

**School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts**

**Department of Screen Arts**

**The Ridge and the River: Adapting a novel set in World War Two into a screenplay  
for a contemporary Australian film audience**

**John Roderick Beaton**

**This thesis is presented for the Degree of**

**Master of Philosophy (Creative Arts)**

**of**

**Curtin University**

**May 2016**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to Curtin University for the opportunity it has given to me to read widely about the experience of transforming a book into a feature film screenplay, to think about ideas on how to solve aesthetic and commercial considerations involved in the process and to present my conclusions in this exegesis and screenplay.

I especially want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Helen Merrick for her insights, support, and advice, given with unfailing good humour, despite a very heavy workload.

I am grateful too, to many colleagues within the University who have contributed their thoughts about the problems of adaptation from book to screen, and who have encouraged me with sound academic advice. Special thanks to Dr. Julienne van Loon, Dr. Antonio Traverso and Dr. Ken Miller.

## Table of Contents

Preface	Page 1
Chapter 1: An academic approach to screenwriting and commercial pressures on screenwriters.	Page 4
Chapter 2: The “Essence” of a script; examples of Australian screenplays based on adaptation.	Page 18
Chapter 3: Considerations in adapting the novel “ <i>The Ridge and the River</i> ” to a screenplay.	Page 43
Conclusion	Page 59
References	Page 61
Screenplay	

## Preface

As a teenaged boy growing up in Perth, Western Australia I was given a birthday present of T.A.G. Hungerford's World War Two novel *The Ridge and the River*. I read it at once and was excited about reading a story set in the jungles of the Pacific with Australian characters as heroes.

Many years later, I became friends with the author and believed his story would make the foundation of a feature film. Tom's encouragement and advice helped in writing early drafts of the screenplay, but it wasn't until I had some time at University to read and think about what had to be done to write another draft that could secure commercial and director interest, that helped me to understand the strengths and weakness of the current draft more clearly.

This exegesis asks, "With particular reference to adapting *The Ridge and the River* into a feature film, does adaptation theory give sufficient importance to the commercial and industrial pressures on a screenwriter adapting a novel to a film?"

Like Thomas Leitch, I was "trained in literary studies and drifted into film studies". (Leitch, xi) While teaching English and Literature at a College of Advanced Education in Western Australia, I was encouraged to write and deliver a new elective course in Film Studies. My "drift" became a passionate interest to learn as much as I could about film history, film technology and the distinctions between film production, distribution and exhibition.

Encouraged by a colleague who suggested that while I could talk well about film in lectures and workshops I should actually make a film to know more about the practical problems of production and exhibition, I adapted a short story I had written into a short film screenplay, applied for funding, and directed my first film. Soon after, I wrote more short drama and documentary scripts and later wrote several feature film scripts.

Much later, while lecturing in film studies, with an emphasis in scriptwriting and production, I read specialist texts dealing with the practical and theoretical aspects of screenwriting, I became increasingly fascinated by the fact that there was little in the academic literature about screen writing and adaptation in particular that reported on the industry pressures on a screenwriter. I agree with Naremore when he writes in the introduction to his collection on adaptation studies, that “what we need ...is a broader definition of adaptation ....that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience and the academicculture industry” (Naremore, 2).

Adding to the argument of the need to have a broader definition of adaptation, my exegesis examines aspects of current adaptation theory, and reports on several films with reference to industry and commercial pressures and how they influenced screenwriters. I have limited my references to a small number of Australian drama feature films from the 1970's because there is more current information on their adaptation than earlier (1900 – 1950) Australian film adaptations. Later, in more detail, the exegesis analyses some of the pressures that influenced the latest draft of my screenplay adapted from an Australian author's novel set in World War Two.

In Chapter 1, there is a brief overview of adaptation studies before Chapter 2 where I write about the art of screenwriting with particular emphasis on some of the concerns of adapting a novel for a screenplay. In this chapter I also examine some of the commercial and economic contexts of screenwriting. In Chapter 3 I write about my approach to adapting the specific novel into a screenplay, giving an historical context to the original book, an examination of some concerns of screenplay structure and a personal review of tasks ahead for a further draft of the current script.

John Beaton

March 2014

## Introduction

As wrote in his 1994 book on adaptation:

. . . year after year, as many as four out of five Academy Award nominations are adaptations. And invariably they are the winners. Moreover, this has been true throughout the history of motion pictures, from the period of the Hemingway classics, to *Dr Zhivago* and *The Godfather*, right up to *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Silence of the Lambs* . . . . (Brady, 2)

Approximately one half of the feature films you watch on DVD or at the local shopping mall cinema complex, are adaptations. That is, the idea is not an original one, but taken from another source, such as newspaper articles, magazine stories, short stories, comics, plays, novels and children's books. In my own experience of dealing with an adaptation, in this case adapting an Australian novel about World War Two, one of the most pressing concerns is making it relevant to a contemporary audience.

This chapter looks at how early film studies evolved, often with an academic and literary approach to screenwriting, while a professional screenwriting approach concerning adaptation has been more concerned about the industrial and commercial pressures on screenwriters. An example is that if a film story, adapted or original, does not "connect" with a large, paying audience, a commercial imperative of making a profit can't be fulfilled.

Because film production, distribution and exhibition is a commercially costly and high-risk business there is a commercial imperative to make “*The Ridge and the River*”, first published in 1952, relevant to a contemporary audience. The failure to make a film - adapted from another source or an original screenplay - relevant to a contemporary audience can be commercially and professionally disastrous.

The Walt Disney produced science-fiction film *John Carter* was released in March 2012. The film was adapted from *A Princess of Mars* (1917) a science fantasy novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs and has three scriptwriters credited for the screenplay. The film reportedly cost \$US250 million to produce and a further \$100 million to market. Although publicized budgets like these from Hollywood studios aren't reliable, it is reasonable to believe the film was costly. At the end of March, the United States box office gross for *John Carter* was reported to be \$US37.6 million. A further \$119.3 million has been returned from overseas markets. The film is clearly a commercial flop.

In the Weekend Australian March, 2012, in an article sourced from The Wall Street Journal, Richard Ross, the Walt Disney studio chairman, was quoted as saying, “That *John Carter* is a historical tale should not have excused it from relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century moviegoers.” He went on further to say, “If you have something from the past, you'd better be damn sure that it feels modern.”

However, not all films based on historical material lack relevance. For example, the 1865 novel written by English author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson under the pen-name of Lewis Carroll is an out of copyright and rich vein of ideas for current and future scriptwriters to mine. There are

at least nineteen films based on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, including the 2010 version directed by Tim Burton and starring Johnny Depp.

Like *Alice in Wonderland*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*, has proved to be a rich and out of copyright source of dramatic material for a film. There have been twelve films based on this book, including British, German and South Korean productions.

Laurence Raw concludes, "the process of adapting a literary classic for the cinema - especially in the 1930's - had very little to do with fidelity and everything to do with the constraints placed upon it - not only budgetary, but also relative to the type of theatre in which it might be first exhibited" (Kranz, 119).

The process of adapting a story from one source to a screenplay rarely involves a single author and a single screenwriter. For example, the adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) from book to film involved two credited scriptwriters: The author of the original novel, Thomas Harris, and the professional screenwriter Ted Tally. A more recent and more convoluted example of another path of adaptation is the case of the 2011 Academy Award winning best feature film *The King's Speech* (2010). Based on speech therapist Logue's notebooks, the screenwriter David Seidler had written a screenplay, but, on his wife's advice, adapted it for a stage play. The play was seen in London by the film director's mother. She recommended the play to her son Tom Hooper, as a basis of a potential feature film story.

For over one hundred years, screenplay writers have and continue to have, many challenges to convert a story from one medium to another.

Not the least of them is the knowledge that, unlike a novelist or playwright who is likely to have sole authorship of the finished work, the screenwriter may well be one of several who are employed in the screenwriting process before a final script is produced.

My experience as a scriptwriter and member of the Australian Writers Guild for over thirty years, and producer and member of the Screen Producers Association of Australia meant attending National screenwriters' conferences and National producers' conferences each year.

The academic concerns of theories of screenwriting, or theories of screen production, were rarely items on conference agendas. The majority of writers attending such conferences, while having their own personal career goals, for the most part were very interested in hearing from more established writers, agents, producers and distributors about what kind of programs and stories Australian and international film and television markets were interested in. The commercial concerns of markets, budgets, writing fees, legal complexities and future forecasts of audience needs were uppermost in the minds of conference organisers trying to attract attendees.

Any conference sessions dealing with adaptations, tended to have an individual or small team of screenwriters discussing the craft problems of how to adapt a particular novel or play into a marketable dramatic screenplay, how and where the final screenplay was realised as a film, and who the key players - producers, directors, distributors, lawyers and financiers were - in making this transition.

In their introduction to a collection of academic essays on adaptation, *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches* (2010), Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins write that “Much that has been written about adaptation in the last fifty years has reinforced our willingness to ignore the *fundamental* differences between literature and cinema and to look instead, for *surface* differences.” I agree with this overview, and point out that a screenwriter, looking for craft solutions to problems of how to write a commercially (and hopefully critically) successful screenplay would not hope for assistance from adaptation theory that suggests, as they later write;

“Adaptation studies ought to focus on the space of disjunction between texts and media to ask what that space, that necessary difference, enables. One is reminded of Derrida’s concept of the “aporia” of texts. According to Derrida, a text’s promise can never be fulfilled because it poses a “promise (that) is impossible but never inevitable.” For “ a promise is always excessive,” in that a text remains divorced from an essential reference to reality.” P.20

Rarely are any conference sessions for screenwriters or producers given over to presentations dealing with analysis and discussion of film theory, or adaptation practice and theory. This does not mean that individual writers are neither interested nor concerned with any writing theory. For the most part, this research is individual, meaning scriptwriters discover, often in a haphazard manner, books and articles dealing with screenwriting, film and adaptation theory for themselves.

While there are practical “how to” books on screenwriting, including texts that deal with adapting novels to screenplays, I want to add more understanding to some of the commercial pressures on the screenwriter writing an adaptation.

## Film history

Soon after 1885, generally considered the birth of cinema, the technology of camera, laboratory and projector was manufactured and sold around the world. Directors and producers - not only those in the orange groves of Hollywood - were reading stories and newspaper articles, watching plays, and commissioning writers to adapt stories into dramatic screenplays. In 1913, before Sam Goldfish changed his name to Sam Goldwyn, and was starting his career in New York, he and Jesse Lasky had to pay \$15,000 cash for the rights to Royle's very popular West End and Broadway play *The Squaw Man* to adapt as a five reeler film. A year later, the eponymous film, produced for \$47,000, returned \$244,700 (Marx, *Goldwyn* 54). While a cottage industry at first, the film industry quickly grew into a very profitable business. So much so, that by 1917, Goldwyn paid popular Metropolitan Opera singer Mary Garden \$15,000 a week, to act in his forthcoming films (Marx, 82).

The "star" system developed in New York and Hollywood to promote the commercial interests of producers and distributors, and the popularity of the early fan magazines grew in tandem with the mushrooming popularity of films and their actors. Serious analysis of films also had their place in less popular but authoritative magazines such as *Sight and Sound* founded in 1932, and the highly influential *Cahiers du Cinema* begun in 1952 in France. With contributors and editors like Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, the magazine wrote persuasive articles on the existing beliefs about film

criticism and theory. As Hiller points out in *Cahiers du Cinema, the 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, new Wave*,

. . . what are the typical contents of *Cahiers*? A continuing concern with American cinema, . . . a continuing concern with Italian cinema and realism; . . . a continuing attention to Soviet cinema and ‘art cinema’ . . . and polemics for French cinema (Hiller,3).

The concerns of contributors to *Cahiers du Cinema* had a wider influence than French subscribers. In the 1960’s and early 1970’s, Universities and tertiary colleges began to establish courses in media studies. Such courses were generally seen as a development from academic English and literary criticism studies. In Australia, starting in Victorian universities, media courses began in the early 1960’s and within ten years media studies was being taught in secondary schools. This was valued as an appropriate educational response to the growing influence of Television and the need to have students understand how film and television “worked”. “Being literate in contemporary society means being active, critical, and creative users not only of print and spoken language but also of the visual language of film and television.... Teaching students how to interpret and create visual texts...is another essential component of the English language arts curriculum. Visual communication is part of the fabric of contemporary life” National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association Standards for the English Language Arts (1996). (p. 5). However, while much of the teaching involved understanding the language of film, the study of films like David Lean’s *Oliver Twist* (1948) for its camera work, art direction, and editing skills, classes also involved students having to compare the film with the original novel. Media courses continued the academic and literary bias of early film criticism. It is only in the last twenty years that scholars have moved from this simple comparative

method of adaptation studies into examining the social and cultural functions of cinema.

### **Film studies.**

A major field of film study deals with theories about adaptation, particularly the study of the transformation of novels into featurefilms.

Until the 1980's, much scholarly study was concerned with a single, over-arching interest; the "fidelity" of the film to the book. How faithful was the film story to the book story? While this form of analysis is still strong in many publications and articles, as a single, overarching tool for analyzing the transformation of a book to a film, it has lost its relevance. More recent theory presents a more complex picture of adaptation.

An adaptation can borrow, or intersect, or transform its original source (Andrew, 1945). Kamilla Elliott suggests that adaptation can involve one or more of possible six approaches: psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de (re) composing, incarnational and trumping. She suggests that a de(re)composing approach to adaptation could take one part of a novel – perhaps a single character, or a single dramatic event, to produce a film that could take the sub-text of the novel to become the main text of the film. Further, she considers that the "psychic concept of adaptation argues that to be true to the spirit of a text adaptation *has* to leave behind the literary corpse." (Elliot, 224) The "genetic" approach is another way of writing about the narratological approach to adaptation, whereby the series of events in a narrative, linked by causes, usually involving the same characters who are influenced or are influenced by these events, are the main functions of the story. In adapting the original form to a

screenplay, the scriptwriter will use different plot strategies to rewrite the story into a drama suitable for film.

Rather than illustrate examples of different kinds of adaptation, it is useful to understand the historical “waves” of innovation in adaptation studies over the last fifty years. According to Murray, the first wave was fidelity criticism - “how true is the film to the book”? In this first wave of adaptation theory, intent on analyzing the “fidelity” of the screenplay/film to the original text, scholars failed to understand that while the writer may want and need to find the particular “essence” of the original to make a successful adaptation, this was not their only concern. Theorists did not pay any attention to the sometimes more significant pressures - those commercial considerations for example - on the screenwriter. This failure to begin to understand the industrial process of filmmaking ensured that practicing screenwriters spent little, if any time, studying theories of writing.

Secondly, from about the 1970’s, influenced by formalist literary theory, structuralism and semiotics, a second wave of adaptation studies emerged, which could be called narratology. Finally, a twenty-first century new-wave of adaptation studies has emerged which places “audience pleasure in intertextual citation front and centre of its critical concerns.” (Murray, 10) I agree with Murray’s concern that this third wave is lopsided because it doesn’t provide enough attention to “production contexts, financial structures and legal regimes” in adaptation. To be fair, neither of the earlier two waves of adaptation criticism took into account - other than in a general, anecdotal manner - the important pressures on the writer of production demands, financial constraints or even legally binding contractual boundaries.

