIE
   That’s her.

Rose turns to Lizie.

   ROSE
   Who?

Lizie points to the singer.

   LIZIE
   Michael’s floosey.

Rose and Lizie watch the woman, then look at the audience, and see a well-groomed Chinese man, MICHAEL, 30s, mesmerised by the songstress.

   LIZIE
   (Points)
   There he is.

Then, two dashing officers, one Australian and one British, invite Rose and Lizie to dance.

DANCE FLOOR

George’s mind is elsewhere as he dances with AGATHA, 16, a beautiful raven-haired Eurasian girl.

Agatha looks at George’s sad face.

   AGATHA
   What’s the matter, George?

George smiles at Agatha.

   GEORGE
   You look beautiful tonight, Agatha.

Agatha smiles brightly at George.
Mary and Ben move to George and Agatha.

MARY
(Smiling)
Enjoy Agatha ... George.

Agatha smiles at Mary.

BOOTH # 1

Flora sits alone, smoking and drinking nervously, looking at George and Agatha.

She stubs out her cigarette in the ashtray, grabs her bag and exits.

DANCE FLOOR

AGATHA’S DAD moves to George and Agatha, smiling.

AGATHA’S DAD
(To George)
May I dance with my beautiful daughter?

GEORGE
(Smiling)
Certainly, Sir.

BOOTH # 2

George moves to the table and as he sits, Arthur sees him and yells.

ARTHUR
(Loud)
George!

George turns, smiling brightly as Arthur moves towards him.

GEORGE
(Getting up)
Arthur!

Arthur shakes George’s hand, smiling widely.

ARTHUR
People are talking about you, George. You know that?
GEORGE
No, I slept through the entire month.

They laugh.

Arthur and George sit.

George signals the waiter.

GEORGE
Two beers, please.

The waiter nods.

George turns to Arthur.

GEORGE
What happened to you? We were ambushed, Ali and I took off into the jungle.

ARTHUR
Well, the Japs got most of us. I was wounded. Ali’s family took me in and hid me.

Arthur leans forward.

ARTHUR
Guess who sold us to the Japs ... that Lo-life!

George’s face stiffens at the mention of Lo’s name.

ARTHUR
That bastard is making himself scarce nowadays. A lot of people would like to get their hands on him.

The waiter returns with the beers.

GEORGE
What else did he do?

George and Arthur drink their beers.
ARTHUR
(Leaning forward)
You don’t know?

George looks at Arthur, shaking his head.

ARTHUR
Like I said, George, he passed
information to the Japs about
the Underground.

George frowns as he leans forward.

GEORGE
Lo betrayed my brothers?
(Staring at Arthur, recalling)
That explains the packages.

ARTHUR
What packages?

GEORGE
I saw Lo taking packages from
Hoshijima.

DANCE HALL

Loud clanging of glasses as Mary gets everyone’s
attention. Ben is at her side, smiling as Rose, Lizie and
Anne gather near them.

MARY
Everyone ... everyone.

Everyone stops and looks at Mary as she smiles brightly
looking for George in the audience as Agatha and her
parents move to her.

MARY
George, darling?

Mary sees George at the table with Arthur.

MARY
George, come, come to mummy.
(Turns to Agatha)
Agatha, closer, darling.

George and Agatha move to Mary.
MARY
Everyone, thanks for coming.
    (Gasps, smiles)
As you know, we are celebrating
George’s home-coming.
    (Grasps her chest)
Thank you, God for returning my son
to me and Ben.

Tears well in Mary’s eyes, she wipes her eyes.

MARY
    (Sighs, smiling)
Ben and I have an announcement.
    (Looks at George and Agatha)
We’ve set George and Agatha’s
wedding day!

Agatha blushes brightly as her parents smile happily at
her.

Rose, Lizzie and Anne are stunned, as they stare at one
another, then at George.

George’s body stiffens.

The room spins around him as Agatha smiles brightly at
him, and people applaud and pat him on the shoulders and
back.

Slowly, George turns to Agatha.

