WHERE THE BLOOD IS

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ABSTRACT

"Where the Blood Is" is a feature length fiction screenplay combining the genres of Horror, Holiday, and Family Drama. It tells the story of Bud O'Brien, a rural Ontario cop who must lure his estranged son John home for Christmas and convince him to sign over his inheritance in order to solve Bud's pressing money problems. What Bud doesn't know is that in the eight months John has been gone, he's become a Vampire. Trapping John at the family home with no easy supply of blood, Bud inadvertently puts the rest of the family -- wife Judy, daughter Stefanie, and Stefanie's boyfriend Cody -- in direct danger of becoming victims of John's vampirism. Through honesty, understanding, and the holiday spirit, the O'Brien family will overcome these obstacles and emerge unified at the end of one long late December day.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract....ii

Acknowledgements....iii

Table of Contents....iv

The Question....1

The Origin....2

The Classical Unities....3

The Power of Perversity....5

Visual Storytelling....7

Humour and Warmth....10

Realism....13

Theme....16

Vampirism....17

The Small Miracle....22

The Setting....24

The Holiday Season....26

The Characters....28

Bud....28

John....30

Judy....31

Stefanie....32

Cody....33

Structure....34

Act One....34

Act Two....36

Act Three....39

My Filmmaking Career So Far....42

In Conclusion....44

Bibliography....45

Filmography....48

THE QUESTION

"I was determined to write a story that was so far-fetched and so full of clichés that no one could take it seriously, but of course the audience liked it. All you have to do is come up with something really stupid, and it will become a great success" (Dabrowski, Trier). That's Lars von Trier talking about his 1996 film *Breaking the Waves*.

Think of the reputation of the Science Fiction movie before *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or the Gangster genre before *The Godfather*. Both genres were relegated to the category of low-brow, mass-market pulp (Kaye, Cortés 1987, 107). But the ideas for these films, now considered two of the greatest works in cinema history, came from taking a genre that was considered "trash" and trying to make it "High Art". The plot of *Breaking the Waves* is basically an absurd religious parable fused with a soap opera plot, more sick joke than movie, and yet, based on its critical acclaim and the awards it won, von Trier's strategy proved effective (Ebert, "BREAKING THE WAVES - Festival de Cannes"). At the writing stage, how do these movies pull off this feat? Through story design, realism, and drama.

I think this is an interesting starting point when coming up with ideas for movies: what's a great cinematic cliché that can be made fresh again? In writing the script "Where the Blood Is", I asked myself : could I take a genre of film as artless and stupid as the Christmas Horror Movie and use it to design a well-crafted story with a certain degree of realism and emotionally compelling drama?

THE ORIGIN

I first had the idea for "Where the Blood Is" when I was at my parents' house in the country for a funeral. I was thinking about the idea of the Black Sheep, in particular this older kid I knew as a boy who ran away from our small town and became a drug addict in Toronto. The trope of the Black Sheep coming home and having difficulty making amends with his family is one so hard-wired into our brains that it will almost always work dramatically.

Then I thought about the movie *The Addiction*, directed by Abel Ferrara, in which the main character Kathleen Conklin is a grad student in New York City who gets bitten by a vampire and turns into a vampire herself. It's not a great movie, but the grittiness of the "vampire as junkie" idea is done pretty well, and it would have been great fun to see her go home for the holidays.

And with that I had the basis of the idea: the Black Sheep of the family comes back to his small town for Christmas, but now he's not just a junkie, he's a Vampire.

THE CLASSICAL UNITIES

The idea lent itself quite well to the concept of the Contained Horror Movie, or what the great hack screenwriting guru Blake Snyder would call the "Monster in the House" genre (Snyder 2007, 2). The concept is, in its purest form: everyone's trapped in one location with a monster. The plot of *Alien*, basically. I think this is an excellent genre for the cinematic form, for the same reason I think Ingmar Bergman's chamber dramas are: the use of the Classical Unities, often referred to as the Aristotelian Unities (Tierno 2002, 19). They are:

1. Unity of Action: a tragedy should have one principal action.

2. Unity of Time: the action in a tragedy should occur over a period of no more than 24 hours.

3. Unity of Place: a tragedy should exist in a single physical location.

The reason that a movie, like any form of storytelling, can benefit from these unities, is because it is an art form in which the audience is trapped for a certain period of time. They really can't comfortably leave their seats, they hope to be engaged, and they don't want to be taken on tangents that don't add up to something in the end.

Now, clearly movies can work without strict adherence to these rules, and most movies that use them aren't one hundred percent faithful to them, but to the degree that they are employed, they almost always work to make the movie more potent. Think of those two beach party classics, *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Jaws*. Would *Through a Glass Darkly* be more effective if we spent an extra half hour with Karin in a mental institution before or after the events of the

movie? Would *Jaws* be better if the shark kept making pit-stops all along the eastern seaboard and our heroes kept getting bigger and bigger boats? Probably not.

The Classical Unities are also very useful when trying to create a High Concept Point-of-View movie. That is, a movie that puts you inside of a character's ordeal and you have to live through it with them in basically real time. Recent successful examples of this type of film-making on a blockbuster scale are *Gravity*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and *Dunkirk*. The dialogue is very limited in these movies and they are almost entirely action driven. And that's what's good about them, they avoid that classic Hitchcock complaint that after the silent era American movies had become nothing more than "photographs of people talking" (Stevens 2007, 264). As he elaborated to Francois Truffaut in their book-length conversation:

> "In writing a screenplay it is essential to separate clearly the dialogue from the visual elements and, whenever possible, to rely more on the visual than on the dialogue. Whichever way you choose to stage the action, your main concern is to hold the audience's fullest attention" (Truffaut 1983, 61).

Now, "Where the Blood Is" is a very talky movie. But my goal was to make it a Talky Point-of-View Movie, that is, a story that adheres to the Classical Unities and is told as visually as possible, but the dramatic situation allows for a lot of back and forth dialogue. Ideally the talk shouldn't feel as if it's explaining things to the audience, it should feel believably generated by the characters and their situation, and the content of the talk should set the stage for the visual beats.

THE POWER OF PERVERSITY

There's a featurette on the Blu-ray of the American version of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in which a grinning David Fincher looks into the camera and says "I think people are perverts. That's the foundation of my career." Based on the popularity of Fincher's filmography, this would appear to be true. One need only open a newspaper, or better yet look at the bizarre negativity of the internet news cycle to understand what many people really want to know about: uniquely perverse horrors. And they don't want to see too much, they just want to be teased with the suggestion of it and their imagination will fill in the rest.