There is a growing interest in studying the financial, industrial and commercial constraints placed upon screenwriters adapting sources for screenplays as a more holistic analysis of the process than the “fidelity” of the film to its original source. For example, Naremore’s essay *Kubrick, Douglas, and the Authorship of Paths of Glory* considers production conditions of the film, and notes, “nearly all the major differences between the novel and the film can be accounted for by a need to build up Douglas’s role” (Kranz, 92). This included a contract point between production company and lead actor that all of Douglas’ films had to “contain a scene in which he takes off his shirt” (Kranz, 92). Script and film criticism cannot make full sense of the finished product without knowing the kind of production information - trivial as the contract point above may seem - which influences the choices the writer has to make.

Leitch, in a review article, *Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads* pays tribute to the pioneering work of McFarlane, Cartmell, Whelehan, Naremore and Cardwell on the “relation between film adaptations and their literary antecedents” (Leitch, 63). The turning point from straightforward fidelity studies, to more diverse analysis of adaptation, was prompted by Robert Stam’s three-volume work *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* published in 2004. Among the more diverse forms of analysis, which included intertextuality studies, was a growing interest in the influence of the pragmatic forces of finance and the commercial pressures not only in production but also in distribution and exhibition.

What underpinned much of the fidelity-based criticism was a “word-based” value system as opposed to an “image-based” one. Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, students’ most important source of knowledge and

understanding came principally from print. While films attracted mass audiences, they were marketed and appreciated fundamentally as entertainment. The dichotomy was established early and reinforced consistently that print was good and film, while enjoyable, was inferior.

While there was grudging acceptance that some films could be considered as great art, and put on the same pedestal as great literature, this did not change the general bias towards print over the visual. This bias persisted until the penetration of television sets in homes, first in the Western world and later throughout the world, which meant more people spent more time getting information, knowledge, understanding and entertainment through images and sound. Questioning of the previous bias of print over film began. Education studies began to reveal that people had a visual literacy as much as a numerate and words based literacy. As late as 2004, educationist and researcher Charles Hill was bemoaning that the education system had not yet fully caught up with “the by-now undisputed fact that our students come to us having been "exposed to a broad range of information daily ... [and that s]o far our educational system has failed to take seriously and to adequately respond to the fact that so much of this information is in visual form" (Hill, 108). These studies added to the accelerating change of understanding that in an increasingly sophisticated, visually literate society, print no longer remained primary in a hierarchy.

Despite these changes, the comparison of two completely different forms of telling stories - words in print and pictures on a screen - the most predominant popular perception is that the original book is better than the adapted film. Here is an example - common on any of the discussion boards on the internationally regarded Web-based first source for information on films – iMDB (International Movie Date Base). The

film *The Firm* (1993) has the following discussion. It compares the film to the original best-selling book by John Grisham. Italics are mine.

I don't even know where to start. I was extremely disappointed after reading the book earlier this week for the first time, and watching the movie last night for the first time.

The direction was horrible. The cinematography was bland. Several characters were sorely miscast. And the *script writers took liberties that, in my opinion, ruined some of the best parts of major plot lines in the book.*

Some of this attitude persists in critical literature. In her Preface to the Second Edition of *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon writes that one of her two aims was “to tackle head-on the subtle and not so subtle denigration of adaptation in our (late-Romantic, capitalist) culture that still tends to value the “original”, despite the ubiquity and longevity of adaptation as a mode of re-telling our favourite stories”. (Hutcheon, xx) The underlying value remains the same - books are better than films. Films leave out too many things from the book - characters, events and themes. The film adaptation often drastically changes the events in the original book. A film might alter the ending the novelist had written, and often introduces new characters. I agree with Hutcheon when she bemoans the continual academic fascination with the relationship between film and fiction in adaptation studies. The fascination continues, even in newer journals such as *The Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*.

Why, then has this method of comparison been so prevalent in screen studies generally and in adaptation studies in particular? Part of the reason lies in the history of film and both popular and scholarly writing about film. Only recently has an understanding emerged among

film scholars that the film industry - like others - has commercial pressures and industrial concerns that directly impinge on people who work within it. These pressures influence the outcome of a writer adapting a story into a commercially realisable script for film.

As Faubert writes:

Contemporary scholars, such as Linda Hutcheon and Thomas Leitch, argue that the context in which an adaptation emerges produces for it a set of meanings that are critically more valuable than those which can be found through a comparison with its source. (Faubert, 180)

Later, however, he goes on to say that this approach has limitations of its own, in particular it “overlooks the fact that many adaptations have always been commercial products” (Faubert, 181). Removing adaptation studies from the context of the predominantly commercial imperative that places artistic and social contributions in an inferior place makes it almost impossible to understand cinema, particularly Hollywood cinema, but many other national cinemas as well, including Australia. The interaction of the commercial and industrial elements as well as the artistic and social forces in making a feature film from a study of adaptation is only recently being analysed.

Worldwide, the majority of feature films, not only those produced in Hollywood, emerge from an aesthetic that is shaped by commercial concerns; “How can this story/film make a profit?” Artistic concerns are structured and altered by industrial concerns as well as commercial ones. Increasingly, adaptation scholars are revising the comparative analyses of book text to film text, by examining the industrial and commercial choices, the targeting of particular audiences (marketing) as well as the social and cultural environment of the original book and the (often later)

social and cultural environment of the completed film as a more beneficial way of understanding adaptation. Gueric DeBona, in his 2010 book *Film Adaptation in the Studio Era* is one such champion of this method of adaptation analysis.

De Bona agrees with Naremore's view that much current writing about adaptation moves between two groups. One group, influenced by Bluestone, writes about adaptation in a literary versus cinematic form. A second group, influenced by the auteurists at *Cahiers du Cinema*, is more "apt to consider such things as audiences, historical situations, and cultural politics" (DeBona, 4). It is this second group of writers on adaptation theory, that takes seriously Naremore's suggestion that "what we need instead is a broader definition of adaptation and a sociology that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry" that interests me, particularly some aspects of the commercial apparatus that brings pressure to bear on the scriptwriter adapting a novel into a screenplay.

The next section examines key aspects of the art and craft of screenwriting, and by doing so, discovers where the screenwriter's internal aesthetic considerations must find a balance with the external commercial and industrial motives of a film studio or production company. For the screenwriter and the film producer, what is often agreed early in the process, as the single most important aspect of adaptation is the consideration of finding the "essence" of the story to be re-told.

## 2

**Finding the “essence” of the story.**

. . . in human affairs there is never a single narrative. There is always one counter-story, and usually several, and in a democracy you will probably get to hear them (Clendinnen, 3).

The scriptwriter, in adapting a novel into a screenplay, and trying to find what the essence of the original story is, is aware that within the original story there is the possibility of an alternative or opposing story as well.

Whether the adaptation be from a play (Shakespeare’s *Othello*) for example, to Opera (Verdi’s *Othello*) or Stephan Elliot’s original screenplay and direction of the film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) to *Priscilla Queen of the Desert - the Musical*, (2006), or from novel to film, the biggest question at the heart of all adaptation is this: What is the *essence* of the original? While the core of the work to be adapted - in this case a novel into a film - can lie in the time frame of the story, or the atmosphere of the original, or the characters, the human essence must be preserved. From the beginning of time, stories hold a “mirror up to nature” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet Act 3, Sc 2, 17-24*) i.e. human nature. While some might argue there is no “essential” human nature, and there are only the constructions of a local culture, there is little argument that the great repository of detailed knowledge of human

nature is in literature - the stories told in words and in pictures over millennia which allow us to think beyond the here and now, and to think in novel, complex and strategic ways.

The feature film *The Firm* (1993) was adapted from Grisham's eponymous bestseller. Despite the disappointments of some viewers who felt betrayed by the film because it didn't cast the right characters, or left out characters from the book entirely, the screenwriters (influenced perhaps by the studio, or director or producer who commissioned them) clearly understood that the heart of the story was the main character's fight against his criminal employers. It is Tom Cruise's "hero" story of the essentially good man fighting evil, and, in the process, keeping his integrity, his marriage and his license to keep practicing law intact. The essential human element of the book is kept whole in the adaptation from novel to screenplay.

Who makes this judgement and on what basis? While every history of the development of a novel into a screenplay has its unique characteristics, the screenwriter has the first task of determining what is the key driver of the novel that can provide the "spine" of a dramatic screenplay. For example, Robin Swicord, screenwriter of *Little Women*, (1994) *Matilda* (1996) and *Memoirs of a Geisha*, (2005) discussed the process of adapting novels into screenplays at the Literature Film Association Conference at Dickinson College in October, 2005. Talking about finding the "essence" of a book to be adapted to a film, she noted, "Let me decode what we have in the novel and try to find the best version of this that can translate to the moving image." In discussing changes from one medium to another she says, "You try to change elements thoughtfully, but you can be too obsessed with being faithful to a book." Often, the time it takes to "decode" what is in the novel can take years,

and not because the writer is simply taking their time. For example, Sony Pictures bought the screen rights to the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden in 2001. A friend of Swicord's who ran Sony Pictures asked her what she thought a film of the book should be like. Swicord gave her friend a twenty second summary of her ideas, but it was two years later before Swicord met the director, Rob Marshall, to give him what she thought the "spine" or the "bold strokes" of the book were.

The writer will study the text many times, have discussions with the producers and, if contracted, the director, before all agreeing what the story is "about". In the case of adapting Golden's book into a screenplay, Swicord says that, working with Marshall, she delivered a twelve-page summary of her thoughts about how a script might take shape from the book. On a request from the producers, she met Marshall again, and "went through the thematic lines of the narrative, and talked about the important scenes, and the general shape of the movie, referring to the notes and the rough outline that I had sent Rob" (Kranz, 15). Later, she met the production designer and together they studied hundreds of art books on Japan. After these consultations and careful thought, Swicord wrote two drafts of the screenplay - the first closely reflecting the book and the outline she and the director had made, and the second draft with "another ending for them that the studiosuggested".

It is not always "another ending" that adapting a novel for a screenplay requires. The dramatic needs of storytelling on film can also mean that the screenwriter, while remaining true to the essence of the original, will alter the point of view of a singular character in a book, to different points of view of additional characters in the adapted screenplay. An example is the change from a single main character in the book by ex-CIA agent Robert Baer called "See No Evil: The True Story

*of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism*” where the essence of the human story is the singular man opposing dark forces in the fight for good. In the book, Baer loses the fight. When the book was adapted to become the screenplay for the feature film *Syriana* (2005) starring George Clooney, the emphasis shifted from one man - the CIA agent - to many. Arabs, Palestinians and earnest but misguided American consultants are shown fighting the corrupting forces of international oil companies while trying to maintain their personal integrity. They too, lose their fight.

### **Screenplay structure**

From the beginning of the twentieth century to approximately the early nineteen sixties, most of the specialized craft skills of screenwriting were known only to writers of all kinds who were lured to Hollywood studios - or their equivalent in other countries - and had to quickly understand how to make a dramatic picture work in a screenplay. Post Second World War, with the acceleration of general public interest in all aspects of the film business, and school and university courses in media and film studies proliferating, there grew a market for “How To” books on filmmaking including, of course, texts on how to write a screenplay. Now, there are so many books on screenwriting that Amazon.com has a web page listing the best fifty. These books are further subdivided under headings like “Basics”, “Structure (formulas)”, “Technique” and “Format”.

One of the earliest screenwriting texts is *Screenplay* (1979) by American writer Syd Field. In the book, Field describes an ideal paradigm for screenwriting in a three-act structure. According to Field, the film must have a *set-up* that in the first twenty to thirty

pages establishes the main characters, genre, style, location and time of the story. In this period the protagonist will find a goal that must be achieved. About half the film will show us the protagonist's struggle to achieve his or her goal, and the final quarter or so will deal with a climax where the hero succeeds (or fails) in achieving their goal. (Field, 10). This is a simplified explanation of the contents of a book that continues to have an extraordinarily powerful influence not only in Hollywood but also for thousands of screenwriters worldwide. When Field died in 2013, the New York Times Obituary by Yardley wrote that *Screenplay* (1979) was "a book that over the next three decades became widely regarded as the "bible" of screenwriting, the paperback enabler of Hollywood dreams." This is partly because, without guidance, many writers struggle with structuring their screenplay. While I believe this structure can stifle experiment and innovation in screenplays, its greatest strength is that it allows the screenwriter to focus on the story, using Field's paradigm to give it shape.

Field writes: ". . . you need more than just an idea to start writing a screenplay. You need a subject to embody and dramatize the idea. A subject is defined as an action and a character. An *action* is what the story is about, and a *character* is who the story is about" (Field, 32).

A further craft task for the screenwriter, then, is a simple answer to the question of "Whose Story is it?" In the past, most feature films kept to the straightforward narrative mode of a linear story with a relatively easily identified hero, villain and, (depending on the genre) a "heart interest" or love story as well. Using Field's questions to discover the foundations in the screenplay of *Gone With the Wind*, (one of the most successful feature films of the last 100 years) reveals that survivaliswhat

the story is about, and Scarlett O'Hara is *who* the story is about. *Gone With the Wind* has a running time of just under four hours. The original hardback novel by the author Margaret Mitchell had 1037 pages. One thing is immediately clear in adapting the book for a film. Not all the events or all of the characters in the original can be accommodated in the film version. When the screenwriters (Sidney Howard was credited, but there were four other scriptwriters who were not credited for their work on the film) and producer (David Selznick) determined what the story was about and who the central character was, they could make decisions about which characters and which events from the novel would be cut. Audiences in the 1940's compared the faithfulness of the film to the book. Today, however, questions of fidelity to source text seems increasingly archaic in an iPad world where remediation and culture jamming are valued.

With this in mind, the next section looks at different approaches to adaptation within the practice of screenwriting. While the search for and understanding of what might be the essence of any form to be adapted to a film is interesting in itself, the screenplay does not have to be sycophantic or derivative and therefore "inferior" to its literary source. Some theorists have argued that instead of examining the fidelity issue, perhaps it is more rewarding to look at an appropriation model where the screenwriter "borrows" the plot and characters. As Sanders observes:

the study of appropriations in an academic context has in part been spurred on by the recognized ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position, and by the capacity of appropriations to highlight troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts to which they refer. Many appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to those characters or subject-positions they

perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original (cited in Gomez-Calisteo).

In the case of *Gone With the Wind* it is easy to identify the investment that writer Sydney Howard appropriated from the novel. On one level, he adapted the plot and chose selected characters from the original for the dramatization of the story. Howard drives the screenplay, not only from plot and characters, but the author's avowed theme of survival and the difference between people who have 'gumption' and those who don't.

Soon after the book was published, the author said:

If *Gone With the Wind* has a theme it is that of survival. What makes some people come through catastrophes and others, apparently just as able, strong, and brave, go under? It happens in every upheaval. Some people survive; others don't. What qualities are in those who fight their way through triumphantly that are lacking in those that go under? I only know that survivors used to call that quality 'gumption.' So I wrote about people who had gumption and people who didn't (cited in Gomez-Galisteo).

Another model of adaptation is an "interpretive mode" that analyses the key ideas and character motivations in the source, and "re-embodies" them. An example of this method would be the adaptation of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, where the key ideas and character motivations informed Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* (Leitch 18). The screenplay takes the action, themes and mood of Conrad's novella as the inspiration for its discussion of the American involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s. While both stories appear different on the surface, they contain similar themes. Marlow in *The*

*Heart of Darkness* and Willard in *Apocalypse Now* are confronted with the moral abyss and the alienation that it creates in the survivor.