GEORGE
    (Softly)
Agatha, I’m sorry.

George turns to Mary and Ben, glares at them, then turns
around and moves towards the exit sign.

AGATHA
    (Anxious)
George?

George walks steadily ahead, not turning back.

MARY (OS)
    (Loud)
George!
George turns to the bar, grabs a bottle of whiskey and exits, leaving everyone to stare at one another.

Rose, Lizie and Anne go after George.

EXT. DANCE HALL ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Rose, Lizie and Anne emerge from the door.

ROSE
(Loud)
George! George!

LIZIE
George!

George is nowhere to be seen.

Mary, Ben, Agatha and her parents emerge from the door.

Mary and Ben look anxiously at one another as Agatha looks at her parents, tears welling in her eyes.

AGATHA
Ma, Pa, what’s happening?

Agatha buries her head in her parents’ arms.

Arthur dashes from the door.

ARTHUR
I’ll look for him.

Rose turns to Arthur.

ROSE
I’ll come with you.

LIZIE
Me too.

EXT. SMALL HUT – NIGHT

The door opens and Lo steps out, drunk.

LO
(Slurring)
What do you want?

Then, he smiles brightly.
LO
Oh, Flora.

Flora is anxious and scared.

FLORA
Lo, you must leave.

LO
Why?

FLORA
George will find out ... 

Lo interjects.

LO
George?
(Laughs)
That mummy’s boy?!
(Laughs, slurring)
He wouldn’t have the guts to face me. If he bothers you, come tell Lo.

Lo sneers, beating his chest.

LO
I’ll fix him.

INT. SMALL HUT – NIGHT

Lo pours whiskey into a glass, and throws it down his throat.

Ching is in a dark corner watching him.

Lo glares at Ching as he moves to her.

LO
(Angry, yells)
Why can’t you get pregnant?!

Lo slaps Ching hard, knocking her into the wall.

LO
I should take you back to your father and trade you in for your little sister!
Ching trembles as she gets up, blood trickles from the side of her mouth.

Lo shoves her to the floor and unbucks his belt.

\text{LO} \\
\text{You don’t even moan when I give it to you!}

Ching moves back, taking aim as Lo drops his pants, then kicks him hard in the balls.

Stunned, Lo drops to the floor.

Ching quickly rises to her feet as Lo crouches over, moaning in pain.

\text{LO} \\
\text{Ohhh ...}

\text{CHING} \\
\text{Who’s moaning now, Lo?}

\text{EXT. SMALL HUT – NIGHT}

Ching bursts out the door, and takes off into the dark.

\text{EXT. GRAVEL ROAD – NIGHT}

George takes a few mouthfuls of whiskey, then throws the bottle into the shrubs.

Headlights shine on the road as the car slows down, honking at George.

He turns around, squinting at the bright lights.

The car doors open, Rose, Lizie and Arthur step out.

\text{ROSE} \\
\text{(Running to George)} \\
\text{George!}

George drops to his knees.

Rose and Lizie console their brother, tears welling in their eyes.

Arthur looks on helplessly.
GEORGE
Why did she marry that bastard?!
What does he have that I haven’t?
(Looks at Rose and Lizie)
What? Rose, Lizie ...  
(Yells)
What?!

INT. FLORA’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Flora is on her knees, fingerling her rosary, praying fervently.

FLORA
Blessed art thou amongst women, 
and blessed is the fruit of thy 
womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother 
of God, pray for us sinners, now 
and at the hour of our death, 
Amen.

Flora makes the sign of the cross and gets into bed, anxious.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD – NIGHT

Rose and Lizie look at George.

LIZIE
You really love Ching, don’t you?

George nods, gasping.

ROSE
George, I don’t think Ching 
had a say in marrying Lo. 
Flora gave him money to pay 
for the wedding.

George glares at Rose, grabbing her arms.

GEORGE
Flora gave Lo money to marry 
Ching? Why?!

ROSE
He had no money.
LIZIE
Flora talked mummy into getting you into the Volunteer Force too. Daddy couldn’t say no.