But even more than just flirting with perverse horrors, the audience wants those horrors to sting emotionally. As Aristotle wrote of the "Tragic Deed" in *The Poetics*:

> "In a deed of this description the parties must necessarily be either friends, or enemies, or indifferent to one another. Now when enemy does it on enemy, there is nothing to move us to pity either in his doing or in his meditating the deed, except so far as the actual pain of the sufferer is concerned; and the same is true when the parties are indifferent to one another. Whenever the tragic deed, however, is done within the family--when murder or the like is done or meditated by brother on brother, by son on father, by mother on son, or son on mother--these are the situations the poet should seek after" (Tierno 2002, 60).

There's a very perverse Italian movie from 1965 called *Fists in the Pocket*, directed by Marco Bellochio. It's the story of a family of epileptics and one healthy brother. One of the epileptic brothers, a severely disturbed young man, wants to free his healthy brother from the burden of his sick family, so he begins methodically murdering the other family members in their remote country home, staging the murders as accidents. What makes this movie such an

interesting hybrid of Horror and Family Drama, is the use of the "Tragic Deed". Were it simply the story of a stranger killing a house full of strangers, this movie would not be nearly as effective. It's the breaking of the familial bond that bothers us the most.

In the context of "Where the Blood Is", a vampire movie in which the vampire is sucking the blood of a random stranger, or even an enemy, is far less interesting than one in which the vampire is sucking the blood of his sister, and then later his own father.

VISUAL STORYTELLING

David Fincher, like Pedro Almodovar, Brian DePalma, Roman Polanski, Claude Chabrol, and Henri-Georges Clouzot before him, works very much in the tradition of that famous cinematic pervert: Alfred Hitchcock (Singer). Discovering the films of Hitchcock as a teenage boy is what made me decide to start making my own movies, largely because I had been a visual artist up to that point and saw in the Hitchcockian tradition a way of expanding the visual storytelling I was doing in my paintings into the fourth dimension of time.

The Hitchcock movie that "Where the Blood Is" most obviously resembles on a plot level is *Shadow of a Doubt* -- Niece Charlie's adoration/infatuation with her mysterious Uncle Charlie, Uncle Charlie's anger at being photographed, and the long tense dinner scene all have their variations within this movie. However, it is in the general theories behind the visual language that I take the most from Hitchcock.

The three sequences of Bud "investigating" John -- in the restaurant bathroom, watching him wash the bloody towel through the basement window, and watching him take down the crucifix through the bedroom window -- are intended to be done in a Hitchcockian subjective treatment. Hitchcock:

> "...we have the power in film to get right into the mind of the character. I'll give you an example. *Rear Window* is strictly pure cinema. You do a close-up of James Stewart. He looks. You go back to him and he reacts. So you set up this mental process. You can't do that by doing a master shot and these various individual shots" (Stevens 2007, 268).

So by showing Bud, then showing what he sees, we are put inside his mind as he starts to

put together the idea that his son John might be a Vampire. Bud's choice to ignore these chilling observations in pursuit of his primary goal lead directly to John's "Tragic Deed."

The scenes involving Bud's police duffle bag containing the luminol, the handcuffs, and the Glock, adhere to another great Hitchcock rule that works in tandem with the Classical Unities: use what's around. In Hitchcock's words:

> "It really is a matter of using your material to the fullest dramatic extent. For example, in *Rear Window*, James Stewart is a photographer, so naturally he fends off his attacker with the use of photographic material, such as a flashgun. That's only because it is indigenous to him. As far as I possibly can, I always insist on using those elements that belong to the character and involve them in the actions of the story" (Stevens 2007, 256).

Bud is a police officer, so he uses the tools of the police officer (the luminol, the handcuffs, his authority in the community) to deal with his problems, even in the way he goes into "cop mode" when dealing with Cody.

This idea of using what's around was also the very first rule of the *Dogme 95 Manifesto*'s "Vow of Chastity": "1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found)" (Utterson 2007, 87) . While the Dogme 95 version is intentionally extreme, the basic idea behind it is the same as Hitchcock's and Aristotle's.

The sequence in which Bud, Judy, and Cody encounter John sucking Stefanie's blood is intended as an exercise in the simplest but arguably most important of Hitchcock's theories: the theory of "Suspense vs. Surprise." From Hitchcock/Truffaut:

> "There is a distinct difference between "suspense" and "surprise," and yet

> many pictures continually confuse the two. I'll explain what I mean. We are now having a very innocent little chat. Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, "Boom!" There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene, of no special consequence. Now, let us take a suspenseful situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it, probably because they have seen the anarchist place it there... In these conditions this same innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the audience is participating in the scene. The audience is longing to warn the characters on the screen: 'You shouldn't be talking about such trivial matters. There's a bomb beneath you and it's about to explode!' In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second we have provided them with fifteen minutes of suspense. The conclusion is that whenever possible the public must be informed" (Truffaut 183, 73).

By fully establishing that John is a Vampire with protruding fangs being driven insane with blood lust and hovering over the throat of his sister right before the cut, the scene of Bud and Judy checking in on drunken Cody in the bathroom is suddenly imbued with a great deal of suspense. We know something bad is happening and we know they will encounter it, but by leaving it hanging in the air for a few minutes, the audience is sent into a state of anxious dread.

HUMOUR AND WARMTH

The 1959 Howard Hawks film *Rio Bravo* served as a model for the humour in "Where the Blood Is." In *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, film critic David Thomson writes of Howard Hawks' ability to elevate genre films through turning their conventions upside down by describing *Rio Bravo* thusly: "*Rio Bravo*, apparently a Western -- everybody wears a cowboy hat -- is a comedy conversation piece." (Thomson 2016, 427) Indeed, *Rio Bravo* acts more like a sitcom than an action or adventure movie: John T. Chance's bashfully inept romance with Feathers, the amount of time Chance and his buddies sit around in the jail bantering about the sub-plots, the fact that two hours into the movie they take time out to sing TWO full songs. And yet these warm, humorous scenes are the good parts. The action sequences look old-fashioned even for 1959, but the fun of hanging out with Dude and Stumpy feels fresh 60 years later. The movie worked so well in fact that Hawks spent a significant portion of the rest of his career remaking it as both *El Dorado* and *Rio Lobo* (much to the chagrin of screenwriter Leigh Brackett, who got sick of writing the same story over again just a few years later, while Hawks and Wayne didn't think the repetition was a big deal because "it worked once!"). (Truesdale)

The genre confusion in *Rio Bravo* is a great example of why Hawks' comedic sensibilities hit the mark so often. Reflecting on the state of comedy in 1976, he said:

> "You don't find a good comedy so easily. There are a lot made that are supposed to be funny but aren't. There's another thing about making comedies -- they start out with funny main titles and with ridiculous gags, this attitude of 'Look, we're going to be funny and we want you to laugh at it.' I try to start as if it's all serious and then all of a sudden surprise them. It's much easier to do it my way than to do it their way. If I go to see a

> movie and they start off trying to be funny right from the beginning, I get up and walk out." (Stevens 2007, 112)

I agree that this is why most comedy is painfully unfunny: because it's trying to tell you it's supposed to be funny so you should laugh, rather than setting up a real situation and then allowing it to take an unexpected comedic turn. Essentially, it's the idea that an actor should only try to be funny if the character is trying to be funny, even in the stupidest of comedic situations.