Recalling Murray's description of a twenty-first century new-wave of adaptation studies which is placing "audience pleasure in intertextual citation front and centre of its critical concerns" (Murray, 10), the following section attempts to give some attention to production and financial constraints on the process from source text to screenplay.

### **Text to screenplay**

Film scripts have many beginnings. In some cases it will be a screenwriter who has read a novel, been excited and inspired by an aspect of the story, whether that is the plot, character, locations, the central idea driving the story or simply a handful of events in the novel. In other cases, it may be a producer who has read a book and, believing in the commercial and/or dramatic possibilities, commissions a screenwriter to adapt the story for a film script.

At some point in the development process of a script, the writer faces the major considerations of how to turn a word-based narrative into an image-based drama for the screen. This ability is the overriding and singular skill a screenwriter brings to their writing task. The screenwriter also has considerable commercial and industrial pressures.

An immediate requirement, frequently overlooked by cinema goers and some adaptation theorists, is the need to condense what might be a three hundred page book (the original novel, *Gone With the Wind*, was over one thousand pages) into a one hundred and twenty page screenplay. In a rule of thumb for the industry, one page of script equals one minute

of screen time. Hence, a one hundred and twenty page screenplay is a two-hour film. It is obvious that some things from the original book have to be cut. This is easy to understand, and very difficult to do.

Another commercial pressure a screenwriter may come under is the need to write a script with a particular actor in mind who will play a lead role in the film. Words on the page describing characters in the book conjure images in the reader's mind of a particular character's appearance. It is not surprising that many filmgoers are disappointed when their "casting" of the hero from a book does not match the casting the producer, director and writer put on the screen. In 2013, an A list Hollywood actor, like Chris Hemsworth or Johnny Depp is known as "fireproof" - meaning that such an actor almost guarantees financial, if not critical success for the production, distribution and exhibition companies exploiting the film. For example, not every reader of Homer's *Odyssey* and *The Iliad* would imagine that Brad Pitt is the epitome in looks, stature and accent of Achilles, yet he was the lead actor in *Troy* (2004).

Feature films often have more than one screenwriter. A novel is the product of one voice - the author (albeit, mediated to varying degrees by a publisher and editor) - directed to the reader. Each writer has a collection of skills and strengths, which might include good plotting abilities, or a "good ear for dialogue". Their book might, however, also exhibit some weaknesses; perhaps an inability to write convincing female characters.

Because one of the least expensive processes in film production is screen writing, it makes financial sense in such a case to hire a screenwriter with skills and experience in writing convincing female

characters to write a draft of the script. Additional writers with particular skills in plotting or even more specialized skills may well write further drafts. It is not unknown, for example, that a specialist writer will be called to the production office with a contract to “beef up” a star’s dialogue. Many famous writers work as well-paid (but often uncredited) script doctors on Hollywood feature films. British playwright Tom Stoppard wrote the majority of the dialogue on *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/53410/9-films-punched-famous-screenwriters>). A feature film may have many screenwriters credited for the adaptation. It is only when writers and their agents have a conflict about the positioning, font size, and order of appearance of a screenwriter’s name in the screen credits, (therefore the size of the next pay-check) that such a conflict will be referred to the appropriate screenwriters Guild for arbitration. Only after arbitration is it clear which writer had what kind of influence on the final script.

Despite this significant difference between a singular novelist and the many voices writing a screenplay, and no matter how many writers have their finger in the screenwriting pie, the principal writer charged with the adaptation must have the vital skill of telling a story as a drama. A character’s internal conflict can be described in intimate detail for many pages by a skilled novelist, but to realize this internal conflict in images and in a manner that dramatizes the character’s needs and emotions for the audience to see and understand demands the skill of the dramatist.

So far I have written about aspects of screen adaptation with a Hollywood perspective. At the same time as the American film industry was growing, experimenting and through practice, argument and common use determining what later became industry standards, other countries

were also discovering the excitement, power and commercial possibilities of this new medium. As early as 1906, writers in Australia were adapting stories from a wide range of sources into screenplays for the local film industry. Because the exegesis examines the influence of adaptation theory on the process of adapting an Australian novel into a script for an Australian audience, it is useful to understand key aspects of the Australian film industry and the industrial and commercial influences on the screenwriter in this particular industry/location.

### **The Australian film industry**

Australia has developed a thriving, productive, innovative and exciting film industry, including what is acclaimed as the world's first feature drama film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906) that ran for more than an hour. It was adapted for the screen from what was known of the bushranger Ned Kelly's life and death. Despite the critical and commercial success of many early Australian feature films, exhibitors could not resist the financial and political lobbying pressure from globetrotting Hollywood representatives of screening American pictures that were cheaper to rent than the homegrown Australian films. This meant the local film production industry, increasingly starved for high-risk production funds, died a slow death.

It wasn't until the 1970s that successive federal governments committed funds to the development, production, exhibition and overseas marketing of Australian films that what became known as the Renaissance of Australian film began. "Australia produced nearly 400 films between 1970 and 1985 - more than had been made in the history of the Australian film industry" (<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/film-in-australia>). Film directors, start-up

feature film production companies and scriptwriters searched for Australian stories that could be adapted to make especially Australian films. Directors like Peter Weir, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, (1975) Fred Schepisi, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, (1978) Bruce Beresford *The Adventures of Barrie McKenzie*, (1972) and films like *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) and *Storm Boy* (1976), took cinema-going audiences around the world by surprise with their unique stories, locations and high-quality productions, winning prestigious prizes at international film festivals and markets.

Many of these films were adaptations from original novels. One of the early most highly regarded films, both a critical and commercial success, was *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the film that launched director Peter Weir's international career. The key to the success of the book, by Joan Lindsay, first published in 1967, and the extraordinary success of the film is the essence of the original story - the mystery of the disappearance of a party of girls from a fictitious upper-class private boarding school, who travel to Hanging Rock for a picnic in 1900. Producer Pat Lovell bought the screen rights in 1971 for \$100.00 and while she wanted David Williamson to adapt the novel, he was unavailable. Williamson suggested TV writer Cliff Green, who became the sole writer of the final screenplay. It is customary for the director to "rewrite and polish scenes, put interpretations on them and ask for rewrites", but in this case, as Weir says: "Cliff did a very good script, and I was happy with it...who wants to have a lot of writers? You'd ideally like to have only one" (Weir, 7).

Another book from the early days of Australia's film renaissance adapted to a successful film is *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, (1978). This was a Booker award nominated novel by author Thomas Keneally,

written in 1972. It was released as a film with the same title in 1978, written, directed and produced by Fred Schepisi. At the heart of this violent story, based on an actual incident, is white racism in Australia. Schepisi's adaptation deals with Jimmie's violent rage, in images that shocked contemporary audiences. Because of its powerful telling of racism, the film has come to be regarded as a key Australian film of the 1970's. Writing the screenplay for *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Schepisi's adaptation also politicized the historical story, representing a divided, unjust society because, like Keneally, he wished to raise consciousness about race relations, opening the eyes of contemporary Australian society to its amnesia concerning past injustices. (Wilson, p.192)

Fred Schepisi had not only to capture the essence of Keneally's story, but also to be aware that while feature film had expectation of an international release, the primary audience for the film was an Australian one. It was therefore not unreasonable for the screenwriter to assume that an adult Australian audience had some knowledge and understanding, no matter how vague or ill-thought out, of Australia's history of ill-treatment of Aborigines. With this assumption, Schepisi could adapt Keneally's novel without too much concern over the audience not having enough context to appreciate, even if they did not enjoy the violent nature of the film. He retained the original linear narrative of the film, the majority of characters and much of the original dialogue of the novel. The pressures on screenwriters in Australia in the 1970's included a keen understanding of a local (i.e. Australian) audience and its likely tastes. As film budgets grew, the writer's expanded understanding of what an English speaking audience in the USA, Canada, and the UK would enjoy became vital, if the film was to recoup its costs beyond a primary Australian audience.

### **Commercial influences on adaptation.**

Other professionals, dramatists and film producers are sometimes less concerned about fidelity to the original source when adapting a text for a film script.

In 1926, when playwright George Bernard Shaw met Samuel Goldwyn met to write a screenplay for MGM, Goldwyn said he didn't care about money, but was interested in art. Shaw replied to Goldwyn that he didn't think they could do business together because "you're an artist, and care only about art, while I'm only a tradesman and care only about money" (Dukore, 179). The anecdote highlights the tension between the two fundamental sides of the film industry – the creative, "artistic" aspect, and the hardheaded, commercial aspect. To understand some of the commercial and industrial pressures on a screenwriter adapting a book for a film script, I will briefly examine the three major areas of activity in the film business. They are production, distribution and exhibition.

Production involves activities from the concept or idea for a film, through script writing, financing, shooting and editing until there is a final master ready for distribution. Distribution is the business of printing copies of the film, advertising and promotion and shipping copies to the various exhibitors, who are the independent or chains of cinemas. Distributors, frequently involved in financing the production, and with detailed knowledge of what kinds of films are likely to get good audiences in what territories in the world, can play a major role in the business of production as well as creative aspects of a film production.

A producer with the rights from a novelist or publisher to have a film made based on the original story, and having contracted a screenwriter for the adaptation, would have discussions with a proposed distributor of the finished film. In order to try and maximise the financial returns to the exhibitor, distributor, and production company, it is common for a distribution executive to lessen as many of the high risks of film production as possible. Media consultant Blake Harris states that a bankable star is one of the “3 minimum ingredients to any film package”, the other two being a successful director and a script or a strong story idea. One such way of lessening the risk is to contract a well-known actor who has a large international following, to play a lead role in the film. *Dances With Wolves* (1990) with the involvement of Kevin Costner was guaranteed production, for example (Epstein). While there is no guarantee that a star player will automatically bring an audience, to ensure distribution, the producer will balance the cost of an established star, and their acting strengths and weaknesses in initial talks with the screenwriter. Star actors often have contracted input to the screenplay.

For example, actor Dirk Bogarde influenced the development of several drafts of the screenplay for the film *Victim*, the first film to openly depict homosexuality in Britain. Janet Green was the credited screenwriter, but an analysis of the letters between her, her husband John McCormick, Dirk Bogarde, the producer, and the role of the British Board of Film Censors, reveals that “The complex mix of argument, negotiation and collaboration suggests a struggle for control of ideas in the development process between the players involved” (Nelmes, 17).

What this example suggests is that there are many more considerations for the screenwriter than the already complex demands of

changing a story from one format into another. A screenwriter has to take into account the estimated final production budget for the film. Clearly, a \$750,000 low budget feature film has restricted practical possibilities for a screenwriter. At the other end of the scale, the feature film *Australia* (2008) directed by Baz Luhrmann had a budget of over \$100 million. The restrictions aren't on the writer's imagination, creativity or dramatic possibilities, but in the practical considerations of number and remoteness of locations, whether the locations are exterior or interior, whether the production is going to be shot mostly at night or during the day, size of cast including the number of "extras" and other non-speaking roles. This is a small sample of what, at some stage in the screenwriting process (perhaps not at the first draft stage), the writer has to take into account.

The final keyword to discuss in the context of commercial pressures in screenwriting is the audience. Producers, production company executives, directors and screenwriters generally have a reasonably clear audience in mind as they work through the process of adapting a book into a screenplay. A targeted audience of eighteen to twenty-five-year-old men is different from a targeted audience of fifty to seventy five year-old women.

While a screenwriter is aware of the differences, he or she is also conscious of the fact that a good screenplay in a particular genre for a targeted audience can also appeal to a larger audience, and that there is no particular cut-off age that would deter an individual from seeing a well-made film. Meanwhile, producers study important trade publications such as the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. annual publication "Theatrical Market Statistics". In the plethora of figures and graphs about changing numbers of global screens, box office admission

in the US and Canada, the 2012 edition shows that Caucasians make up the majority of moviegoers, but “Hispanics are more likely than any other ethnic group in the US to go to movies and purchased more tickets in 2012 compared to 2011”. A graph in the same publication showing trends in the share of moviegoers demonstrates that in the last three years, more women go to the movies than men. A producer or scriptwriter when optioning the rights to books, plays or story material from any source, with an audience demographic clearly in mind for the completed film, often takes such statistics into account. The producer will also be acutely aware that a film must return 4-5 times its budget before it reaches break-even - the key point where he or she might make a profit. Scriptwriters will have these ideas in place, but the bottom line is still the ability to write a good, dramatic story. Screenwriters have to engage with the problems of deciding what is the best narrative structure for their particular screenplay.

### **What is narrative, feature film structure?**

Historically, a professional scriptwriter will be more influenced by compelling national and international trade and commercial statistics about the likely viability of a screenplay, than he or she is about screenwriting theories. The financially compelling need to have a screenplay not just developed but produced, has meant that scriptwriters focus a lot of attention on the craft skills of their profession. One such skill is overcoming the problems of screenplay structure.

One of the most influential books on the craft of screenwriting is Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. First published in 1949, it combines the insights of modern psychology with the author's understanding of comparative mythology. Powerful and famous

filmmakers like Spielberg, Coppola, and George Lucas acknowledge the influence of Campbell's book on their own work. Screenwriters, looking for good "tools" for their craft of storytelling, look to other writers who can explain the pattern behind successful stories. Campbell studied world myths, and realized that the myth of the hero's journey is the most persistent. The title of Vogler's 1992 book, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers & Screenwriters*, emphasises the need for a screenwriter to have a structure for dramatic storytelling that can successfully engage an audience. Vogler's *Mythic Structure* is one such paradigm that screenwriters turn to shape their story. Syd Field's Three-Act Paradigm is another story writing tool for the screenwriter. A screenwriter, like a novelist, short story writer, playwright or any creator of a story has to know the arrangement of and the relations between the parts of the complex artifice called story.

The American novelist and screenwriter William Goldman, most famous for his original screenplay *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) wrote Ten Commandments for screenwriters. At the top of his Ten Commandments he wrote, "structure is everything". This is a deceptively easy statement to make about the importance of one overriding element of successful screenwriting, but it begs many questions, not the least of which is, what did he mean by structure? In his book *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (1983) describing his experiences as a screenwriter in Hollywood, Goldman explains that for him, structure is the ordering of scenes in the best possible way for an audience. This is another deceptively simple statement that needs to be unpacked more to understand the writing skills required to reach a well-structured screenplay. I want to examine words like "order" and "scene" as a way of understanding the importance of Goldman's statement.

Unlike a novelist who may *dream* of writing a book that could become a bestseller and sell millions of copies, a screenwriter *knows* that their story has to reach millions of viewers. But every storyteller, whether writing in prose or screenplay format, wrestles with the problem of what information, what kind of information, and at what point in the story do they give this information to their reader/audience. For example, writing a scene that gives a vital but small piece of visual information to the audience for a mystery genre isn't difficult. The difficulty lies in deciding where to put the scene in the shape of the unfolding events of the story. If the scene with this vital piece of information comes too early in the structure, for some, this could result in failure of the film. On the other hand, if the scene comes too late in the structure, it is possible that many audiences will have already "got it" - that is, understood the importance of it already, thereby lessening the credibility and enjoyment of the story. The peculiar kind of judgement required of the screenwriter in this case, is making a decision about where to place this vital scene in the structure of the film without damaging the story and thereby the film for the audience. This kind of judgement requires understanding the dramatic needs of storytelling.