George is flabbergasted, gets up, and races off into the dark.

GEORGE
(Screams)
Flora! Flora!

INT. FLORA’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Flora is nodding off to sleep as the door bursts open.

Flora jerks right up.

George stares at Flora, his chest heaving heavily, scaring the crap out of her.

George jumps on Flora, straddling her as he grabs her neck, shaking her.

GEORGE
(Yelling)
Flora, why?! (Demands) Tell me why?!

George glares at Flora, choking her.

Ed is woken up by the noise, sees George straddling and shaking his mother, starts crying.

Flora’s eyes bulge open as she gasps for air.

GEORGE
Why did you give Lo money to marry Ching? Why did you talk ma into drafting me?

George loosens his grib on Flora’s throat.

Flora gasps loudly, then spits at George.

FLORA
(Screams)
Kill me then, mummy’s boy!
GEORGE  
(Gritting his teeth)  
Don’t tempt me, Flora!

George squeezes Flora’s neck until her eyes roll back, then releases.

Flora gasps loudly.

Rose, Lizie, Arthur, Anne, Mary and Ben rush to the door, horrified to see George on top of Flora.

MARY  
George!

Ed runs to Mary.

FLORA  
(Screams)  
I ... I had to get you away ...  
away from me!

George glares at Flora.

FLORA  
(Loud)  
I need a man!

Flora forces George aside, tears from the bed, and glares at Mary and Ben, and the others.

FLORA  
(Screams)  
I need a man!!

George grabs Flora by the arms, pushing her against the wall.

GEORGE  
Why did you give Lo money to marry Ching?

FLORA  
I hate her! Lo had already asked her father for her hand. I gave him the money to pay for the wedding so  
(Yells)  
(MORE)
FLORA (CONT’D)
you can’t marry her!
(Gasps)
Oh God, forgive me!

George pushes Flora aside.

GEORGE
(Mad)
I’m going to kill him!

Mary gasps.

MARY
George, no!

George glares at his mother.

GEORGE
(Loud)
Don’t get in my way, mother!
Don’t you even try!

George turns to Arthur.

GEORGE
Arthur, get the women who are widowed by Lo’s betrayal, take them to Ali’s village and wait for me.

Arthur nods.

Ben looks at George.

EXT. SHRUBS – NIGHT

Ching is hiding in the dark by the gravel road, trembling, crying.

She sees George running to her hut.

GEORGE
(Loud)
Lo! Lo!

INT. SMALL HUT – NIGHT

Lo is at the table, still holding his groin.
GEORGE (OS)
Lo! Come out and face me!

EXT. SMALL HUT - NIGHT

The door creaks open, Lo emerges from the house, wielding his parang, and lunges at George.

LO
Arrhh!

George grabs Lo’s arm and quickly forces the parang out of his hand.

George punches Lo hard and grabs him by the neck, ready to break it.

CHING (OS)
George!

As George turns, Lo yanks from George’s grip and takes off into the dark.

George
Ching.

Tears run down Ching’s face.

George takes Ching into his arms.

She sobs and sobs.

Tears run down George’s face too as he holds his girl gently in his arms.

INT. WOODEN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mary, Ben, Anne, Lizie and Rose are waiting anxiously.

The door opens, George enters with Ching.

Mary stares, as Rose, Lizie and Ben gather around George and Ching.

ROSE
(Concerned)
Ching.

Rose and Lizie see the bruises on Ching’s face and the bloodstains in the corner of her mouth.
Mary is flabbergasted, gets up and moves away.

George sees his mother and goes after her.

MARY AND BEN’S BEDROOM

Mary sits on her bed, turns to George as he enters.

MARY
I thought you’d be over her by now!

GEORGE
I don’t understand why you’re so against Ching.

Mary stares at George.

MARY
Chinese people are low people!
We are not like them! We belong with the English!

George looks at his mother, shaking his head.

GEORGE
(Gasps)
I ... I ...

George is dumbfounded.

MARY
The Japs murdered your brothers!
When I see Chinese people, I see Japanese!