Originally the character of Bud was intended to be less charming and more of a hardass cop, but he became far more interesting when Amnon suggested that he be the Nice Guy Cop in town. The addition of comedic charm also gave Bud the toolkit he needed in his attempt to woo John back to the family: he's funny and charming enough that at a certain point John can't help but snicker at his antics.

To me, one of the most humorous filmmakers at work today is Paul Thomas Anderson, though rarely are his movies classified as comedy. Some are, like *Punch Drunk Love* or *Inherent Vice*, but I find these movies to be far less funny than the ones that are thought of as serious drama. *Boogie Nights* is pretty over-the-top in its sense of humour, but the actors play even the most ridiculous scenes as straight as they can, and that's why it's funny even when the laughs sting. The performance of Daniel Day Lewis in *There Will Be Blood* or Philip Seymour Hoffman in *The Master* are endlessly funny to me because the actors are so committed to living inside the reality of the scene even when their characters' actions or words are objectively hilarious. And, as over-the-top as both of those performances are, they're realistic enough to not blow out the

performances of the other actors who are playing less extreme characters opposite them.

Another filmmaker that I've taken a lot of inspiration from in his combination of brutality, gallows humor, and overwhelming nostalgia is Sam Peckinpah. Aside from *Straw Dogs*, most of his best work is surprisingly warm for the amount of blood-letting it portrays. What's fascinating about his 1973 movie *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is that the entire movie feels like the third act of a movie. The melancholic nostalgia of a bittersweet denouement pervades the whole thing, from the violence to the tragedy to the raunch. Probably the warmest of Peckinpah's movies, and the one that tonally aligns with "Where the Blood Is" the most, is his 1972 film *Junior Bonner*, starring Steve McQueen as an aging rodeo cowboy/prodigal son headed back to his changing hometown for the weekend, and the family issues that he needs to resolve while he's there. The plot parallels are obvious, but it's the warm afternoon-drunk vibe of the movie that I wanted to tap into for certain scenes in "Where the Blood Is." Based on personal experience, Peckinpah is also one of the best directors at capturing rural life and small town people that I've seen thus far.

REALISM

That concept that I had settled on was in danger of becoming a preposterous and dramatically inert movie. This is a problem I usually encounter when going from the idea/outline stage to actually having to turn my ideas into compelling drama. It's very much a matter of paring down the silliness until I have one or two fantastical elements that can be strengthened by having everything else around them be as realistic as possible. Then the crazy stuff really pops.

Blake Snyder has a good name for this problem. He calls it "Double Mumbo Jumbo" and diagnoses it like this:

> "I propose that as an audience we can only buy one piece of magic per movie. You cannot have aliens land and then be bitten by vampires and become both alien and undead. Not fair. That to me is a "cheat" in writing and disses viewers" (Snyder).

I knew that this movie was going to be about a vampire. That's about all the craziness it could hold, but I had two major hurdles of ideas I had to overcome to let the vampire stuff shine. Early versions of the story had all of the characters aged ten years older and instead of being a homeless junkie, John was a once-wildly successful author who had written a novel in his early twenties that was basically a thinly veiled screed against Bud. He had fallen in with a bad crowd of vampires and was suffering from writer's block. The Double Mumbo Jumbo of an imaginary famous author who was also a vampire was too much wackiness for the kind of movie I was going for. And it was killing my unity.

In the summer of 2017 a movie came out called *Good Time*, directed by the Safdie Brothers. This movie really showed me something I didn't know I'd been looking for. It was the perfect

synthesis of two of the most significant uses of the cinematic form: the American Thriller and the Italian Neo Realist Film. It took all the tropes of the classic American noir thriller -- cops and robbers, mistaken identities, disguises, violence, tough talk, prison -- and by taking an approach heavily influenced by the techniques of Italian Neo Realism and its descendant forms -- location shooting, casting real people, a backdrop of poverty and bureaucratic oppression -- *Good Time* injected these thriller tropes with new life and vitality (Iannone). And more than just the tropes, it truly used the best techniques of these two seemingly disparate forms to elevate it to being both the most realistic genre thriller I'd ever seen, and the most nerve-wracking, anxiety-inducing Neo Realist film I'd ever seen. The suspense and dread became so heightened because the danger of it felt real. *Good Time* did not recoup its production budget at the box office, but I predict that its approach will be very influential on American genre films in the coming years (Bronstein, Safdie).

Seeing *Good Time* showed me what I was trying to do as far as fusing genre tropes to compelling drama, but it also set a very high bar. My goal became to do my best with the raw material I already had and convert it into something that could at least place respectfully behind *Good Time*. (To show my respect/steal some good ideas, I also included a couple of direct homages to that movie and the Safdie Brother's previous movie *Heaven Knows What*.)

So I got rid of the bad idea about the famous book and soon came up with a new bad idea: Bud's debt was actually to some local heavies who were blackmailing him for beating a suspect into a coma and the movie ended with the bad guys showing up at the house after John has been

revealed to be a vampire and they force John to do an E-transfer of his inheritance to them to cover Bud's debt, but then the whole thing erupts into a bloody shootout that ends with like five people dead. This version made it all the way through the first draft, but I could definitely feel that it wasn't sitting right as I wrote it. I am grateful to Amnon for really grinding away at me to imagine my ending without this gangster subplot. The script became a lot tighter once that stuff was gone.

Hitchcock, that master of the American thriller, described the value of realism like this: "...a picture like *North by Northwest* is a nightmare, but it behooves you to be realistic, because when you have a nightmare and you are being led to the electric chair, it is so vivid that you are glad when you wake up." (Stevens 2007, 276) One could certainly argue that Hitchcock's studio-bound melodramas are pretty far from realistic, but in a way they're kind of both things at once. The reason so many of them remain evergreen is that the heightened sensations and emotions make them feel more real by going directly to the audience's primal instincts. So while the form of them is very stylized, the queasy feeling is real.

THEME

"Where the Blood Is" is a story about the civilizing influence of family. This comes from the two main strands of the story: Christmas movies are about "the value of family, the importance of charity and helping others, and the heartwarming goodness of fellowship among men" (Saporito), and Vampire movies are about the primal urge toward aggression, destruction, and selfishness (Butler).