### **Different kinds of structure**

The most traditional is the three-act structure, analysed by film theorists and used by screenwriters for over one hundred years. Described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the three-act structure continues to be a deeply satisfying organisation of dramatic events for contemporary audiences. "Basically, all dramatic pieces follow a three-act structure, which corresponds to the beginning, middle and end of a story" Portnoy(13). Portnoy is one of scores of writers who have textbooks or web sites about screenplay writing who acknowledge the power and purpose of this

structure.

The first act, generally called the setup, establishes the main characters, the kind or genre of film story we're going to watch, a sense of style, mood, place and pace, as well as the central question or conflict for the remainder of the story. For example, in the now recognised classic Australian film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, in the opening ten minutes of the first act, the film quickly and clearly introduces the location - country Victoria - beginning of the twentieth century and the main question: what will happen to the girls on the picnic?

Act two in this structure takes the elements established in the setup of Act one and complicates in a variety of ways the obstacles and difficulties for the main character or characters to achieve some kind of internal or external goal. Finally, in Act three, the storyteller will resolve the problems raised in the first act. Clearly, this simplistic overview in three short paragraphs can only be that. However, this structure with its carefully thought out plot turning points has been and still is the main shape of tens of thousands of feature films. Some of these have been analysed in Field's book *Screenplay; The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979).

As cinema audiences have become more sophisticated in their viewing, many screenwriters have successfully challenged the traditional three-act structure, writing screenplays in a non-linear way. Many of these have been critical and financially successful films. *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Run, Lola, Run* (1998), *Syriana* (2005), *Crash* (2004), and *Babel* (2006), are a few feature films that have achieved success, yet are non-linear in their structure. Not all non-linear screenplays have been commercially successful, however, even if film

critics, academics and film students are enthusiastic about the experiment.

Such films have invited analysis about their structure, and various labels are used to try and describe their shape. Linda Seger, a Hollywood based script consultant and screenwriting coach has written ten books on the subject of screenwriting. She has appeared on several American Writer's Guild (West) seminars as well. Attempting to label some of the different structures she takes the most famous of the above films, *Pulp Fiction*. This film begins at the beginning, jumps to the end, and looks back to the middle. Seger calls this a **Loop Structure**. Evan Smith, writing in the *Journal of Film and Video*, discussing non-linear structure, prefers to call this a **Thread structure**, and points out that "each story thread is shorter, less developed, than a conventional plot ... because the writer is cramming two, three, four or more main stories into a space normally accorded one" (Smith, 88).

*Mulholland Drive* (2001) has a similar looping shape, which critics such as Philip French from *The Guardian* and Roger Ebert from the *Chicago Sun-Times* were enthusiastic about. There are several story "threads" in this film. The main one is about the amnesiac car-crash victim who calls herself Rita, while another thread is about a film director called Adam, and a man with no name who has horrifying dreams.

All of these separate but simultaneously occurring narratives follow a sequence, or they seem to until two-thirds into *Mulholland Drive*. From then on, all bets are off as the film spirals into an increasingly absurd and confused jumble. In fact, the persons, events, and images in this last third feel more desultory than those of the previous two-thirds; as they appear to have been woven into each other, like a Möbius strip, with some details that overlap and some that do not.

Moreover, the narrative framework in this last portion seems much more circular, fluid, and tousled than it does in the first which might explain why words fail to pinpoint an exact destination (meaning) for Mulholland Drive (Hudson, 17).

Not surprisingly, filmgoers were confused. The director/writer David Lynch refused to give away any clues to his dream-like film, and box office returns were poor. The film cost \$15,000,000 and returned a gross of \$20,000,000. The looping structure, as far as audiences were concerned, was a failure.

*Groundhog Day* (1993) is an example of a writer successfully altering the three-act structure in what can be called **The Broken Record Structure**. *Groundhog Day* is about one day in the life of a fictional, apolitical, very ordinary man. In this film we have a beginning, which leads us to the middle, and we have middle, middle, middle, middle before we move to the third act and the end. This is, obviously, a difficult structure to play with and rarely used. Yet Suzanne Daughton believes that this compositional technique, a rhetorical structure, is effective in the film to show the audience a practical guide “toward achieving wholeness and transcendence” (Daughton, 138). A romantic comedy in genre terms, *Groundhog Day* is a parable or myth of the human condition. The Broken Record Structure allows the writer and director to show how the hero, played by Bill Murray, has to un-learn some rigid behaviours.

Another example of screenwriters playing with the traditional three act structure and succeeding is the film *Memento* (2000) which turns the structure on its head by starting at the end of the story and working its way to the beginning. Again, a difficult structure to write a drama in, because we are so used to hearing and seeing stories with a linear

structure that start at one point in time and work their way through to the climax and conclusion at a different point in time, nearly always in the future. We are so accustomed to this that to turn this expectation on its head and to keep an audience successfully engaged for two hours when within the opening ten minutes they can guess the outcome and the resolution, means the writer has to keep the audience curious about the setup, that is, the beginning of the story that led to the outcome they already know.

*Memento* is a very good example of what a complex narration can be. It was a successful film both critically and financially, partly because of its sense of newness for the cinema audience, partly because it engaged them in a kind of reverse detective story “whodunit” process, and certainly because the script by Christopher Nolan (who also directed) was exceptionally well-written and the production was of a high standard. Because the film moves backwards, the viewer tries to put the scenes in the right order. But this is difficult when the flow of continuous events unfolding on screen, inhibits recalling what has already been seen. The DVD special edition of the film had a second disk that re-arranged the events in chronological order, showing a simple, linear storyline. Detailed critical analyses by Stefano Ghislotti of the structure of the screened film, with the re-arranged chronological version leads him to conclude that *Memento* presents a mnemonic system: a “structured set of memory aids which parallels the two main story lines.” He says that “Mnemonic connections are different from temporal or causal connections: they are free from rigid direction as well as from strict chronological binds” (Ghislotti, 104). Despite the film’s critical and commercial success, the puzzling, disorienting structure has not been repeated in feature films since the film’s release in 2000.

A **Circle Structure** is where we start at one place in the story and circle back until we end up at the same place we began: sometimes at the same time we began. This dramatic structure can please, because audiences have often had experiences in time where they sense they have come back to a familiar place, albeit with changed personal circumstances. *Eyes Wide Shut*, the 1999 film starring Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise was adapted by director Kubrick from the 1926 novel by Arthur Schnitzler. His *traumnovelle* or dream story structure ends where you began. This shape is successful for unfolding the erotic impulses through fantasies, dreams and behaviours in the film. Jack Boozer points this out when he says that: “One further connection that may have attracted Kubrick to Schnitzler’s short novel was one he repeatedly borrowed from his literary sources, namely, symmetrical story construction” (Boozer, 86). What is more symmetrical than a circle?

Scriptwriter, consultant and teacher, Linda Aronson in her blog, breaks down the **Parallel Journey story**, where two stories are told side by side, into six different sorts. (Aronson) Without going into examples of each sort here, films like *City of Hope*, *Traffic*, and *Brokeback Mountain* are examples of how a parallel journey can use tandem stories, or multiple protagonists or double journeys. The problem for the screenwriter using this structure is to determine where and how, why and when the two stories move together at key times. In other words, how long can you keep the two stories separate and maintain a dramatic tension?

I have discussed three historical stages of academic writing on screen adaptation, with more emphasis on the recent interest in the financial, industrial and commercial constraints on screenwriters. I have also examined some key screenwriting craft skills including finding

the “essence” of the original story and the necessity of deciding on the best structure for the script to have the best opportunity to be a commercial and critically successful film.

The next section focuses on my individual solutions to writing a fourth draft script, adapted from an original novel.

## 3

**Adapting *The Ridge and the River* to a screenplay.**

An issue not always covered in academic discussion on adaptation is that the process of scriptwriting involves many drafts of the script before it is deemed ready for production. Ten drafts of a feature film script of one hundred and twenty pages are not uncommon. Generally speaking, a production executive and writer team (which may or may not include a director at this stage) will concentrate on the first several drafts of the script on ensuring that the dramatic structure of the script is right. Further drafts will focus more attention on finer points of character, scene polishing and latest of all, ensuring that dialogue is right for character and plot.

In this section I will refer to my own adaptation as an example of scriptwriting decisions that have been made and point to others that are still to be made in light of the academic and professional research referred to earlier in the exegesis. The finished screenplay that forms the second part of this submission is a polished third draft. This means that at this stage in the script development process, it has solved most, if not all, the structural concerns of a scripted drama.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Two early drafts of the screenplay were co-written with a partner, playwright and novelist Bill Warnock. After Warnock died, I continued, with the author's consent, the process of re-writing the script to a produceable, commercial standard.

Among many tasks in adapting Hungerford's novel into a screenplay, I face the same challenge as Ramadam Suleman when he adapted the 1997 apartheid novella by Mdebele titled *Fools* into the eponymous feature film. His task, as mine is, was not only how to transform literature to cinema, but also how "to represent a colonial past in a postcolonial present, thereby creating a history and identity"(Leitch, 66).

As a creative practitioner, the research process needs to encompass not just an informed 'reading' of the original text, but historical research into the contexts informing this text. In the case of *The Ridge and the River*, this involves a complex layering of contexts: the cultural and political positioning and history of the author; texts relating to the 'real life' portion of 1940's Australian history; my own contemporary socio-political context; and how the practicalities of film production influences creative choices in adapting a novel to a film script. The chapter will look at each of these elements in turn.

A further aspect of the enterprise is to examine some aspects of what is often missing in the current discourse about adaptation. What is missing is more detailed research on the commercial and industrial pressures on screenwriters. What does exist in this area is based more on scholarly analysis rather than screenwriting practice. Tom Stempel in his book, *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*, believes that the existing histories of screenwriting is incomplete, because the directors, producers, even actors and the well-funded publicity machines in Hollywood studios downplayed the role of the screenwriter, because it was in their interests to do so. He believes, as I do, that a shift of control in film production from the power and influence of producers

to film directors is part of the reason behind a decline in the quality of films. Further, he says, “One reason the films of the thirties and forties are so memorable is that they were made by producers who respected good writing, like Zanuck, Thalberg and Wallis” (Stempel, xiii). Such producers not only respected good writers, but also often had significant creative input to the development of the screenplay through its successive drafts.

The next section will look at the historical background of the author and his novel to provide a context within which the adaptation has taken place. *The Ridge and the River* was published in 1950. Thomas Arthur Guy Hungerford, the author, was born in 1915 in Western Australia, then with just over 322,000 inhabitants (excluding Aborigines who weren't counted in the census). He grew up in South Perth, when the area was semi-rural, with riverfront market gardens worked by Chinese men. As a young West Australian he was, of course, a citizen of the global British Empire. Tom began writing as a teenager and had a short story published in the Sydney Bulletin in 1942. He was a sergeant in 2/8 Commando Squadron, and served with the Australian Army in Darwin, New Guinea, and Bougainville and later with the Occupation Forces in Japan. After the war, Hungerford wrote his first novel - *The Ridge and the River*. In the 1950's, Hungerford's editor believed that readers were not ready to read authentic Australian wartime vernacular, and the book was heavily edited, mostly removing the authentic swear-words common at the time. It is a tightly written story based on his experiences as a commando in Bougainville towards the end of the World War Two. The book captures the pressures of jungle fighting, focusing on a reconnaissance patrol of oddly assorted men fighting the often unseen Japanese enemy, and set against the overwhelming presence of the rain forest. Their tough language shows their dependence on each

other, their past memories of varied lives back in Australia and their constant anxieties. In 2005, a year after he was awarded a Living Treasure of Western Australia by the Western Australian Government, the ABC's 7.30 Report reported on the book saying the "unflinching depictions of jungle fighting are acknowledged as some of the best writing to come out of the war". Hungerford told the program he wasn't a hero: "I was one of a group of men all doing the same bloody thing. Sticking the head up, hoping to Christ it wouldn't be shot off." (<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1349028.htm>)

While the foregoing gives historical context, the question for the screenwriter is how to make seventy year old history relevant to a contemporary audience. The following outlines some of the concerns and objectives to achieve relevance. My principal target audience for the screenplay is eighteen to forty-year-old men. A twenty five year old today, was born in 1988, nearly forty years after *The Ridge and the River* was published, forty three years since the end of World War Two and the war in the Pacific and few Australians today would identify as being members of the British Empire.

Syd Field warns adaptors of non-fiction to ". . . . approach it from a screenwriter's point of view. What's the story about? Who's the main character? What's the ending?" (Field, 164). My task was to combine an appropriate film adaptation method with the "facts" of the author and his subject's lives into the coherent whole of a film script. As many authors do, Hungerford has used some of the facts of his direct experience of jungle fighting, and altered many. However, it is not my intention in my research to become a literary detective and simply uncover the differences between the reported facts of Australian Commando experience in World War Two and point out where Hungerford diverges

from these facts. This would be part of the process for research for a documentary, not a dramatic retelling of the original into a screenplay for film production.

### **Whose story is it?**

Hungerford's novel involves a handful of Australian commandos on a reconnaissance patrol in the closing stages of World War Two. They include Army privates Wallace, Sweet, Howard, White, Manetta and Evans; Corporals Shearwood, and Malise, Major Lovatt, Lieutenant Wilder, and two Kanaka porters—Mummawa and Womai. The enemy Japanese are only identified as individuals in a revelatory scene towards the end of the story.

One solution was considered early in the planning. A character in the patrol called Malise, grudgingly admired as a good soldier by his colleagues, but acknowledged to be aggressive, angry and somehow “different” from his mates is revealed towards the end of the novel as being part Aboriginal. Malise discloses his reasons why doesn't want the war to end, and why he is content to remain a fighting soldier. Because of the circumstances of war, he is regarded and judged equally by his skills as a soldier, and not as a second-class Australian because of his Aboriginality.

To shine another light on the long-term effects of both war and race discrimination in contemporary Australia, an earlier draft had Malise the central character in the screenplay. The story cut from the patrol in 1944, to flashback scenes giving the audience some information (but not too much) about Malise's background, as well as carefully placed flash-forward scenes showing Malise at an Anzac day

parade 40 years after the war. Rewriting the story in this way provided a strong narrative method to drive home two points about the long-term damage of war on young men, and the ongoing harm of the poison of race discrimination.

However, a draft script exploring this potential solution to the problem of making the story more relevant, while solving some of the issues of relevance, created a greater dramatic problem.

The rising dramatic tension of focusing the audience on the continuing actions in one location - the jungle - was lost each time we left that location with its claustrophobic sense of the constant threat of death, for wide shot scenes in 1990's Australia. The strength of the tension rising to an exciting climax by keeping the audience in one time and in one location was felt to be much more dramatically valuable than the somewhat artificial and relatively simplistic solution to the need for relevance by choosing to make the part Aboriginal character of Malise the hero. The new focus - away from choosing one character as the source of a dramatic structure - meant finding a dramatic structure that would work.

Because the novel originates from Hungerford's direct experience as a commando for three years, mostly in the western Pacific island of Bougainville, he identified the character of Corporal Shearwood as most like himself. It was tempting then, in adapting the story for a film script, to make this character the central one in the drama. Interestingly though, Shearwood does not change much as a character from the beginning to the end of the novel, while the character who undergoes most changes is Lieutenant Wilder.