GEORGE
I could’ve been murdered too!

Mary stares at George, tears fill her eyes.

MARY
(Quivers)
I only wanted you away from her.
(Shaking her head)
I ... didn’t think ...
(Gasps)
Oh, George, forgive me ... Oh, God, forgive me.
GEORGE
(Slowly)
Well, I’m in love with Ching.

Mother and son stare at one another.

GEORGE
(Curious)
If Chinese people are so low,
why did you marry dad?

Mary looks away.

MARY
(Slowly)
I had no choice. I was in
boarding school at the convent.
Your father picked me.
The nuns said he works for
the English and will provide well
for me.

LIVING ROOM
He goes to Ching as Rose and Lizie make a fuss of her.

LIZIE
(To George)
We’ll take care of her.

George nods and smiles at his sisters.

Then, he turns to Ben.

They look at each other.

GEORGE
Pa, Ma hates the Chinese, and
you married her. Why?

Ben takes a deep breath, look to the ground, then at
George.

BEN
George, we live in a British
Colony. To get ahead, we must
be British.

George frowns at his dad.
EXT. SHRUBS - NIGHT

Lo’s body glistens in the moonlight.

SMALL TREE

George sees Lo hiding in the bushes with his back to him.
George gets a rock from his pocket, throws it at Lo.

SHRUBS

The rock hits Lo, startling him. He scurries to another bush.

    GEORGE (OS)
      Loooo ...

Lo gasps, eyes wide, looking everywhere.

Suddenly, an arrow strikes right at his feet.

    LO
      Uhhh ... 

Lo crawls into the bushes.

SMALL TREE

George wraps a small piece of material onto an arrowhead.

He lights the material and sends the arrow into the bushes.

UNDERGROWTH

The foliage ignites around Lo.

Lo screams, scurrying out of the bushes, and runs right into George.

George grabs his neck.

    LO
      (Trembling)
      Errhhh!
GEORGE
(Slowly)
I had very good training at
breaking necks in the jungle,
Lo. Do you want me to show
you how to do it?

George tightens his grib into Lo’s neck.

Lo gasps, shaking his head, trembling.

GEORGE
I can’t hear you, Lo.

George loosens his grib.

LO
(Gasps)
No ... no ...

GEORGE
(Deliberately)
You passed information to the
Japs about the Underground,
didn’t you, Lo?

Lo stares at George.

George shakes Lo.

GEORGE
Didn’t you, Lo?
(Loud)
Yes or no, Lo?!

Lo only stares, trembling.

GEORGE
You know what, Lo?
(Shakes his head)
I’m not going to kill you.

LO
Ooohh ... George.

GEORGE
But, a lot of women in this town,
whose husbands you betrayed to
the Japs, would love to get their
hands on you.
Lo shakes his head, terrified.

LO
No ... no ...
(Screams)
George, no!

George grabs Lo by the hair.

EXT. VILLAGE – NIGHT

The women and men armed with clubs and parangs have gathered. Arthur is among them.

The campfire crackles and burns brightly before them.

George drags Lo towards the villagers.

George stops and looks at the villagers.

The villagers glare at Lo.

George turns to Lo, grabs him by the collar.

LO
(Gasps)
George ...
(Shaking his head, trembling)
don’t leave me here, please.

George looks at Lo.

GEORGE
Goodbye, Lo.

George pushes Lo to the ground.

LO
(Trembling, screaming)
George! George!

George turns and walks away as the villagers close in on Lo, raining down blows on him.

LO (OS)
(Screams)
Arrhhh ... George ... Arrrhhhh!

George keeps walking.
EXT. STREAM #1 - NIGHT

George and Arthur are sitting on the ground, smoking cigarettes, and watching the water gently flowing by.

Arthur turns to George.

ARTHUR
So, what’s next for you?

GEORGE
(Smiles)
Well, first thing tomorrow, I’m taking Ching out.

George and Arthur giggle.

ARTHUR
I mean, are you going to be the next town magistrate?