Our two main characters, Protagonist Bud and Antagonist John, are both struggling to suppress the dark urges inside themselves: Bud, the violence he fears he inherited from his father, and John, his addiction first to drugs and then to blood. These traits cause destruction, but the bigger problem for the O'Brien family is that Bud and John choose to hide their issues and attempt to deal with them on their own. Once they open up about their problems through the encouragement of Stefanie and Judy, they are able to develop a support system to deal with them and the family comes together again.

If we were to express this idea as one of Robert McKee's Controlling Ideas, it would be: Family comes together through honesty and openness.

VAMPIRISM

In my opinion, horror movies are most effective when they are presented with minimal camp. So something like *The Addiction*, while not a great movie, is presented in a form that I can appreciate. It attempts to be as realistic as possible and put the campier elements of vampirism within the here and now. I took a lot of ideas from that movie, mostly for the story of John's transformation. In *The Addiction*, Kathleen Conklin is attacked by a vampire in a dark alley in New York City. As she transforms into a vampire, she doesn't know what's happening. The disease of it takes the form of flu-like symptoms and a thirst for blood. She steals blood from the arm of a nodded off junkie in an alley. There's another vampire character who's learned to control his blood addiction and lead a relatively normal life. After a climactic orgy of violence, Kathleen ends up in the hospital asking the nurse to let her die. She then submits to God and is reborn, finally seen walking by her own tombstone. All of these elements I stole in one form or another. Compared to other vampire movies,

> "Abel Ferrara is much more explicit, offering scenes of raw realism enhanced by nerve-racking black and white. In this sense, *The Addiction* becomes the best cinematographic gallery showing the images that make up the stereotype for heroin addicts. Kathleen Conklin experiences a gradual physical decline as she becomes a consumer of human blood, which at first she draws from her victims with a syringe, subsequently shooting it up amidst a display of all the paraphernalia typical of heroin addicts, and experiencing similar effects. Her body wastes and she loses teeth ("I'm rotting"), her habits becoming a catalogue of the downward spiral towards debasement: she steals, chain-smokes, uses drugs, hangs out in sordid environments, and shows indifference towards others. Her contempt for her victims grows, reaching its climax in the image of a small-sized shoe that suggests infanticide" (Sanchez 2011, 73).

I watched a variety of other vampire movies, from *Ganja & Hess* to *The Hunger* to *Near Dark* to *Blade*, but didn't really get much out of them, mostly because they are plagued with either bad writing, over-stylization, unrealistic performances, or a combination of these elements. I got the most out of re-watching the two classics from the Silent/Early Sound era, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Carl Th. Dreyer's *Vampyr*, which both gain a huge amount of gravitas from their relatively realistic presentation.

There are a number of ideas taken from *Nosferatu*. First is that it all begins with a real estate issue, which I think is a pretty hilarious premise upon which to build a vampire movie. Then there's the scene in which poor Thomas Hutter cuts his finger and the vampire lusts after the trickle of blood. After the plague portion of the story kicks in, there's a darkly poetic title card that reads, "Fear lurked in every corner of the town. Who was still healthy? Who was sick?" The idea of that pervades any good vampire story. The contagious nature is the scariest part.

Vampyr by Carl Th. Dreyer had several elements that I took from. First, the character of Allen Gray is on a largely silent quest to look around this afflicted town and figure out what's up, a la Bud in our story. He then ends up trying to protect the sisters from vampirism, mirroring Cody's mission. The movie ends with the sister Leone becoming a vampire, and her final resurrection back to human form. I took that in a different direction and made it more about vampirism being a resurrection into a new kind of life.

For any movie with a supernatural element, there must be rules. The use of rules allows the audience to suspend their imaginations enough to accept the world of the movie. Without a set

of strict rules, a movie story is in danger of running into Double Mumbo Jumbo territory. For Vampire Movies, there are a number of variations on these rules, but I tried to stick to the big ones, and avoid any that would get in the way of my plot. So the big rules I chose from other Vampire Movies were:

1. One becomes a Vampire by an exchange of blood with an existing Vampire.

2. The Vampire craves blood, the more virginal the better.

3. An aversion to crucifixes.

4. The vampire has no reflection and appears blurry in photographs.

5. The Vampire is immortal, unless a stake is driven through its heart, or its head is cut off.

I avoided such rules as "Sunlight kills them" for plot purposes, and "Sleeps in a coffin" for reasons of limiting the stupidity. But I felt like the rules I had would work within the context of the world and wouldn't require much explanation to the average audience.

Thematically, there were four main elements of the idea of Vampirism that I focussed on: Disease, Sex, Drugs, and Violence.

Disease: From the plague in *Nosferatu* to the AIDS allegory in *The Addiction*, the idea of the "poison blood" of the Vampire easily translates to the primal fear of contagious illness. The infection of John, the fear that John could have infected Stefanie when he bites her, the need for the "medicine" of blood. Plus, the sickly look the characters take on when they become Vampires.

Sex: The sexual nature of sucking blood from the neck of a virgin gives the scene in which John bites Stefanie an icky incestuous feeling, obviously (Kohen). But I also wanted to use the

subplot of Cody trying to lose his virginity and becoming uncomfortably aggressive about it to parallel the sexual nature of the Vampire. The MeToo movement happened as I was writing this story, and I was thinking about the parallels between these stories of clandestine sexual aggression and vampirism. Were he not such a slovenly mess, one could make a terrifying movie about Harvey Weinstein that played up the vampiric nature of his crimes.

Drugs: John's drug addiction that becomes a blood addiction, obviously. But also the role of alcohol in the movie: John's vodka lunch order, Stefanie's desire to drink, Cody getting Stefanie drunk, all contrasted with Bud, the son of a violent alcoholic, drinking alcohol-free Arnold Palmers. We see a hint of Bud's struggles with addiction when he bums a cigarette from John. The danger of alcohol eventually plays directly into the climax when drunken Cody waves the gun around and accidentally shoots Stefanie.

Violence: I've always been fascinated by the character of the brutish man attempting to control the constant violent urges that consume him. In my opinion, Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* is one of the best movies about this. It very vividly conveys the fear of Jake LaMotta's violence by the other characters, but more than that, it's a powerful window into the mind of a tortured man trying to channel his violent nature into something useful and not doing a very good job of it. Mike Tyson is a real life character who is a fascinating example of this conflict. The ferocity of his natural violence put him on top of the world, but there was no easy off switch and so it led to a quick reversal and dramatic fall from grace.

There was a movie that was released in summer 2018 called *A Prayer Before Dawn*, directed

by Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire. It tells the real life story of Billy Moore, a British boxer/drug dealer/addict living in Thailand, who ends up in a Thai prison, survives many hardships, and finally finds redemption by joining the prison's Muay Thai kickboxing team. It effectively sums up the aggressive primal urges toward sex, drugs, violence, and nihilism, and then the redemption found in learning to control these primal urges, that I wanted to convey in this story.