Many war stories examine the personal qualities and characteristics of men under extreme stress. *The Ridge and the River* does the same. All of Hungerford's characters face difficulty, danger, extreme privation and the constant threat of death. At the beginning of the story they are an experienced, tight knit band of men, albeit with individual internal conflicts and external personal ones, while the outsider in the story is Lieutenant Wilder. He is introduced as a coward, is put in charge of the platoon, where he is tested as a man and a leader. He is the character who changes most in the novel, and was my choice in answering the question of whose story is it? Again, the theme of an individual being tested in the extremes of war is a common one.

### **Essence of the story**

As referred to earlier, every screenwriter in making an adaptation, at some point has to determine what the essence, or heart of the original story is. In my case, adapting *The Ridge and the River* meant reading and rereading the novel, and many discussions with the author, Tom Hungerford. He was enthusiastic about adapting his novel for a screenplay, and content that the screenwriter should have creative control of the finished script. Early research also involved watching World War Two newsreel footage of Australian soldiers fighting in Papua New Guinea and the jungles of the Pacific Islands.

There are several strong themes in Hungerford's novel, and as one would expect from stories set in battlefronts of war, a powerful element was that of survival. Personal and group survival in the difficult conditions of fighting in heat, rain, mud and dense rainforest

against a determined and generally unseen enemy is a major theme. A second theme, as one might also expect from an Australian author at that time, is that of mateship: a quality of loyalty, equality and friendship, which Australians claim is a national characteristic. Hungerford explores this close relationship between men intensified by the pressures of war. These pressures reveal the personal characteristics and qualities of each man and how these qualities interact in the group, sometimes determining their ability to survive. Another theme common to many war stories including *The Ridge and the River* is the futility of war, given the common humanity of all combatants.

Given that these are strong themes in the novel, the question of what is the essence of the story still remains. My conclusion was that the heart of the story was an examination of courage. The bravery of each man is examined at different stages throughout the novel. Some of these stages involve the mundane and repetitive tasks of being a soldier, including establishing a camp, maintaining weapons, keeping clean, sleeping and eating. Other much less mundane activities involve surviving an enemy ambush and carrying wounded comrades through dangerous rivers, impenetrable jungle, and up steep mountain ridges. Other scenes in the novel question the individual soldier's courage in dealing with the hierarchy of army discipline and obedience. While the stakes are higher in a war story, in every day life each person has to deal with the mundane and repetitious in the daily grind. Each person has to deal with individual and collective relationships in their work life, including degrees of discipline and obedience (while less forceful than that demanded in the military, still present in civilian life) that can question their own levels of courage.

One aspect then, of how to make a World War Two novel relevant to contemporary audience, was determining that the essence of the story - that of courage - was still common to people today. While the theme is still relevant, nevertheless there are still more challenges in conveying this story to a modern day audience.

Another part of this undertaking is to take into account the many significant cultural changes in Australia since 1945. A major shift is a national one from reliance on Britain to a reliance on the global power of the United States, and a concomitant move from British cultural imports like books, music and films for example, to American ones. The post-war influx of migrants, the influence of television, and the changes in sport - all of these and many others directed a shift from local, to national, to a global outlook for Australians. An award-winning novel telling a story over fifty years old is very unlikely to have the same relevance to a contemporary audience as it did with the readers of the 1950's. Because of such changing cultural and historical contexts, my screenplay must depart from its original literary source. How to make a sixty-year-old World War Two story relevant to a contemporary Australian audience is the continuing question for this screenwriter.

### **What structure?**

Previous chapters of the exegesis examined different dramatic structures for screenplays. Having thought about the strengths and weaknesses of each structure, I decided that the best structure for telling this story was a linear one. There is entertainment and storytelling value in other more fractured storytelling such as *Pulp*

*Fiction* (1994). However, this story has the development of the main character from a coward in the opening, to a competent and brave leader by the resolution. There is dramatic tension behind the questions of whether the hero will change and how. Dramatic tension and character development can be lost in anything other than a straightforward linear telling of these changes.

If a different structure involving a change of time was used, apart from the small loss of audience attention while they tried to place the out of sequence scenes into a timeline that makes sense, there is the more important loss, temporary as it may be, of rising dramatic tension.

Many stories in a war film genre have the key dramatic question fluctuating in and out of the storyline of “Who lives, and who dies?” Adding to that fundamental dramatic tension, again rising and falling in and out of the storyline, are the additional character questions for the audience of “Who is going to change; how and why?” To alter the power of audience engagement in this kind of genre by lessening that dramatic tension in any thing other than a linear structure seems to subtract an important element from the writer’s need to engage the audience in the best possible way. While there is intellectual pleasure in a different kind of storytelling structure, for instance, determining where in time we may be in any particular scene, the key driver for the writer is to engage the audience emotionally. I believe for this genre the linear structure is the best.

I chose Field’s three-act paradigm as the foundational structure for *The Ridge and the River*. This meant changing the protagonist from the Aboriginal character of Malise to a major character that

would keep the storyline in the present of the War and not involving flashbacks and flash forwards which would break the tension. The central problem for the protagonist is to show qualities that make him a good leader of the platoon. His struggle to demonstrate his physical courage to overcome pain, hardship and threat of death, and the moral courage to act well despite shame, and opposition see him deal with the internal problems of doubt, and the external problems of men who don't trust him. As well, the protagonist has the overarching problem of carrying out a successful reconnaissance mission in the jungle, where the enemy may ambush the patrol at any time, day or night.

The dramatic climax is when the protagonist has to set an ambush that must succeed. The strength of this particular paradigm is that it allows the writer to focus on the story. The weakness of the paradigm is that once the setup is established, in this case asking the question "Can the hero show that he is brave enough to lead men in war?" audiences, from long experience of many similar films, understand subconsciously that the answer is likely to be "Yes, he can". If the audience can relax, believing they already know the outcome, this weakness will subtract from the power of the story.

This has been a major problem for me in writing the screenplay. I had to think and plan very carefully in order to overcome this weakness. The surest way to overcome the audience's sense that they already know the outcome, is to put the hero into a number of dramatic situations, each one slightly more important as a test of his character than the previous one, and each situation ratcheting up the increasing likelihood that someone, including our hero, could die.

Consequently, throughout the drama, Lieutenant Wilderfaces

and overcomes an escalating series of internal and external conflicts from the men under his command, the constant dangers of operating in dense jungle and the ever-present yet invisible Japanese enemy.

With the inexorable sense of a Greek tragedy, these escalating series of conflicts lead to the climax in Act Three. Setting an ambush is the ultimate test for our hero and his men. At this point, the audience should be very uncertain of their initial sense that the hero will succeed. Their emotional investment in him throughout the drama might mean their backing has failed, and the hero and his men could die. This means that the climax must be exceptionally tense, emotionally exciting and challenging, resulting in release and relief for the audience when their hope that the hero will overcome all of the difficulties and succeed is realised.

Nowhere does the novel explain the details of how a small group of soldiers establish a jungle ambush with the clear objective of killing the enemy who fall into their trap. However, in 1996 Hungerford wrote a very detailed description of exactly how such a trap has to be set in the story 'Ambush'. His story vividly describes where and why different men with a variety of weapons have to be deployed, what signals have to be given, when and how the trap is sprung and with what results. The short story was later adapted and read by the author for an ABC Radio National feature. I decided that these details had to be included in the screenplay for a number of reasons. Because this is the climax, and the hero has to succeed or he and others will die, the specific pieces of information of setting the ambush must be seen and heard on screen. The time it takes to establish the trap, the escalating tension of waiting for the enemy patrol to walk into the ambush and the resulting brief and terrifying

close-quarter fighting that follows adds great suspense and drama to the personal story of Lieutenant Wilder.

Another problem diagnosed early in adapting the novel for the screenplay was that of dialogue. All the characters in the novel have a similar vocabulary and strikingly similar speech patterns. In 2010, when discussing this unusual characteristic with the author, his explanation for this was relatively simple. Hungerford explained that, in 1945, after three years of living and working together, all the men became accustomed to each other's idiosyncrasies and an homogenised speech emerged which was common to them all.

While this carefully noted aspect of character can work in the novel, it can't work in a screenplay for two reasons. The first reason is due to the needs of dramatic writing, and the second reason is due to the particular genre of this screenplay. In several research and reconnaissance trips to Madang and the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea, and surveys in Bougainville, several things were made clear. One of them was that in the dense rainforest jungle, men could not be seen less than a metre away from an observer.

Further, all the men had a yellow complexion. This was a side effect of taking daily Atabrine tablets as a prophylactic against malaria. In film terms, the combination of army camouflage, dense jungle, similar complexion, and almost identical speech patterns meant that it would become very difficult for the audience to distinguish one character from another. Therefore it became essential to give each character distinctive vocabulary, syntax and accent to help the audience identify them quickly and correctly.

A dialogue problem that will be solved in the fourth draft is the colloquial language of Australian soldiers in World War Two. The swearing, slang, and colourful expressions used by the characters in the novel add to its authenticity and strength. However, a contemporary audience could find an excessive reliance on these original expressions and slang more likely to confuse them than not. It becomes important in adapting the dialogue in the novel, to use these idiomatic expressions particular to one age in a carefully selected manner. Too heavy handed a use would be detrimental to the drama, while not using any of these World War Two expressions, and falling into the trap of making the dialogue more “contemporary” would devalue the historical authenticity of the story.

### **Rewriting processes**

Like most forms of writing, screenwriting is a process of rewriting. In the breakdown of the budget for a feature film into the three steps of preproduction, production and postproduction, the least expensive phase is preproduction, of which script writing is part. It is less costly for the screenplay to be rewritten many times than it is to spend money on shooting scenes which, for dramatic and storytelling purposes, do not end up on the screen. The negative cost for movies made by the quasi-independents - the studio-affiliated low-budget art-movie arms like Miramax and Sony Pictures Classics – was between \$18.4m and \$21.8m around 2000, and was a low US\$17m in that year for the box office gross return of \$213.5m for “*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*”.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/aug/31/artsfeatures>)

The current draft of *The Ridge and the River* is a third draft. While this draft has solved many problems, it is common for there to still to be issues which need to be considered for a subsequent draft. In the process of rewriting film scripts, it is seen as good practice to focus on one or two changes in each rewrite source. It is not considered wise to try and “fix” all problems in each draft. For example, after the structure is believed to be right for the story and the drama, the next rewrite might involve strengthening characterisation. Once this is done, changes in characterisation can result in the need to rewrite aspects of the structure again. I have followed this process. The third draft has a strong dramatic structure and the principle characters are credible. Improving scenes in this script is a task for a further rewrite, as is the job of finalizing dialogue and determining the best title.

The title needs reconsideration. While it is a good title for a novel, it is not a good title for a film. There is no implied drama, no sense of possible conflict and little information in the current title. It is not easy to say. For a working title, the current novel title is useful, but for a film title that has to attract and appeal to professional script readers - directors, producers and producers’ assistants - as well as a future audience reading the title amongst many others in the plethora of films being released, the risk is that this slightly bland title could vanish. A better title can also be used to reinforce a contemporary feeling and give an idea of the story. Blake Snyder writing in *Save the Cat* recommends that “a great story must have irony *and* tell the tale.” (P.9)

The dialogue in this draft is drawn from the novel, edited for dramatic purposes, but still faithful to the characters as written by

Hungerford. As discussed earlier in the exegesis, the reason for all characters speaking and sounding the same is factually correct, but dramatically poor. In a fourth draft, the task of rewriting the dialogue where each character has a unique, individual way of speaking because of background, education, age, and even ethnicity must be addressed. Likewise, some dialogue in the novel that is true to the character and the time of World War Two, is racist. It was racist in the 1940's and is now. For example, the use of the word "boong" in the script, while authentic, should be re-considered in the light of contemporary attitudes to racist language. However, the task of rewriting the dialogue is often held over to drafts that are getting closer to the final one, for several reasons. One is that in the hierarchy of difficulty in getting a screenplay to the point where it can be produced, other assessments take priority. Clearly the dramatic structure has to be right, and this can take several drafts, including restructuring scenes, altering characters, location, and even key turning points. There is little point in writing perfect dialogue in draft two, when it is possible that a key character could be cut from a screenplay by draft four.

This is not to underestimate the considerable importance of dialogue being the best it can be. Aside from the fundamental dramatic importance of dialogue driving the story and revealing character, a screenplay has to attract actors who make judgements on the suitability of the role on many aspects, including the lines their character has to deliver.

Another issue to be considered is the opening of the story in the third and current draft. Again, like the dialogue, it is faithful to the novel opening, but fails an important test for the war film genre, which

requires more action that involves life-and-death than the current scenes that give location, time and some key characters. Because the story is now about Lieutenant Wilder, he needs be introduced much earlier in the next draft. This will mean that the central question of whether he is a coward or not is raised at the beginning, and not left until later as it is currently.

## Conclusion

When I began reading articles, books and essays about adaptation, particularly aspects of theories of adaptation, I was searching for ideas and strategies to help me write a fourth draft of *The Ridge and the River*. Nearly all of the earlier theories concerning fidelity of film to the book were not helpful, partly because, it seemed to me of the in-built bias of print over film. Secondly, because most of the problems and issues in the first three drafts that had to be fixed, changed or still need to be changed are because of the understandable desire to remain faithful to the novel – a common fault of many screenwriters adapting a powerful, well constructed novel for ascreenplay.

This point of view seemed to me to overlook some fundamental differences, not only the fact that one medium is so different from the other, but more to the point, that all adaptations, whether from print to film, or print to music or even a dance form, must make important changes for the chosen new medium. This always means not only understanding the different needs of one form of communication over another, but also the different “real-world” pressures on the person or team completing the adaptation. These pressures include industrial and commercial needs that the screenwriter has to take into account if the script is to have any chance of success in the business world of filmmaking.

The increasing interest in these industrial forces from academic studies of film adaptation means there is decreasing emphasis on comparison of book and film. Instead, we are seeing research into some of the underlying reasons why a particular script chose to emphasize a

particular aspect of a novel, taking into account not only the aesthetic drivers, but the commercial ones as well.

Film is, of course, one facet of show business. What has frustrated me, is that until recently, academic studies focused a lot exclusively on the “show” part of the equation such as the aesthetic and theoretical concerns of the scriptwriter, while neglecting the equally important, and just as interesting “business” side of the equation. The studies taking into account the business aspect of screenwriting mean that there are opportunities of having a more balanced study of the process of adapting a book into a film.

I found that examining analyses of the different structures used for contemporary films, helped me re-think how best to plan a re-draft that took into account these newer forms. The fact that I chose to remain with the linear mode is because of aesthetic and dramatic needs of the story as much as the commercial needs of making the script relevant to a contemporary audience. This has also meant not only revising the structure of events in the linear narrative, but other concerns like dialogue and character development as outlined above.

In bringing together consideration of adaptation, film studies and screenwriting, with a creative example itself and examining some commercial and industrial pressures on the screenwriter, I hope to contribute to dialogue around these issues. Hopefully, such dialogue will produce an environment where there is a better understanding of professional concerns within critical studies; better understanding of theory amongst professionals, and even a better understanding of the importance of the screenwriting process and its role in the whole business of film production, consumption and studies.