GEORGE
(Shakes his head)
No ... no ...
(Looks at Arthur)
I want to plant trees, Arthur. I want a rubber plantation, grow vegetables, flowers
(Smiling widely)
make babies.

Arthur smiles.

GEORGE
You? What do you want to do?

ARTHUR
My dad wants me to run the shop with him.

George exhales the cigarette smoke.

GEORGE
The prisoners Ali and I saw in the jungles, did any of them make it home?

ARTHUR
I heard six were rescued.
EXT. BEACH - DAY

Gentle waves splash on the shore.

George smiles gently at Ching as they walk hand in hand on the sand.

They stop and turn to one another.

George takes Ching’s beautiful face into his hands.

GEORGE
(Softly)
Do you know how in love I’m with you?

Ching looks at George lovingly.

GEORGE
You’re the reason I stayed alive in the jungles, Ching. I wanted so much to come home to you.

Tears well in Ching’s eyes.

GEORGE
Just to ask you to be my girlfriend.

CHING
George, your mother doesn’t like me.

George looks deep into Ching’s eyes.

GEORGE
(Shakes his head)
My mother is not important.
(Softly)
You are.

CHING
George, I didn’t want to marry Lo. (Gasps) I couldn’t disobey my father.

Ching buries her face in George’s chest.

George kisses Ching on the forehead, holding her firmly and safely in his arms.
GEORGE  
(Whispers)  
I love you, Ching, and I want  
to be with you a long, long time.

INT. WOODEN HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY

Mary checks the meatsafe, there’s only a wilted bunch of vegetables.

She checks the pantry, it’s empty and the rice sack is nearly empty.

EXT. WOODEN HOUSE – YARD – DAY

Mary emerges from the door and sees Ben chopping wood. She goes to him.

MARY  
(Worried)  
Ben, we’re out of food.

Ben stops, and turns to Mary.

MARY  
No one is selling at the market.

EXT. RUBBER TREE – DAY

George cuts clumsily into the bark. Ching giggles at him.

CHING  
Here.

Ching takes the dagger from George.

CHING  
This way.

Ching cuts into the bark expertly. Latex quickly fills the gash and runs into the cup attached to the trunk.

Ching hands George the dagger.

They move to the next tree.

George smiles at Ching as he slowly cuts into the bark.

Latex runs into the cup.
George kisses Ching.

EXT. RICE FIELD – DAY

Li Onn and Kong harvest their crop as Ching and George work alongside them.

Li Onn watches George and Ching, smiling.

EXT. LI’S HUT – DAY

George and Ching plant rows of vegetables.

Li Onn emerges from the hut, sees George and Ching and smile.

George looks at Li Onn.

    LI ONN
    George, are you sure this is what you want to do? This is poor man’s work.

    GEORGE
    Nothing will make me happier, Li Onn.

Li Onn and George smile at each other.

    BEN (OS)
    George.

George turns, surprised to see his dad approaching.

    GEORGE
    Pa!

Ben smiles at George, Ching and Li Onn.

    LI ONN
    (Surprised)
    Mr. Huang.

    BEN
    Mr. Li, we’re out of food. I’m hoping to buy ...

Li Onn cuts in.
LI ONN
We have food, come.

INT. WOODEN HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY

George, Ching, Li Onn and Ben put baskets of fresh green vegetables, bags of rice, meat, sweet potatoes and some tropical fruit on the table.

Mary is amazed at the abundance of food.

Ben dips his hand into his pocket, and takes out a bundle of cash.

BEN
(To Li Onn)
Please let me pay you, Li Onn.

Li Onn giggles kindly.

LI ONN
No, no, Mr. Huang. These are gifts from my family to yours.

Mary looks at Li Onn, dumbfounded.

Ching smiles at Mary.

Mary nods and smiles at Ching.

EXT. WOODEN HOUSE – YARD – DAY

Ben and Mary are at the door, smiling and waving at George, Ching and Li Onn as they leave.

BEN
Thank you, Li Onn.

MARY
Li Onn, Ching, thank you.

Tears fill Mary’s eyes.