THE SMALL MIRACLE

Even more of an influence on this movie than *Vampyr*, is Carl Th. Dreyer's 1955 movie *Ordet*. It is presented in a Magical Realist style, and has an excellent example of what I call "The Small Miracle." What I mean is that the movie presents itself as realistically as possible, but in the end there is a supernatural moment that is sold by the fact that what's come before has been so believably real. In *Ordet*, a movie about faith, the climax comes as the wayward son Johannes, who believes himself to be Jesus Christ, stuns the other characters by performing a resurrection of his dead sister-in-law after his niece says that she believes in him. *Ordet* is about as slow as molasses, but it builds to this magical moment that only feels magical because of how long it took to reveal the magic. It wouldn't work the same way at all if magical things were happening within the first half hour.

This idea of "The Small Miracle" is used to great effect in Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*, another tale of a father overcome by violence. When that strange little trickle of water starts rushing out of Karin's death spot, the audience is overwhelmed with the same affirmation of faith that the father feels in that moment.

One could argue that Andrei Tarkovsky's whole career hinges on the use of "The Small Miracle." In my opinion, what's so wonderfully ballsy about Tarkovsky's movies is that they induce such a feeling of hypnotic boredom in the audience and then BAM! They hit you with a Small Miracle, like the ending of *Stalker* with the daughter moving stuff around on the table with her mind, or even just the moments of elemental magic, like encountering the naked Pagans

running through the forest in *Andrei Rublev*, or watching the whole house burn down in *The Sacrifice*. Without the long and uneventful build up, these magical moments wouldn't hit the audience the way they do.

In "Where the Blood Is," the goal was to keep the proceedings and the world as realistic as possible until the moment of Stefanie's resurrection, which turns the other characters into true believers. "The Small Miracle," which hopefully pays off big if we haven't overwhelmed the audience with Double Mumbo Jumbo before it happens.

THE SETTING

In my quest for greater realism for the story, I eventually decided to set the story in the town I grew up in: Combermere, Ontario. In the 20-some feature-length screenplays I'd written before this one, I'd only ever set one act of one movie there before. But it turned out to make the writing of the script and the dialogue incredibly easy, because I knew the culture and the characters so well.

I've never seen a movie that accurately depicts rural Ontario culture. There have been some TV programs that attempt it, but usually they play the culture for broad laughs. Which this script does a bit of, but I tried to make the laughs feel like realistic events as much as possible. I feel like most of the depictions of rural life in Canada are done by outsiders who don't understand the culture very well.

I used the rural Ontario perspective of Toronto as this darkly hedonistic land of American Sin as a kind of philosophical setting for the story. When I was a boy growing up in Combermere, there was an older teenager who grew up in a severely Catholic household. He was caught smoking a joint out his bedroom window and, to escape the wrath of his Bible-thumping parents, hopped the next bus to Toronto. There he developed schizophrenia and was returned to Combermere in a strangely blissful state. The idea of the madness this young man had encountered in the big smoke of Toronto made an impression on me as a kid, and influenced the idea of the dichotomy between rural Ontario and Toronto in the script.

All of the scenes in "Where the Blood Is" are set in very specific places. I feel like, if done

right, the subculture of rural Ontario could be mined for many great stories. I really identify with those filmmakers who create an unapologetic sense of place and find the universal stories within it. Bergman's Sweden, Fassbinder's Germany, Peckinpah's West. Making it feel like it's been lived in, and making everything look like it stinks of reality.

THE HOLIDAY SEASON

One of my favourite dry comedies is Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. Bill Harford, emasculated by his wife Alice's fantasies about a sailor, goes off on a dark journey in search of sexual thrills. He's traumatized by his misadventures, returns home to tearfully confess it all to his wife, and their bond is strengthened. And yet for some reason, we don't think of *Eyes Wide Shut* as a Christmas movie about a family coming together through openness and honesty. But that's what it is.

That creepy Christmas vibe of *Eyes Wide Shut* is what I want this movie to convey in its presentation of the holiday season. And the fact that Christmas remains a few days in the future at the end of both the stories is a direct steal as well. It seems better to leave the potential joy of Christmas in the imagination of the audience.

I used several stories of family lore in the movie, for example: Bud's story about Grandma shoving him into the Christmas tree as a four year old to make him afraid of it so he wouldn't pull the ornaments off. A great uncle of mine did this with each of his seven children and it remains a hilarious family anecdote to this day.

Rituals of Christmas like tree decorating and drinking egg nog also make an appearance, but the biggest references to Christmas come in the form of music. The movie leans heavily on a specific soundtrack of Christmas songs. There are wintry country songs from Merle Haggard and Dolly Parton, as well as Christmas staples like "Silent Night" and "Pachelbel's Canon." But there are also two key songs that have a direct impact on the plot when they come on the radio:

the first is The Irish Rovers' "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" and the second is The Pogues featuring Kirsty MacColl's "Fairytale of New York."

The effect of "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" is obvious in the movie: it provides some gallows humour for the O'Brien family to bond over. More of a meal is made out of "Fairytale of New York" as Bud and Judy sing and dance through the entire song in the middle of the dinner scene. Not only does their display of joyous love have its desired effect of partly winning John over to Bud's side, but the plot of the song directly comments upon the subplot of Judy and Bud's marital issues, so much so that Bud nearly quotes the lyrics in a moment of revelation later in the movie. While he's in the bathtub and we don't see him for twenty minutes, he's thinking about that song.

The movie ends with Bud reading the kids the story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer in an attempt to restore some wholesomeness to the evening.. This is about as cliched a Christmas beat as I could muster, but it feels very appropriate to the story, and hopefully the "one-the-noseness" of it will give the audience a bit of relief after having watched Stefanie and John suck their own father's blood a few minutes prior.

THE CHARACTERS

BUD

There's a movie from 1956 called *Bigger Than Life*, directed by Nicholas Ray. In it, the main character Ed Avery is a stressed out family man, a school teacher moonlighting as a cab driver. He suffers from a rare artery disease that causes intense attacks of pain and blackouts. He is put on an experimental cortisone treatment to save his life and for a while he feels great, has boundless strength and energy, and gets his life back. But soon the cortisone turns him into a controlling hardass and eventually drives him insane. The movie climaxes with him attempting to re-enact the Binding of Isaac from the Bible. With his wife locked in the closet, he enters his son's room with a pair of scissors, ready to make a human sacrifice, until his friend Wally Gibbs shows up and beats the shit out of him.