## References

- Albrecht-Crane, C. (2010). *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*. Associated University Presses. New Jersey.
- Aronson, Linda. The six sorts of parallel narrative.  
<http://www.lindaaronson.com/six-types-of-parallel-narrative.html>
- Aronson, Linda. (2010). *The 21st century screenplay a comprehensive guide to writing tomorrow's films*. Sydney: Allen &Unwin.
- Beresford, Bruce (Director). (1972). *The Adventures of Barrie McKenzie*.
- Boozer, Jack. (2009). *Authorship in Film Adaptation*: University of Texas Press.
- Brady, J. (1981). *The Craft of the Screenwriter: Interviews with Six Celebrated Screenwriters*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Campbell, Joseph. (2008). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: New World.
- Clendinnen, Inga. (2006). The History Question: Who Owns the Past? *Quarterly Essay*, 23, 1-72.
- Clendinnen, Inga. (2010). Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads. *Oxford Journal*, 3, 63-77.
- Coppola, Francis Ford (Writer). (1979). *Apocalypse Now* [35 mm blow up to 70 mm]. In Z. Studios (Producer). USA: UnitedArtists.
- Daughton, Suzanne M. (1996). The spiritual power of repetitive form: Steps towards transcendence in *Groundhog Day*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13(2), 138-154.
- Dearden, Basil (Producer). (1961). *Victim*.
- DeBona, Gueric. (2010). *Film Adaptation in the Hollywood Era*. University of Illinois: Board of Trustees, University of Illinois.
- Dempsey, Michael ; Weir, Peter. (1980). Inexplicable Feelings: An Interview with Peter Weir. *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No 4, *Giant Film Book Round-Up!* , from <http://www.jsor.org/stable/1211985>

- Elliott, Kamilla. (2003). *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. C.U.P.
- Elliot, Kamilla. (2010). Adaptation as Compendium: Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland. *Adaptation*, 3(2), 193-201.
- Epstein, Alex. (2002). *Crafty Screenwriting: Writing Movies That Get Made*: Owl Books.
- Faubert, Patrick. (2011). Perfect Picture Material: Anthony Adverse and the Future of Adaptation Theory. *Adaptation*, 4(2), 180-198. doi: 10.1093/adaptation/apq018
- Field, Syd. (1984). *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. New York: Dell.
- Field, S. (1994). *Four Screenplays*. New York: Dell Trade.
- Foundation, Fix Feenly; Writers Guild. (2010). Writers on writing 2006 with Guillermo Arriaga [DVD]. Venice, California: First Light Video Publishing.
- Gaghan, Stephen (Writer). (2005). *Syriana*. In G. Kacandes (Producer): Warner Bros.
- Geraghty, Christine. (2007). Foregrounding the Media: *Atonement* as an Adaptation. *Oxford Journals, Humanities, Adaptation*, 1(2), 106-120.
- Ghislotti, Stefano. (2009). *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*: John Wiley & Sons.
- Goldman, William. (1983). *Adventures in the Screen Trade*: Warner Books.
- Gomez-Galisteo, M. Carmen. (2011). *The Wind is Never Gone*: McFarland.
- Gonzalez, Inarritu Alejandro (Writer). (2003). *21 Grams*. In T. i. T. Productions (Producer). USA: FocusFeatures.
- Gonzalez, Inarritu Alejandro (Writer). (2006). *Babel* [35 mm]. In A. G. Inarritu (Producer). USA: ParamountVantage.
- Guild, Australian Writers. (2013). [http://www.awg.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=58](http://www.awg.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58)

[:industrial&catid=39:industrial&Itemid=62](http://www.industry.com.au/industrial&catid=39:industrial&Itemid=62). Retrieved 18 March 2013,2013

Haggis, Paul (Director). (2004). *Crash*.

Hannam, Ken (Director). (1975). *Sunday Too Far Away*.

Harris, Blake. (2005). *The True Art of Screenwriting*. Retrieved 1 March 2013, 2005. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankable\\_star](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankable_star)

Hill, Charles A (2004) Reading the visual in college writing classes. *Visual rhetoric in a digital world: A critical sourcebook (pp.107-130)* Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.

Hiller, Jim. (1985). *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1950s Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (J. Hiller Ed. First ed.). USA: Cahiers duCinema.

Hooper, Chloe. (2008). *The Tall Man: Death and Life on Palm Island*. Hamish Hamilton, Penguin.

Hooper, Tom (Director). (2010). *The King's Speech*. In E. Sherman (Producer): Harvey Weinstein.

Hudson, Jennifer A. (2004). No Hay Banda and Yet We Hear a Band: David Lynch's Reversal of Coherence in Mulholland Drive. *Journal of Film and Video*, 56.

Hungerford, T A G. (1992). *The Ridge and the River*. Ringwood Australia: Penguin.

Hutcheon, Linda & O'Flynn, Siobhan. (2006). *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge.

Iñárritu, Alejandro González (Director). (2000). *Amores Perros* [Feature film]. In A. G. Iñárritu (Director). USA: Filmax International (Spain).

Keneally, Thomas. (1978). *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Sydney: Fontana.

Kranz, David L, & Mellerski, Nancy C. (2008). *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kubrick, Stanley (Director). (1999). *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Lean, David (Director). (1948). *Oliver Twist*. In R. Neame (Producer): General Film Distributors.

Leitch, Thomas. (2007). *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone With the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Leitch, Thomas. (2008). Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads. *Adaptation*, 1(1), 63-67.

Levinson, Daniel J. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life*: Random House.

Lubomir, Dolezel. (1980). Truth and Authenticity in Narrative. *Poetics Today*, 3, 7-25.

Luhrmann, Baz (Director). (2008). *Australia*.

Lynch, David (Director). (2001). *Mulholland Drive*.

Marshall, Rob (Director). (2005). *Memoirs of a Geisha*. In S. Spielberg (Producer): Columbia Pictures.

Marx, Arthur. (1976). *Goldwyn* (First ed.). Toronto: Norton.

Morgan, Michael D , & Seger, Linda. (2006). *Advanced story telling* [DVD]. Los Angeles: First Light Video Publishing.

Murray, Simone. (2011). *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*: Taylor & Francis.

Naremore, James. (1999). *A Companion to Film Theory*. Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Naremore, James. (2000). *Introduction: Film and the Reign of Adaptation* (Vol. 10).

Naremore, James. (2009). Kubrick, Douglas, and the Authorship of *Paths of Glory*. *Film Quarterly*, 37(3), 91-110.

Nelmes, Jill. (2010). Collaboration and control in the development of Janet Green's screenplay *Victim*. *Journal of Screenwriting*, 1(2). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/josc.1.2.255/1>

Noland, Christopher (Director). (2000). *Memento*.

Jackson, Peter. (Director). (2009). *The Lovely Bones* [35 mm]. In F. Dreamworks, WingNut Films (Producer). USA, UK, New Zealand: Dreamworks SKG.

Phillip, Noyce (Director). (2002). *Rabbit-Proof Fence* [35 mm]. In C. O. Phillip Noyce (Producer). Australia.

Portnoy, K. (1991). *Screen Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*. New York: H Holt and Co.

Ramis, Harold (Director). (1993). *GroundhogDay*.

Schepisi, Fred. (Director). (1978). *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* [35 mm]. Australia: Hoyts.

Seeger, Linda. (1994). *Making a Good Script Great*. New York: Samuel French.

Snyder, Blake. (2005) *Save the Cat*. Michael Wise productions

Soderburgh, Steven (Director). (2000). *Traffic*.

Stam, Robert. (2005). *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. BlackwellPublishing.

Stanton, Andrew (Director). (2012). *John Carter*. A. Vajna (Producer): Walt Disney.

Stempel, Tom. (1988). *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*. New York: First Syracuse University Press.

Tarantino, Quentin (Director). (1994). *Pulp Fiction* [35 mm]. In L. Bender (Producer). USA: Miramax.

Theatrical Market Statistics Retrieved 25 September 2013, 2013, from <http://www.mpa.org/resources/3037b7a4-58a2-4109-8012-58fca3abdf1b.pdf>

Tom Hungerford. (2013). Retrieved 17 March 2012, 2012, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_Hungerford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Hungerford).

Turner, Graeme. (1986). *National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Turner, Graeme. (1994). *Making it National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Victor Fleming, George Cukor (Director). (1939). *Gone With the Wind*. In D. Selznick (Producer): Warner Bros.

Vogler, Christopher. (1998). *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*: Michael Wiese Productions.

Watching the Screen - Fan Magazines, Trade Papers, The MPPDA.  
<http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/2053/Watching-the-Screen.html>

Weir, Peter (Director). (1975). *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Wilson, Janet. *Studies in Australasian Cinema* Volume 1 Number 2 © 2007 Intellect Ltd.

Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

THE RIDGE AND THE RIVER

Feature film screenplay

by

John Beaton

May 2012

© John Beaton  
890 Oxley Road  
Hovea WA 6071

Ph: (H) 08 9295 4476  
(M) 0431 677 759

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - MORNING

Light rain falls on the carpet of leaves on the narrow jungle track.

A pair of big black feet walks over the leaves, then out of shot.

A beat.

A pair of muddy boots walks over the leaves.

A beat.

Another pair of boots and this time we see the green Army trousers of the soldier.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - MOMENTS LATER

Rounding a corner of the track, there is Army PRIVATE "WALLY" WALLACE, carrying his Bren Gun, ammo pouches in his webbing. He marches at a steady pace down the track. In the rain.

PRIVATE ALBIE SWEET rounds the corner of the track behind WALLACE. He has an Owen machine gun.

EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

Still raining.

Spread out, with safe spacing between them, waist deep in the jungle swamp, is Section Two of an Australian Army patrol. World War Two. Bougainville Island.

SUPER

NEW GUINEA 1945

EXT. SWAMP - AFTERNOON

Eight skilled soldiers carrying their weapons high out of the water, and two Kanakas are waist-deep, wading through the swamp. WOMAI in a laplap, carrying spears, and behind him, the older man, MUMMAWA, with a large sprig of betel nut over his shoulder. He pulls a nut off the spring and pops it into his mouth. The two kanakas have shiny, pale brown skin.

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

The rain is heavier now. The patrol is travelling in file down a shallow, but fast moving jungle river. Narrow stream, high banks and dense jungle either side.

CONTINUED:

The patrol is Bren Gunners WALLACE and HOWARD, Privates SWEET, WHITE, MANETTA and EVANS with Corporals Alec SHEARWOOD and Ritchie MALISE. Plus WOMAI leading the whole patrol and MUMMAWA bringing up the rear. All of the Australians are very yellow-skinned - the effect of atebine tablets taken to ward off malaria.

EXT. RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Corporal SHEARWOOD (28), behind MUMMAWA, is up to his armpits in a deep pool. He carries his weapon high out of the swiftly running water.

Behind him, the rest of the patrol is wading through shallow water, but then MALISE steps into a deep pool in the river.

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

Still raining.

Later in the morning, the patrol has moved further down the same jungle river. Now they're walking carefully through a section of rapids - fast green water over slippery rocks.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - AFTERNOON

The patrol has halted on the rain-soaked track. Ahead is the junction of the narrow bush track with a Government road - a wider, cleared part of the jungle.

MALISE, the forward scout, has edged from the track to the palm froned Government road. He looks back at the others.

Their bleached faces, steady eyes, stare back at him. MUMMAWA chews beetle nut. He stands on one foot, then the other. WOMAI holds a part of a banana leaf above his frizzy hair.

WALLACE

(looking at the junction)

Looks like it.

(looks around)

In pretty good time, too.

WALLACE is hardly distinguishable from the other soaked, green-clad figures. A little bigger, maybe. His right shoulder droops slightly under the weight of the Bren.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

How you feel, Geoff?

HOWARD

Crook. We got to dig holes yet, too.

SWEET

Lovat'll have 'em dug for us.

His coons'll do it.

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

Get off yourself, Albie - you'll dig.  
Like always.

HOWARD

I hope they dug a latrine, that's all!  
Bloody shits. I feel another crap  
coming on already!

WALLACE changes the Bren over to the other shoulder.

WALLACE

Hold your breath.

SWEET

Get a cork!

HOWARD

(morose)  
Get fucked.

EXT. TRACK JUNCTION - AFTERNOON

MALISE beckons to SHEARWOOD. Big and powerful, muscled arms under the rolled-back sleeves, SHEARWOOD sashes through the mud up to MALISE.

MALISE

This looks like it, don't it? It's a  
Government road all right, and runs  
north and south - roughly anyway. Got  
the coolaus.  
(waves up to the palm-fronds)  
Give it a burl?

SHEARWOOD shrugs.

SHEARWOOD

(quietly)  
Soon find out.  
Womai!  
(he beckons him)

WOMAI, a small, slight kanaka, joins them. He leans on a cluster of barbed spears.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

This place Tononoi? You got savvy  
'long 'im?

WOMAI shakes his head. MALISE is annoyed.

MALISE

He don't know whether it's Tuesday or  
Bourke street. I'd give him a kick in  
the arse and send him back to the  
bloody Japs, that's what I'd do.

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD

Shut up, you gabby bastard.

MALISE clenches his fist at the insult. WOMAI watches them both. One hand softly strokes the barbs on one spear.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Womai, suppose one-pella white master,  
one house, 'e stop below.

(he demonstrates the branch  
track below)

You can look 'im?

WOMAI nods, SHEARWOOD touches him lightly on the shoulder as WOMAI moves out stealthily on to the road.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Quick-time!

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD splashes up to the men in the file. SWEET is weighted down with a huge water-logged pack, a small shovel, a folded piece of canvas tied to the top. On his webbing belt are clusters of grenades, like big blowflies. He leans heavily on his rifle, the butt in the mud.

SWEET

All right, Alec? This it?

SHEARWOOD

Dunno for sure; know before long,  
though.

SWEET

No hurry.

(grins)

Pubs don't close till six anyhow.

WHITE

How's the enemy, Alec?

SHEARWOOD undoes the leather case of his watch and stares at it through the rain.

SHEARWOOD

About a quarter past three, Oscar.

WHITE

Couple of hours it'll be dark as  
buggery an' we'll be squatting under  
the trees all night like shags on a  
fucking rock. Oh, hell!

SWEET

Dry your eyes, for Christ's sake.  
You'd moan if your arse was on fire!

CONTINUED:

WHITE

Fat chance of that!

In the green gloom, down the line of the patrol, in the rain, heads on chests. Rain drifts on their bowed shoulders, drips from their foreheads into the mud below.

SWEET

Hey, Alec, here's your boong back again!

WOMAI is on the track as SHEARWOOD looks up.

SHEARWOOD

What name, Womai?

WOMAI

White Masta 'e stop, true.

SHEARWOOD pats WOMAI on the shoulder.

SHEARWOOD

(to Section)

Okay, fellas, move off.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - AFTERNOON

Relatively safe from attack, the sodden patrol is moving down the wider Government road. MURMURS of conversation, but kept low out of habit.

WALLACE

Keep your eyes peeled for dead wood for a fire.

SWEET

Always thinking of your belly.

WALLACE

If you don't eat, you don't shit.

WHITE looks up. He is the youngest of the group. Lank and skinny, wet clothes sticking to him.

WHITE

Yeah, we know. I been thinkin' about ice-cream all day. Big heaps of it. By hell, if I ever get back to Civvy street, I'll never pass an ice-cream joint without having a gutful!

WALLACE

You'll never get back. You're not in the race.

WHITE

Pigs, aren't I!

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

No - give us a burn.

WHITE

Get fucked.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - AFTERNOON

The patrol reach a turn-off from the road to a gully. SHEARWOOD beckons MALISE to him.

SHEARWOOD

Put the men around in the scrub, close-to. Send two men a couple of hundred yards up and down the track to keep nit. I'm going down to see what the boss wants us to do. I'll take the boongs too; whatever happens, he won't want them up here on the track. O.K?