INT. FLORA’S BEDROOM – DAY

Flora, a sad and forlorn figure, watches from the window as Li Onn, and George and Ching walk away, hand in hand.
EXT. SMALL TRACK – DAY

George and Ching walk closely together, hand in hand as Li Onn walk a few paces behind them, watching them and smiling.

EXT. GEORGE STREET, SYDNEY – ANZAC DAY – PRESENT DAY

Hands clutch tightly together as 75-year-olds George and Ching walk hand in hand in the noisy crowd.

Meg and her boys are beside them, clutching foldable chairs in their arms.

Meg points.

MEG
There’s a good spot.

75-year-old George and Ching, and Meg and her boys, are among the hundreds of spectators, watching the pomp and ceremony of the parade, cheering and waving their mini-Australian Flags as the smiling War Veterans march proudly by.

George studies the faces of the elderly marching men.

Ching looks at him.

CHING
You recognise anyone, George?

GEORGE
(Shakes his head)
No, Ching.

George takes Ching’s hand into his.

Meg turns to her dad.

MEG
Pa, why don’t you march with them?
(Points the war veterans)

GEORGE
(Shakes his head)
I don’t belong, Meg.
Slowly, George fingers out his war medals from his shirt pocket, hands them to Meg.

GEORGE
(Smiles)
You have these.

Meg gasps as she looks at the medals, then at her dad.

MEG
Pa.

Meg takes the medals from her dad, and studies them.

MEG (VO)
1939 to 1945 Star, Pacific Star, and War Medal 1939 to 1945 are awarded to Australian servicemen and women and civilians for their bravery and willingness to serve their country ...

EXT. BURWOOD PARK – DAY

George is holding a bunch of flowers in one hand, and holding Ching’s hand in the other as they walk to the “SANDAKAN” memorial structure.

Meg follows closely behind.

MEG (VO)
Whose country did George serve? The colonised fighting the coloniser’s war, in a country he no longer calls home. Now lives in a country he feels he does not belong ...

George and Ching stand before the memorial, looking at the plaques, remembering.

Meg watches her dad.

MEG (VO)
His silences are deafening. The quiet, reluctant hero ...

INT. ROOM – DAY

Meg is at her computer, typing.
MEG (VO)
Transcended hate, jealousy,
prejudice, war, maybe even
time for his only love ...

EXT. BEACH – DAY

It’s a beautiful sunny day, and old George and Ching walk slowly, arm in arm, on the sand.

Then, George and Ching look deep into each other’s eyes.

GEORGE
(Tenderly)
Ching, my most dearest wife.
If I should live another life
time, I would love you again
and again.

CHING
(Just as tenderly)
As I would love you, my dearest
husband, George, again and again.

George and Ching embrace lovingly and kiss.

FADE OUT.

THE END
Prologue

Countless job applications to join the workforce resulted in no replies, yet three applications to three universities received replies in the affirmative to study a postgraduate degree in the creative arts. Whatever the reasons, or complexities, in our world of schemes and things that impede the necessity to look for work and yet grant the dream to write, I must write when the opportunity knocks, in the form of writing the screenplay, and, as a way of imagining this work into the space of a Doctor of Creative Arts portfolio.

This is also an exercise in research and writing, with the voices of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Hélène Cixous, George Battalie, bell hooks, and others echoing within a profession, which I have studied and practised for some years, but always from a position exclusively on the outside. As a researcher and writer, this is also an attempt to write a screenplay, and showcase work that may otherwise not have had the chance of making it in the scheme of things in the make-believe world of filmmaking.