What really stands out about *Bigger Than Life* is that it uses the hokey tone of a 1950s Hollywood melodrama and turns it into a widescreen domestic horror movie. It's the story of a deeply troubled man trying to hide his problems beneath the veneer of a happy 1950s suburban Dad. Much like Bud in our movie.

I like to think of Bud as a lovable Sitcom Dad who sees visions of chaotic violence when he closes his eyes to go to sleep at night. He's trying to keep the mood light, trying to be the likeable Constable who comes into the local school to talk to first graders about bike safety, but he sees this as only a veneer of goodness, because he fears that the blood of his own evil father courses through his veins. He's constantly fighting off the darkness, trying to relax, trying to do

good, even if it means doing bad for a greater good. His deepest problem is that he can't come to terms with the darkness inside himself and so it goes unaddressed, erupting now and then in violent outbursts.

There was a teacher in my high school who was probably the most even-tempered man I've ever met. An intelligent and deeply devout Christian family man who could calmly deal with any classroom behavioural situation... Up to a point. About once every year, some teenage jackass would push this kindly man to the breaking point and he would *lose it.* His face would turn red, he'd be screaming, smashing stuff. It was terrifying -- mostly because it was such a dramatic, Jekyll & Hyde transformation. But after the fireworks, he would calm himself down and by the end of the class he and the jackass who'd driven him to madness would be calmly talking it out, shaking hands in front of the rest of the class. This man became a model for Bud's struggle with his inner violence.

In my opinion, the best part of Wes Anderson's 2001 film *The Royal Tenenbaums* is the title character. He's a scheming, conniving bastard, but he's attempting to bring his family back together and correct his past mistakes as a father. His journey is that he comes to realize that he's doing it for the wrong reason: as a salve for his own damaged pride. Royal Tenenbaum became another model for Bud in that awkward combination of pettiness and genuine concern for his family's well-being.

Bud is a guy who wants to be the stoic leader of the tribe, but he's not sure how to deal with the difficult problems he faces. He sees himself as the head of the household and so is too

proud to open up about his weaknesses with Judy and his children. He'd rather bury his mistakes, bury his past, lie about things to avoid blame. Bud's journey is a Maturation Arc about learning to be nurturing to his children through openness and honesty.

JOHN

In 1991, Bob Dylan was given a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammys. After awkwardly taking his placque from a beaming Jack Nicholson, he stepped to the mic and delivered this speech:

> "Well, my daddy, he didn't leave me much, you know he was a very simple man, but what he did tell me was this, he did say, son, he said... (long pause... laughter...) ...he say, you know it's possible to become so defiled in this world that your own father and mother will abandon you and if that happens, God will always believe in your ability to mend your ways. Thank you." (Dylan)

I very much had the Prodigal Son years of Bob Dylan's life in mind while working on the character of John. As a teenager growing up in small town Minnesota, Bob Dylan and his father clashed over his dream to become a musician. Bob Dylan dropped out of college, moved to New York and quickly became a famous folk singer and pop music crossover phenomenon. At the height of his fame in the late 60s, his father died before the two ever had the chance to make amends.

After *The Addiction*, that quote about becoming "so defiled in this world that your own father and mother will abandon you" was the biggest influence on the character of John. When we meet John, in his own mind he's already given up on the love of his parents. He's discovered

the blood bank blood and is attempting to control the beast within himself and make peace with a higher moral power. He's prepared to go it alone, like a stoic junkie death metal mirror of Bud, but is able to reconnect with his family through openness and honesty about his problems. His too, is a Maturation Arc.

JUDY

In the 1986 Peter Weir movie *The Mosquito Coast*, from the novel by Paul Theroux, the Mother is a character who served as a model for Judy. As the Mother of the family, she's a pushover who can't assert herself against the domineering and much more intelligent Father, in this case an eccentric inventor who drags his small town American family to Central America to pioneer a new life for themselves. For a while, the dynamic works: what appears to be an imbalance of power is actually a fairly productive symbiotic relationship. Until the Father loses control of himself and descends into madness.

What's interesting about their dynamic is how devoted the Father is to the Mother. Even though he doesn't think twice about making cataclysmic family decisions without her, he sees the life he's building as being sort of a testament to his love for her. He takes every opportunity to celebrate her and strictly demands that she is respected by their sons. In turn, she goes along with the madness, goes along with his lies to the children, and is totally honest and devoted to the Father until right before his last breath, when she lies to him for the first time to comfort him on his way out.

There's a genetic trait that runs through some of the women in my extended family that you could call Old-Fashioned Saintliness. Total devotion to family, a love of all human life, humility, and the ability to block out the more grotesque realities of the world. Their greatest sin is a guilty giggle at a juicy piece of gossip. Judy has this Old-Fashioned Saintliness trait. It has allowed her to hold the family together until the past year, while still being intimidated into deferring to Bud's authority.

Her arc is also a Maturation Arc. Her old way of being the gentle rock that soothes family tension without taking a side won't work during the ordeal of the plot. She is forced to finally assert herself against Bud to save the family and literally save the life of her son.

STEFANIE

Stefanie's youth and virginity make her a target for two forces that she isn't mature enough to deal with yet: Cody's hormones and John's vampirism. Her arc is also a Maturity Arc, but it doesn't have the same feel-good catharsis at the end of it that the other characters get. She goes from being a teen girl trying to navigate the adult worlds of sex and alcohol to a bloodthirsty vampire in about twelve hours time. She's pretty easy-going about it, but her arc is basically Bud's worst nightmare for her. While she's yearning for the dark thrills of adulthood, Bud is trying to protect her, as his innocence was lost at such an early age. She's essentially the victim in a situation where the family must sweep a horrible crime under the rug to remain intact. The movie is intentionally ambiguous as to the morality of the resolution of Stefanie's story.

CODY

I find very effective the trope of the daughter's idiot boyfriend that nobody likes, who just keeps forging ahead socially with the rest of the family, almost willfully blind to their disdain for him. Like the Lenny Cantrow character in Elaine May's 1972 film *The Heartbreak Kid*. The father just can't get rid of him -- almost as though he's too stupid to leave. This character, like Bud, is another very "sitcom" character. Steve Urkell from *Family Matters*, Michael Kelso from *That 70s Show*, even Boner from *Growing Pains*. It's the next-door-bozo who inserts himself into the family.

Where this trope becomes fun is when the Sitcom Dad who despises this jackass is forced into an alliance with him to achieve his own goals. Cody's arc goes from being an unwanted interloper to an accepted member of the O'Brien family, with a few bumps along the way.