MALISE says nothing. He hates taking orders from SHEARWOOD.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

I said, O.K?

MALISE nods and grunts. SHEARWOOD beckons to WOMAI and MUMMAWA and plunges down the steep incline into the gully.

WALLACE leans on his Bren gun and holds out his hand.

WALLACE

Gimme a burn, Geoff.

HOWARD hands over his battered tin of tobacco and papers.

HOWARD

Don't you ever buy any?

WALLACE

(calmly)

This weed's crook, anyway. Tell your sort to send better, next time.

HOWARD

You get a sheila and she can send you weed. I'd have dough in the bank if it wasn't for you.

WALLACE

I had a sheila. She pissed off with a Yank.

WHITE

Don't blame her. Bet you sucked her dry, first!

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

A man's got to live. Give's a light.

HOWARD

I'll smoke the bloody thing if you like.

WALLACE

I'm used to better company.

(exhales)

This weed's crook, all right.

WALLACE examines the end of his cigarette.

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD and WOMAI walk down the track. They enter a clearing. In the centre is a small building with a steeply pitched roof of thick saccac thatch. Called a garamut after the big wooden ceremonial drums ranged around the sides. It has no walls, but the thatched eaves reach to a couple of feet off the ground. One end of the building is open.

SHEARWOOD and WOMAI walk over to LOVATT's quarters which are in the hut opposite the garamut.

INT. HUT - AFTERNOON

Just inside the hut is LOVATT, a short, thickset man in his mid-thirties. He has white hair over a red face and a blonde moustache. He is a forceful man.

LOVATT

(curt wave)

Hullo, corporal. Hell of a day, eh?  
Where's the section?

EXT. HUT - AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD and WOMAI near the open end of the hut.

SHEARWOOD

Up at the track junction.

INT. HUT - AFTERNOON

LOVATT

Come on, Alec. I'll tell you what I want you to do.

INT. HUT - MOMENTS LATER

Large white MAP with meticulous detail of tracks, creeks, a large river, the Government road, native gardens, Army position below the river marked in red, and a large circle in yellow.

CONTINUED:

LOVATT'S finger on the yellow circle, then on the road on the map.

LOVATT (O.S.)

They go up and down the road every so often, day time mostly - hardly ever at night, the local coons tell me. But they're so bloody scared of the kanakas that don't often worry about the branch tracks like this one -  
- and that's got to be our main protection until we can make it so bloody hot for them in their spot down the road that they'll pull out further south. They're sure to have seen your footprints where you came onto the road from the track you came in on. So if they get nosey I want someone to stop 'em at the junction.

LOVATT breaks off from the table. He goes to a wooden box and pulls out half a bottle of whisky. He pours a shot into two tin mugs.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

If the Nips are in any strength, someone's got to hold them at the junction until I can load all this shit (signals the boxes at the back of the hut) onto the boongs and sneak out the back way - across the river.

LOVATT meanwhile has collected a jam tin that stands under the drip of rain from the eaves. He pours a splash of water into the two mugs and hands one to SHEARWOOD. LOVATT points to the map.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Down there. See what I mean?

SHEARWOOD

Yeah. That means camp on this side of the road?

LOVATT

Naturally. Why?

SHEARWOOD

Seen the slope?

LOVATT

(grins)

They'll have to put up with that - maybe it won't be for long. When they're majors they can sleep in the big house.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOVATT (CONT'D)

One thing, there'll be a decent fire down here and a couple of rice drums to boil water for tea and stew.

SHEARWOOD

What greasy?

LOVATT

Beetle. He's not a bad old bastard. I've never been able to catch him, but I think he spends most of his time with his ear -

SOUND of staccato bark of automatic weapons.

LOVATT turns to the open end of the hut, listening.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

What the fuck's that?

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

Thin repeated AUTOMATIC FIRE.

EXT. JUNGLE - AFTERNOON

Hills and trees surrounding the clearing.

Dead silence.

EXT. TRACK JUNCTION - AFTERNOON

MANETTA, SWEET, WALLACE, HOWARD, MALISE and WHITE are sitting by the track. MANETTA has pulled off his beret. His dark curly hair, stringy with rain, falls over his forehead.

MANETTA

Hell, that's close!

EVANS

Back along the track, but who the hell?

SWEET

Japs, it was. A Nambu.

MANETTA

Bullshit. Nambus got a sharper sound.

SWEET

All right, know-all. Have it your way. But who the hell they firing at?

WHITE (sarcastic  
laugh)

Wait a mo', and I'll get me crystal ball out of me kick and have a look!

CONTINUED:

EVANS

Guess this one, Brainwave. Where'll we be in ten minutes time?

SWEET

Goin' down the track to see what the fuck it is. What else?

INT. GARAMUT - AFTERNOON

LOVATT

It's gotta be Japs - but what for?

(quietly)

Better take a few blokes and have a look.

SHEARWOOD

Maar river crossing? Who're they firing at? There's none of our blokes round there, and the infantry don't even know the track.

LOVATT

Yeah. Better get cracking, there's not much light left.

SHEARWOOD

Any fight? Or just look-see?

LOVATT

(emphatic)

No! Hell no. Don't buy any trouble unless you're forced to. We don't want to stir the bastards up until we're better settled in here.

SHEARWOOD nods.

EXT. CLEARING - DUSK

SHEARWOOD looks in the direction of the firing. WOMAI comes softly out of the thicker darkness of a low lime-tree and stands by his side.

SHEARWOOD

Ah, Womai!

(softly)

You hear 'im this-pella musket b'long Japan?

WOMAI

Hear 'im, Masta.

SHEARWOOD

Orright.

(waves hand towards Maar river)

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Maybe long too-dark, Japan bring 'im  
fight long this-pella place, 'long  
Tononoi. No good!

WOMAI

True. More better, walk about quick-  
time, Masta. 'Long too-dark, Womai no  
can look 'im road.

SHEARWOOD

True.

Together, WOMAI and SHEARWOOD head off down the incline.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - DUSK

SWEET is the scout, SHEARWOOD is immediately behind him as  
the Section moves slowly down the track.

Cautiously forward.

CRASHING of someone running wild.

SWEET leaps to the side of the track and freezes in the  
shelter of a hanging vine. As soon as he moves, the Section  
behind him melts into cover.

Silence.

SHEARWOOD crouches beside a rotting stump. He looks  
steadily at SWEET who peers ahead, looking jerkily to the  
left, then the right, nerves screeching alarm.

SWISH and CRACKLE of sticks.

The Section edges into better cover.

SOUND of someone STUMBLING, RUNNING through the jungle.  
The RASPING SOB, of someone heading their way.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - DUSK

SOUND is louder.

SWEET's trigger finger close on the trigger.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - DUSK

LOUDER. Bushes sway and raindrops fling out.

A MAN bursts out onto the track. He has no pack or weapon.  
Scratches across his face, arms and chest. Hatless, long  
hair plastered over his forehead.

The MAN stares at the black mud of the track. He turns his  
head with clockwork regularity.

CONTINUED:

MAN (clenched  
teeth)  
Oh, Jesus . . . . Jesus, Jesus,  
Jesus. . . . Oh, God.

He turns to duck into the jungle cover. SWEET stands up.

SWEET  
(muted shout)  
Hey, digger! This way - you're OK.  
Here! Australians, here!

The MAN swings round, crouches low, and peers blindly down the track.

SWEET steps out onto the track, followed by the others. The MAN runs, stumbling to them. SHEARWOOD grabs him by the shoulders and holds him.

SHEARWOOD  
Here! You're all right, sport! Calm  
down, you're with friends!

MAN  
(blank)  
Oh, Jesus!  
(looks wildly at undergrowth)  
Oh, Jesus, Jesus, they got us. Oh,  
Jesus, Donny!

SHEARWOOD  
You, Kevin, Albie, Oscar - scoot up to  
the next bend and keep nit. The rest  
of you - get in off the track.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - DUSK

SWEET, WHITE and MANETTA head off. Once out of earshot.

SWEET  
Fuck me! What you make of that,  
Oscar?

WHITE  
Must be him we heard getting stuck up  
a while ago, all right. Who the hell  
is he? What's he doing out here?

SWEET  
Looks like the other poor bastard got  
done, I reckon.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - DUSK

SHEARWOOD shakes the very young MAN by the shoulders.  
Hard.

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD

(sharp)

Hey, mate! Snap out of it! You're OK. Where'd you come from - what unit?

The MAN stares at SHEARWOOD, then buries his face in his hands and cries.

MAN

(crying)

Oh, Donny! The bastards . . .

SHEARWOOD lets him go and looks around helplessly. WALLACE and HOWARD look away.

Night is coming on.

SHEARWOOD

Malise, you better take this bloke back to the major. I'll take four of the men and go and have a look at the Maar river crossing.

MALISE

You'll get the medals! Beyond the line of duty or some other bulldust, eh?

SHEARWOOD

Just do what you're told. Tell Lovatt what I'm doing.

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - LATER

EVANS, a small, wiry man, nearly middle-aged, walks beside SHEARWOOD. WOMAI just behind him. It starts to rain.

EVANS

(loud whisper)

What you make of that, Alec? He's on'y a kid, ain't he?

SHEARWOOD

Dunno, Pinkie. Looks like the other poor devil copped it. We'll soon know, anyway. This bloke can't be much over nineteen, or twenty, maybe.

MANETTA and WALLACE step quietly out of the bushes beside the track and join them. SHEARWOOD points along the track to the river crossing. MANETTA nods. Dusk is really thickening now.

SOUND of shallow, swiftly running water.

SHEARWOOD raises his hand suddenly. The others prop into nearby cover.

CONTINUED:

The track in front swings into a tiny clearing a few yards across, and down a gentle incline to the river.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Womai! You look 'im this-pella place,  
quick-time.

WOMAI disappears into the shadows. WHITE spits at his feet.

WHITE

(whispers)

Jesus, Alec. Fucken' Saturday night.  
Back home, I'd be gettin' ready to go  
to the Troc with the sheilas and  
blokes. Havin' a bath and shave,  
clean clothes, whacking a froggie into  
the kick.

WHITE grinds the butt of his Owen-gun into his hip.

WHITE (CONT'D)

Fuck me drunk! When will it ever  
finish, eh?

WOMAI joins them.

WOMAI

(whispering to Shearwood)

Japan-man bugger off. Soldier die-  
pinish!

SHEARWOOD

O.K., Womai.

(beckons the others)

The Japs have gone, and Womai reckons  
there's a dead white man by the track,  
poor bastard. Let's have a look  
round.

EXT. CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

They file into the clearing. The rain is heavier now.

WHITE

Yeah, can't get killed for lookin'.

SWEET

Can't get killed. Period.

WHITE

Not much. Ask that poor bastard the  
boong just found.

SWEET

I'm tired. You ask him.

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

He's dead, all right. It happens.

SWEET

To him. Not to us.

SHEARWOOD

(loud whisper)

Okay, cut the bloody cackle.

EXT. CLEARING - LATER

The glazed, half-open eyes of the dead man. On to the sprawled figure by the track in the clearing. An open pack is near the body; the contents rifled and scattered.

SHEARWOOD bends down to look for the dead mans' paybook.

SHEARWOOD

Scout around and see what you can find, you blokes. The other bloke's pack should be around if the Nips haven't found it. And his gun.

The men break off to search the area.

SHEARWOOD feels in the dead man's breast pocket for his paybook. He grimaces, then withdraws the paybook, covered in congealed blood.

WHITE (O.S.)

(whispers)

One thing I don't like it's mucking around in ambushes. Especially with a stiff looking on.

EVANS (O.S.)

(whispers)

Poor bugger can't hurt you.

SHEARWOOD tugs the silver chain around the man's neck and collects his meat-tag. He stares at the blood smearing the information on the meat-tag.

INSERT

ARMY NUMBER, BLOOD GROUP (A2) AND HINES, D.

EXT. CLEARING - EVENING

WALLACE crosses in front of WHITE and EVANS as they search.

In the background can just be seen MANETTA holding a rifle.

WALLACE

Found anything?

CONTINUED:

WHITE

Kevin's found the gun. That hairpin must've panicked some - chucked the bloody lot.

EVANS

Yeah - must've.

WALLACE

(whispers)

Holy cow! I wish we could smoke. Anyone touch that stiff for his weed?

WHITE

(shudders)

You got no conscience, you horrible bastard.

WALLACE

I hate waste.

EXT. CLEARING - EVENING

WHITE, carrying a discovered pack, goes back to SHEARWOOD just as he puts the meat-tags into the paybook and stands up.

WHITE

There's the pack, Alec, and Kevin found the gun. Must've been in a panic to sky his gun.

SHEARWOOD

Give the pack to Womai, Oscar, and someone can come out tomorrow and pick this bloke up. Grab him by the feet there . . .

They each grasp a leg of the dead man, round the ankles above the muddy boots, and drag him from the track.

The body gouges a deep furrow in the spongy ground. One bloodless hand bumps and bounces over the rough surface.

They stop by a creeper-choked tree and let the boots fall to the ground. WHITE pushes his boot under the dead man's ankle and heaves it to roll the body under the shelter of a bush. WHITE breaks some wild ginger stalks, strews them over the body and looks down.

WHITE

Poor bastard. That stopped his farting in church, eh, Alec?

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - NIGHT

Thousands of fireflies roam through the jungle and the moonless night. SOUND of BOOTS shushing through mud.

CONTINUED:

WOMAI, in the thick dark, leads the section back to Tononoi. Behind him is SHEARWOOD. Behind SHEARWOOD, following the green firestick stuck in the back of his pack, is MANETTA. His free hand fumbles with the tiny cross at the end of the rosary around his neck. His lips recite the rosary, and his head bows a fraction.

Behind MANETTA is WHITE, following the firestick in MANETTA's pack. He looks at the pale green hands on his wrist watch. Just after seven o'clock.

WHITE

Hell. How the fuck did we get here, eh? Saturday night and we're sloshing around in pitch dark, up to our arses in mud.

EVANS is just visible in the firestick glow from WHITE.

EVANS

Ooh, you big, bronzed bastard, you! What did you do in the war, daddy?

SHEARWOOD

Fuck Saturday and your bloody cackle you lot! You're like a bunch of old sheilas!

EXT. JUNGLE TRACK - NIGHT

The moon is up. Pale light on the wet trunks of trees.

The section sloshes through the mud back to Tononoi. Each deep in his own thoughts. MANETTA of the fish and chip shop he grew up in; WHITE, of Saturday night at the Trocadero, dancing with Selma with the brittle blonde hair.

SHEARWOOD

Hold!

The section stops, head down, weapons butt-down on the muddy toes of their boots, shoulders sag and eyes close.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

This is the junction. Lovatt told me there'd be a bit of a listening post about half-way down to the garamut. Keep quiet and let me do the talking. OK - let's move off.

They edge out of the jungle track and onto the cleared space of the Government road. As they do, they all look up into the cleared sky. Stars hang just over the trees.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

A low slush-lamp flickers on an upturned box. The yellow light plays on LOVATT's face.

CONTINUED:

A few feet away on another upturned box, hands clasped on his knees, and his face white and strained, sits the panicked MAN.

SHEARWOOD is by the entrance. He flings the two packs onto the dry floor and leans the rifle against a post. He looks at LOVATT.

SHEARWOOD

Won't be a moment, boss. I'll see the blokes get a feed and have a bit myself.

LOVATT relaxes. A little.

LOVATT

All right, corporal. When you're ready, bring your kai in here if you want to. Everything all right?