While in my attempt to do these things that may otherwise elude me, I am here also to experience an existence in a world that in turn exists in dreams and illusions. I wanted to experience the writing of a screenplay. If nothing else, at least, I have had this chance to do what I had imagined, and the chance to say to those who come across my work: I wanted to do this while I was here.
As the writing of the screenplay has preceded the theoretical work, I would suggest reading the screenplay before examining the dissertation. This is so that you may have an experience of the story, and its contents, in the script. The suggestion, however, is not a rule set in concrete.
Grace H. Funk

is Hereby Awarded
This Certificate of Merit
for "Jungles of Sandakan"

2003 International Screenplay Competition
presented by
American Screenwriters Association and Writer's Digest

Editor, Writer's Digest

Executive Director, ASA
METRO SCREEN - ON SITE SCRIPT ASSESSMENT

DATE: 12 March 2003
WRITER: Grace H Fuak
SCRIPT TITLE: "JUNGLES OF SANDAKAN" - 115pp
ASSESSOR: Barry Gamba

DESCRIPTION:
In British North Borneo during WWII, George, a young Eurasian boy, and Ching the Chinese girl he loves, confront many obstacles, including the racism within their families and the invading Japanese army, before they can find happiness together.

GENERAL COMMENTS:
An engaging story with a strong autobiographical feel. Interesting cast of characters, whose actions, ranging from heroism to political and emotional betrayals, are explored with some degree of sympathy. The war/romance scenario sits in stylistic contrast to the human drama, not always successfully. A promising first draft.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Genres - Family Saga vs Action Drama
Most of the story has the feel of an autobiographical drama, developed out of a fairly thorough process of research, with attention to historical and cultural detail. The biological descriptions of the jungles of Borneo, and the anthropological descriptions of the cultures that inhabit this environment and their means of cultivating it, seem keenly observed and studied.

The basic narrative works well, although there are some areas that jar stylistically with the predominantly family-drama/ Romeo & Juliet narrative (lovers from opposing camps). Once the protagonist, George, has joined the resistance and is involved in combat in the jungle, he seems to become a 'super soldier' and is virtually invincible. This character development shifts the story stylistically into another genre - the high-action drama with a larger-than-life hero. This feels inconsistent with the 'mummy's boy' slur George has had to endure throughout. More importantly, an audience is forced to reassess its relationship to the story - we're no longer watching a 'family' like ours (albeit, a family in a different cultural context, through which we discover the ways domestic problems are universal), but instead we're carried along with a high-action hero who confronts dangers and does things we never could.
George seems too invincible in the jungle and in combat, for the vulnerable 'youngest son'. If his prowess in the jungle was a result of superior knowledge he has acquired from a childhood spent in the Borneo jungles, this might explain the edge he has over the Japanese and the other combatants in this environment. Still, the body count from the battle scenes does become stupefying and steers the story away from the human drama.

Likewise, the explicitness of the early torture scenes involving George's brothers, could perhaps have more dramatic effect if it is implied rather than demonstrated in such detail.

The Interplay of Characters
As I mentioned, the characters and the ways they relate, drives much of the drama. Especially interesting are the complicated motivations of George's jealous sister-in-law, Flora. Her struggle with her desires for her brother-in-law that leads her to betray him, have some of the epic qualities of the Ancient Greek tragedies in which passion and power drive people to do terrible things.

Mary's racism is also intriguing, although I feel it needs to be developed more. She is married to a Chinese man but hates the Chinese. Her racism is so extreme that she pushes her son into a potentially fatal situation in order to steer him away from marrying the Chinese girl he loves. This sort of motivation rings true in the context of complicated things like racism, but the script's attempts to explain this motivation aren't entirely successful in this draft. Mary says that whenever she looks at the Chinese, all she sees are the Japanese killers of her sons. This seems confused even for a mourning mother. It also doesn't explain why she has engineered events so that her only surviving son has to face the same killers.

George's father, Ben, a stoic Chinese Catholic, and a former magistrate, seems strangely silent on the subject of his wife's racism, especially considering it reflects on him directly. They seem to be a happily married couple, united in their grief. How is it that Ben is the one that, albeit reluctantly, signs up his son to fight with the Volunteer Force. Is he under a domineering wife's thumb? Is he concealing his own internalised racism? Does he hate being Chinese? He has achieved the rank of town magistrate, but is this an expression of his self-loathing and desire to be Western?

You have created intriguing characters that provoke these questions in an audience. The next draft should bear much fruit if it focuses on these character developments and stylistic concerns.

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