STRUCTURE

Going back to before Aristotle, the commonly accepted way to tell stories is like this: BEGINNING--MIDDLE--END. The Beginning (Act One) is the set-up, the Middle (Act Two) is the pursuit of the external goal, and the End (Act Three) is the resolution. Then, woven into that BEGINNING--MIDDLE--END are two plots: the 'A' PLOT and the 'B' PLOT. The 'A' PLOT is the external plot, and the 'B' PLOT is the internal plot. The external plot is the pursuit of the thing the Protagonist knows they want, and the internal plot is their realization of their inner need. These two plots come to a head at the end of Act Two, or the end of the Middle. Then Act Three is the synthesis, where the resolution of the 'B' PLOT inevitably causes the resolution of the 'A' PLOT, which, if the 'B' PLOT is sufficiently engaging, we don't really care about anymore. If we think of the stock Hollywood action plot, usually the 'B' PLOT will be the love story or the buddy story, the resolution of the conflicts within which will lead to the resolution of the 'A' PLOT problem.

ACT ONE

There's a Youtube video where, standing in the Criterion Collection closet, 1960s underground filmmaker Robert Downey Sr. turns to the camera and says:

> "I only know one thing about screenwriting. It took me fifty years to figure it out, too. You ready? If you have a leading character, make sure they're in a hurry. Even if it's just psychologically, that they're thinking about going somewhere, or they have a purpose, rather than just sitting in a room talking." (criterioncollection)

Simple but invaluable advice. It's in the same vein as that cliched Old Hollywood pacing fix of "lose the first reel". Throw us into the First Act once the wheels of the plot are already in motion.

What's the end of Act One? In my opinion, it's when the Protagonist undertakes their pursuit of the external goal. In the case of "Where the Blood Is," it's when Bud realizes that he needs to charm John into signing over his inheritance to keep from losing the house, which happens roughly twenty minutes into the movie.

This is a brief summary of the plot of "Where the Blood Is":

OPENING IMAGE: We're hurtling through the dark forest, the camera strapped to the roof of Bud's police cruiser. This image is taken from the opening of the 1955 Robert Aldrich movie *Kiss Me Deadly*. It's intended as a visual metaphor for Bud's state of mind: alone, racing out of the darkness of nature, no light but his own to guide his way.

FIRST KILL: Bud arrives at the small town hospital, says a tearful goodbye speech to his vegetative Grandma Maeve, and smothers her with a pillow.

THE PROBLEM: We next encounter Bud in his lawyer's office with his wife Judy. Here we realize that Bud killed his Grandma to get his hands on his inheritance faster. But, this plan is immediately complicated by Grandma's will which states that Bud and Judy's children, Stefanie and John, must be present for the disclosure of it. This is an issue because John ran away from home to Toronto eight months prior and he and Bud haven't been in contact since.

Bud gets Judy to lure John back to town to read the will. But, much to Bud's chagrin, all of

Grandma's money that Bud so desperately needs is willed to the children, John and Stefanie. Even though Bud is suspicious that John was doing drugs in the restaurant bathroom, and had previously said that John wouldn't be allowed to come home, he now must change his tack and become Mr. Nice Guy, trying to charm John into coming home for the evening so he can work on talking him into signing over his inheritance.

EXTERNAL GOAL: To convince John to sign over his inheritance so that Bud can pay off his bank debt.

That's the main thrust of Act One, but we also introduce three subplots:

STEFANIE AND CODY: John's little sister being pressured into sex by her older boyfriend.

JUDY AND BUD: Judy's arc of asserting herself against Bud's dominance of family decision making.

JOHN'S VAMPIRISM: Bud's slow unravelling of John's mysterious blood addiction, which at this point appears to be intravenous drug use.

ACT TWO

The 'A' PLOT of Act Two consists of the pursuit of the External Goal, in this case John's money, during which there are Obstacles that the Protagonist must use Tactics to overcome.

OBSTACLE: John wants to take his money and leave right away on the evening bus, as was the plan. BUD'S TACTIC: Convincing John to come home for a couple of hours and look through his belongings.

OBSTACLE: John still wants to get back to the evening bus, despite Judy's efforts to get him to have dinner and stay for Christmas. BUD'S TACTIC: He disables the car and pretends it's mysteriously broken so that John won't make it to the bus on time.

OBSTACLE: Stefanie's boyfriend Cody shows up in his truck -- a potential alternate ride to the bus. BUD'S TACTIC: He intimidates Cody into coming back later, then convinces him to lie about it. This begins an alliance between the two that builds as a subplot throughout the movie.

OBSTACLE: Bud sees John cleaning a bloody rag in the basement sink. He's confused as to what's going on with John. BUD'S TACTIC: Bud uses luminol from his duffle bag of police gear to investigate the spilled blood in the basement, but this only adds to the mystery. He sneaks into John's room and starts going through his backpack.

OBSTACLE: Judy catches him searching John's stuff. BUD'S TACTIC: Bud forces her to believe a blatant lie.

OBSTACLE: John is still very standoffish toward Bud during dinner. BUD'S TACTICS: To win John over, Bud arrives in a goofy Santa hat; gives John beers; tells several old family stories, some funny, some touching; does an entire song and dance to "Fairytale of New York" with Judy; gives a non-specific apology to John for his past behaviour; and finally reveals that because of the bills for Grandma's care, the family is deeply in debt and will lose the house in January. This is the MID-POINT.

OBSTACLE: John immediately realizes that Bud is angling for his inheritance money and

storms out. BUD'S TACTIC: Bud bums a cigarette from John out back and drops the Mr. Nice Guy act. He tells John that he owes him one, because IN A FLASHBACK we see that eight months ago John was caught by another police officer with a big bag of drugs, but Bud was able to make it go away and save John from arrest.

OBSTACLE: Though Bud did save him, John is still mad about the incident because Bud flew into a rage about it and beat John up, causing John to run away from home. BUD'S TACTIC: He offers John to come home, they'll help him get into school in the fall.

OBSTACLE: John says he wants nothing to do with the family anymore and shuts himself in his room. BUD'S TACTIC: Realizing that maybe he can't do this all by himself, he talks Judy into convincing John to come back and live at home.

OBSTACLE: Judy reluctantly agrees, but she's very upset that Bud didn't tell her sooner about their financial problems. BUD'S TACTIC: He agrees to be more open and honest with Judy so that they can have a more equal decision making partnership. At first, he's kind of just saying it to win her over, but then he milks some back pain and gets Judy to run him a bubble bath, in which he actually reflects on what Judy has said. When we come back to Bud in about 10-15 minutes of screen time, he has truly had a realization about how his duplicity is damaging his marriage and his family, and tells Judy the real truth about how he lost all of their money: through a bad Bitcoin investment.

At this point, we have the PERSPECTIVE SHIFT and spend the next sequence watching

the story from John's point of view. John's story up to now is that he is secretly a Vampire struggling with a blood addiction. He brought a limited supply of blood home in a POM Wonderful bottle, but it spilled in the basement. So now he's struggling with the agitation caused by his cravings. He attempts to pay Cody to drive him to Toronto, but Cody's too drunk. So John drinks with Stefanie and Cody to try to soothe his raging desire for blood.

Judy comes out and gets the kids to help decorate the tree. John, even though he's fighting his cravings, genuinely feels the love from Stefanie and Judy and wishes that he could come home. But, as much as he wants to enjoy a bit of wholesome family time with his mother and sister, he is being driven insane with desire for Stefanie's virgin blood. After getting a taste of it from her cut finger, John can no longer control himself. When left alone by Cody and Judy, Stefanie passes out beside John on the couch, and John reveals his Vampire fangs and prepares to strike.

Just as those fangs come out, we cut back to Judy and Bud. Bud reveals to Judy the Bitcoin truth, and Judy convinces him to come out and talk to the kids about it. Get it all out in the open and work through the family issues together. This is Bud's REVELATION: that being more open and honest will bring his family back together again.

ACT THREE

Act Three is the final test of the Protagonist. They've glimpsed their revelation, but a great

calamity forces them back into their old ways.

The 'B' PLOT, up to this point, has been Bud's slow realization that he doesn't need to go it alone, he can open up to his family about his problems. Even though he started the day making a hollow attempt to bring the family back together to achieve his immediate goal, his emotional journey throughout that quest of reconnecting and listening to his family has brought him to the brink of this new version of himself.

But in order to achieve this SYNTHESIS, he must overcome one final OBSTACLE: walking in on Vampire John sucking blood from Stefanie's throat. Bud's first response is to go into "Cop Mode": he secures John, locking him in the basement closet, and makes sure that Stefanie's first aid is attended to. Bud demands answers, but it takes Stefanie to get John to open up. John reveals that he's a vampire, and describes how this came about in a flashback sequence. After he finishes his story, his vampirism is proven by definitively showing that he has no reflection.

John begs them to just kill him and put him out of his misery. Cody is for it, Judy and Stefanie are against it, and Bud quickly comes to the grim realization that maybe killing John is the only way to eliminate this problem. They prepare to kill John, and Judy becomes livid, asserting herself against Bud for the first time and revealing that he has been lying to the children. She dissects the flaws in Bud's character and diagnoses his inability to be emotionally nurturing to his family. As Bud holds the stake above John's heart, he realizes that Judy is right. He can't do it. He tells John that they're going to help him deal with his Vampirism issue.

The O'Briens are relieved, but Cody demands satisfaction. He gets Bud's gun and attempts

to force Bud to stake John. However, in his drunken stupor, he barfs and the gun goes off, shooting Stefanie in the chest. Stefanie is dying, but John offers a plan to save her: if she drinks his Vampire blood, theoretically she will become a Vampire and survive. It's a tough decision, but Bud allows Stefanie to make it herself. John performs the blood exchange, but Stefanie dies anyway...

Mourning her corpse, Bud and John truly come together, crying, apologizing, and admitting their love for each other. And then Stefanie comes back to life. The transfusion worked. The family is overjoyed.

DENOUEMENT: Stefanie now better, the family sits in the living room, sipping eggnog while Bud opens up about the true circumstances of Grandma Maeve's death. Stefanie and John are becoming agitated with blood lust, so Bud volunteers to cut himself and they drink his blood. He feels strangely satisfied at being able to offer his children this nourishment. After the blood sucking is done, Bud reads the kids a Christmas story, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer.

CLOSING IMAGE: As Bud reads the story, we slowly ZOOM OUT from a master of the living room, until it's just a small speck of light on an otherwise black screen. This image suggests that though the world is a black void, the O'Briens have the womb of family to keep them safe and warm. This is an homage to the final shot of Sidney Lumet's 1962 adaptation of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, another story about a dysfunctional family sneaking around each other to feed their addictions.

MY FILMMAKING CAREER SO FAR

As a child, I spent most of my free time either drawing or playing games of the imagination. There were several movies that I watched at least a hundred times or more as a boy. The most watched ones were: *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. One could probably find most of the basic elements of my approach to filmmaking somewhere in those movies.

I started "writing screenplays" in the year 1997 when my family got a computer that had a demo of a program called "3D Movie Maker." Essentially it was a 3D cartoon game that allowed you to set the actors' blocking, record dialogue for them, choose camera angles, and finally cut it all together into a short film. This, combined with my fascination with Hitchcock at the time, taught me a lot of essential lessons about visual storytelling. I made dozens of short films with this program and stretched its limitations as far as I could.

Then, in 1999, my parents bought a video camera to document a family trip across Canada. My younger brother and I used this camera to make many short action films influenced by the movies *Apocalypse Now* and *Speed*, all edited in-camera. These short film experiments formed the next step in my understanding of the basic functions of cinema, specifically the visual and storytelling power of montage.

By the time I was finishing high school, I had realized that the medium of cinema was arguably the ultimate artistic medium: it combined visual art, storytelling, drama, music, and basically any other art form you could throw into the mix in a thrilling way that consumed the

audience's full attention when done right. So I figured that even when I decided to work in another art form, the synthesis of my experiments in visual arts, writing, music, and cinema, would inform that other art form in a way that an artist simply focussed on one thing wouldn't have at their disposal.

So I went to Film School at York when I was 18, had Amnon as my very first teacher, met a lot of great people, and overall had a thoroughly satisfying art school experience. After that I focussed entirely on songwriting for most of my twenties, and then shifted my focus back to movies when I turned 30. A movie I'd written many years before did well in 2013 and I was able to quit my day job and focus on screenwriting as a day job for the foreseeable future.

Writing screenplays that someone else will eventually direct is a painful experience. As much as the movies might seem objectively good to an audience, if you're a control freak who came up with the idea, you can never be satisfied. So, I've spent the last five years doing roughly one paid job a year and spending the rest of the time writing dozens of spec screenplays in genres including Comedy, Horror, Action, Police Procedural, Crime Drama, and Historical Drama, most of them for myself to direct once I can raise the necessary financing.

Aside from the essential practice of the craft that this gave me, there are several ideas in Where the Blood Is that have their origins in earlier scripts, including the contained horror element, the family drama, and the relationship between Bud and Cody.

IN CONCLUSION

So, in the end, by using the tools of Visual Storytelling, Realism, and the Classical Unities, I was able to make this script better than it otherwise could have been, and hopefully add something to the canon of a genre that is often considered to be trash. And, as that master fusionist of intense family drama and Hitchockian suspense Claude Chabrol once said: "Stupidity is infinitely more fascinating than intelligence. Intelligence has its limitations while stupidity has none." (Kehr)

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