SHEARWOOD

Yeah - won't be a moment.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

A low fire burns under a rice drum.

Behind the drum is BEETLE, the cook. Typical army cook - soured by years of struggling against impossible conditions. Thin shoulders, eyes screwed into a permanent squint. He dips the ladle into the steaming stew.

WALLACE

All right, Beetle, don't let your hand tremble. Fighting men to be fed!

WHITE

(behind him in line)

Fighting man be fucked! You couldn't fight a sick moll.

BEETLE ladles out a pile of stew into the dixie.

WALLACE

You trot her out! Come on, Beetle, whack a bit more on - I'm hungry.

WHITE

You can't be selling rations to the coons yet! Christ Almighty - we on'y been here a day!

BEETLE waves the ladle at him.

BEETLE

Shift your arses, you lot. I don't want to be up all night feeding you scarecrows.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

BEETLE (CONT'D)

On'y the third mob in for tea tonight,  
that's all. What'd you think this is?  
A bloody all-night joint?

WALLACE

Button the trap, Beetle, I'm a  
dangerous man.

WALLACE moves along.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The men lounge in the lee of the high-pitched roof of the  
garamut, balancing dixies and mugs of steaming tea.  
SHEARWOOD has waited till the last man has been fed. He  
shoves his dixie towards BEETLE.

SHEARWOOD

Whack it on, Beetle. As much as you  
like. I'd eat the leg off a skinny  
priest.

BEETLE ladles out the stew, taps the edge of the ladle on  
SHEARWOOD's dixie.

BEETLE

That do you? Who's the bloke in with  
the boss?

SHEARWOOD

I don't know - some bloke we picked up  
along the track. Been ambushed. Why?

BEETLE

I wouldn't be the poor bastard for  
quids. Been roastin' the arse off him  
for doin' his rifle an' pack. I been  
listenin' outside.

SHEARWOOD

You shouldn't, you nosey old prick.  
And if you do, you don't go magging  
about what you hear.

BEETLE

Get off me back. An' if you've got  
enough, fuck off outta me way.

(whining)

Think a cook never wants any rest.  
Blasted patrols for kai at all hours,  
an' no flamin' wood and I could piss  
more water 'n those lazy fucken'  
kanakas bring me. Any bastard asks me  
to be a cook nex' bloody war . . .

BEETLE walks away, grumbling. SHEARWOOD takes his dixie  
and mug of tea and heads to the hut.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

SHEARWOOD enters, LOVATT stands, motions to the MAN who stares at SHEARWOOD. Soft murmur of conversation outside the hut filters in.

LOVATT

Got your tucker all right, corp? Good.  
I want you to meet a new-comer to the  
unit. Mr. Wilder, Corporal Shearwood.

SHEARWOOD puts down his dixie, extends his hand.

SHEARWOOD

(smiling)  
Glad to know you, Mr. Wilder.

WILDER gets up.

WILDER

(awkwardly)  
We've met before. However, I'm  
pleased to meet you again, corp. Cut  
out the 'mister' though. My name's  
Clem.

LOVATT

(tersely)  
No by hell you don't. On patrol is  
your own business, but in camp, you're  
an officer and I'll thank you to  
remember it.  
Mr. Wilder's your new officer,  
corporal.

SHEARWOOD stops from drinking his tea for a split second,  
then takes a sip. Silence.

The murmur of conversation outside, then a burst of  
MALICIOUS LAUGHTER.

MALISE (O.S.)

(mocking)  
Like a bloody stunned rabbit, she was!  
Didn't know if she was punched or  
bored. Be bad enough if she was only a  
cook's offsider, but an officer - our  
officer, too! Is that dinkum, Beetle?

Mumble from BEETLE is indistinct.

SHEARWOOD goes to the end of the hut.

SHEARWOOD

Corporal Malise, if the men have  
finished their kai, take them back up  
to the road.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALISE (O.S.)

(mocking, soft)

Now, corporal? Is our rough talk offending the visitor?

SHEARWOOD

Yes, now, corporal. And cut that bullshit! Holes've been dug - get the men into them, and don't drag your feet. Check on the listening post. Have a look around. I'll be up soon.

MALISE laughs, then the clink of dixies as men move off. SHEARWOOD stands with his back to LOVATT and WILDER for a moment, then turns back to the glow of the slush-lamp.

WILDER stands, pale. LOVATT sits behind his table, shoulders hunched forward. Silence. LOVATT looks up sharply to WILDER.

LOVATT

Well, it's no good beating around the bush, Mr. Wilder. That gives you a fair idea of how you stand with the men. It was a damned bad show, and now it's a long road back for you. If you're up to it, the men'll be with you. If their first idea was right, they won't be backward in letting you know their feelings.

WILDER is going to interrupt, but stops.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

It's up to you to make every post a winner now. I know it's the first time you've been fired on, but every one of them had a first time too, and came through it a lot better. But I don't think you're yellow.

WILDER smiles.

WILDER

(cool)

Thank you.

LOVATT is displeased with the cool response from WILDER.

LOVATT

With the men it's different. They'll remember you panicked when you were fired on.

(beat)

You blew through and left your mate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WILDER

(whisper)

But he was dead. Donny was dead.

LOVATT

How do you know he was dead? He might have been only wounded. Did they tell you at OTS what the Japs do to wounded Australians?

SHEARWOOD looks to WILDER.

WILDER shakes his head and looks steadily at LOVATT.

Silence.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

(brutally)

They caught one of our Coast watchers on the next bloody island. They tied the poor bastard to a palm tree . .

SHEARWOOD

(shaking his head, mouths the word "No")

LOVATT

. . . and ladled boiling water over his head until he died.

WILDER

(very softly)

You didn't have to tell me that, Major. Not now.

LOVATT

It's something you should know, Lieutenant. Look, Mr. Wilder. I'd intended to give the section - your section - a day in camp tomorrow, but I think that under the circumstances it'd be better if they went out. If they stay in, they'll only sit around chewing the rag about what happened today, and you can bet your balls they'd arrive at some weird and wonderful conclusions.

(smiles)

I know 'em, the bastards. How'd you like to go out for a few days?

WILDER

Suit me. Suit me fine.

SHEARWOOD nods agreement to LOVATT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LOVATT

It'll give them a chance to make up their minds without gassing about it, and the sooner they do that, the better. It's up to you, Mr. Wilder. You've got to see that they come back with the right impression. OK?

WILDER

Okay, Major.

LOVATT

All right then. Corporal Shearwood here'll help you. He knows them inside out. You'll find them a good mob of blokes, Mr. Wilder. Worth winning.

LOVATT pulls the slush-lamp closer to the map. He studies it for a while.

Outside noises. KANAKAS talking.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Now both of you come here and have a look at what I want you to do.

LOVATT beckons them to stand either side of him.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Old Mummawa helped me put this map together. It's him gave me the guts about this bit of country. Couldn't have done it without him.

LOVATT stabs the map.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

We're here, see?

INSERT

SHOT OF MAP

INTERCUT

MAP WITH FACES OF THE THREE MEN.

LOVATT

There's that track you came in on. Go south. See this track - it's a well-used kanaka-pad - well used by the fucking Japs now. It runs along a low ridge parallel with the river - here.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Between the track and the river - down on the flat - there's quite a big garden - fuck-all in it now, which leads me to suspect there's a mob of Japs somewhere in the vicinity. You come out of the garden into a stretch of thinned-out jungle - plenty of cover, though, Mummawa reckons. Then onto a narrow beach. Sand and rocks.

LOVATT steps back and faces WILDER and SHEARWOOD.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Mummawa reckons before the Japs moved in there used to be a big kanaka place on the other side of the river. About a mile or down-stream from where you'll bivouac. He reckons the Japs killed a lot of the people and hunted the rest, and they set up a new place in bush-nothing. Somewhere unknown. In the deep jungle. He reckons the Japs have never found it. I don't think the bastards know we're in the area yet, so this isn't a fighting patrol. Unless, of course, you're forced into it. We'll let the buggers know we're around when we're good-and-ready.

SHEARWOOD

After this patrol?

LOVATT

Could be.

WILDER

And what's the job, major?

LOVATT

Two observation posts, Mr. Wilder. One about here (points to map) Make a note of what's happening on the other side of the river - if anything. But mainly . . . see if you can assess it for fordability. If we want to get at the fuckers, we'll have to cross the river - at night, too. How deep, how fast it's running . . .

SHEARWOOD

(laughs)

Gold if it's shallow, green if it's deep and running fast.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOVATT

Spot on. Now, the other post's about a mile down-river, opposite where old Mummawa reckons the big kanaka place used to be. Case the joint thoroughly - number of huts and so on. Size of gardens, anything that might give you an idea of how many Japs there - if any. Maybe there's a ford there - depends on the access from the river on this side, eh?

LOVATT turns to WILDER.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Mr. Wilder . . . I'd suggest you have Alec allocate the men for the Opips when you get there. He knows them backwards and forwards, from arsehole to breakfast time . .

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - NIGHT

At the edge of the jungle by the Government road is WALLACE and HOWARD's hole. The Bren gunner's hole is slightly larger than the others, and has a log rolled in front of it. HOWARD lies in the hole, wrapped in his ground-sheet, knees drawn up to his belly. He breathes evenly. He mutters something indiscernible.

With his back to the earthen side of the hole sits WALLACE, on guard. He cradles the Bren gun in his lap. He looks at the dim outline of his sleeping mate. He stops feeling the Bren gun and listens intently.

Footsteps.

WALLACE stares into the dark, pitted with fireflies. A shadow comes from the surrounding shadows and towers above him.

SHEARWOOD

How's it going, Wally? Everything apples?

WALLACE

Yeah, Alec. Nothin' moving.

SHEARWOOD

Good. How's Geoff?

WALLACE

He's been shitting blood for three days, how'd you think he'd be? He should be in hospital.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD

I know, but you can't send him on a magic carpet. Sick or not, he'll have to wait.

WALLACE

Well, he's not goin' out on any jobs.

SHEARWOOD

We're going out tomorrow.

WALLACE

That's good, but Geoff ain't. Where're we goin'?

SHEARWOOD

Tell you in the morning.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - NIGHT

A clear space of night sky between the trees, and a glowing patch of phosphorescent fungus guides SHEARWOOD to his hole.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - NIGHT

SHEARWOOD bends down near the hole.

SHEARWOOD

Look out, Oscar - I'm coming in. Where are you?

WHITE rustles his gas-cape.

WHITE

Up this end. Look out for my flaming feet!

SHEARWOOD jumps into the hole.

SHEARWOOD

You made my bed yet?

WHITE

(laughing)  
Jesus, gimme a fucking break!.

SHEARWOOD gets ready to settle down in the hole. He wraps his ground sheet around him when he's ready.

WHITE (CONT'D)

(whispers)  
Malise reckons that bunny we found today is the new lieut for Number Twelve. That true?

SHEARWOOD

Yeah - what about it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE

He's the bloke that's going to show us the way round, and he runs away from his china like that. Don't tell me he's on the level!

SHEARWOOD

It's the first time he's been fired on. It must've been a helluva shock.

WHITE

Shock my eye. I got a shock to, the first time I was jumped - I damn near filled me strides, but I never diced me gun and took off like a bloody Bondi. He shouldn't be a lieut. There's plenty a good blokes could take over. You, for instance.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD/CLEARING/GARAMUT - NIGHT

As they talk quietly together, move out of their hole, past the nine other holes dug into the edge of the jungle by the Government road to the garamut in the clearing in the moonlight. Dance music fades under.

WHITE (O.S.)

(whispers)

Alec, you know what I was thinkin' comin' in from the crossing tonight? I was thinkin', Gawd it's Saturday night and here I am up to my arse in mud. You don't think much about it, do you, but sometimes it just hits you, you look at the clock and you think, what would you be doin' at this time if you was home. I do, anyway. What you use to do Saturday nights, Alec?

SHEARWOOD (O.S.)

Oh, I don't know. What did I do Saturday nights? Pictures, dances, stay at home with the cheese-and-kisses, reading? In the summer, beaches, sometimes the Show Boat up Middle Harbour. Different when you're married - Saturday night's the same as any other night.

WHITE (O.S.)

Yeah, you don't need to go out! You got it laid on. Hell, I used to go to the Troc, Alec - me and Selma, dancing. Jeez, she could dance. We used to have a dance, after we'd go an have supper at a joint.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Fuck me, I used to be broke to the  
 wide, Mondays. I've almost forgot  
 what it's like.

The shrill cry of a night-bird. We move above the garamut,  
 past a deep gorge and an abandoned kanaka village over a  
 cold river running fast.

WHITE (O.S.) (CONT'D) You  
 know what I reckon I'll do tomorrow?  
 I'm going to sit down and  
 write a score of pages to the sheila.  
 Not pervy stuff like some of the  
 blokes do. You know, like screwing and  
 that. Just nice, like I'll tell her  
 how I . . . what I . . .

Along the narrow river, past moonlit swamps, up and over a  
 razor-backed ridge, down another gorge, over the living  
 jungle, travelling to the sea.

SHEARWOOD (O.S.)  
 You won't be writing to anyone  
 tomorrow. We're going out.

WHITE (O.S.)  
 (shocked)  
 Where, for fuck's sake?

SHEARWOOD (O.S.)  
 Oh - walkabout. Couple of days.

WHITE  
 Jesus . . . think we're bloody wind-up  
 mechanical toys, or something!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - NIGHT

SHEARWOOD lies on his back, eyes open. He turns over on his  
 side, settling into a more comfortable position.

Silence.

EXT. CLEARING - DAWN

A shadowy FIGURE stumbles across the clearing towards the  
 outlined bulk of the garamut. SNORES from inside.

A pile of ash from previous night's fire. A boot scrapes  
 over the ash and a few red coals wink.

BEETLE (O.S.)  
 (mutters to himself)  
 Bloody fire!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A pine box near the coals. A boot kicks the box. Tins roll out into the mud. A hand tosses some of the splintered wood onto the coals. The fire splutters into life. BEETLE is getting ready to cook breakfast.

He moves to a pile of dry wood collected by the kanakas. He collects some big pieces to put onto the growing fire.

BEETLE (CONT'D)

Bloody wood!

A rope of smoke climbs into the still air and hangs in the dawn light.

BEETLE (CONT'D)

Bloody Japs'll see that as sure as God  
made little apples, and be up here  
like chooks in a dunghill. An'  
what'll we do? (laughs)

BEETLE plonks down two cut-down kerosene tins filled with water over the trench with the fire, and then throws handful after handful of oatmeal into one. Followed by handfuls of tea into the second one.

BEETLE (CONT'D)

(muttering)

I don't ask them bastards to do no  
cooking, so they can deal with the  
fucking Japs.

INT. HUT - MORNING

LOVATT, is asleep under an army blanket with mosquito net covering. BEETLE comes up to the bed, puts the tea on a box by the Major's stretcher and savagely shakes the mosquito net. BEETLE leaves. LOVATT stirs, yawns and sits up.

EXT. CLEARING - MORNING

The tops of the high trees are washed with gold of the dawn. Squawking birds are awake, eating berries from a big tree. BEETLE walks through a light rain of pecked red berries.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - MORNING

EVANS is on guard by the still misty track. Footsteps approach.

EVANS

(softly)

Hey, Beetle, you want to be careful  
coming up to the front line like this.  
I might've mistook you for a Nip and  
put a slug into you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEETLE

You couldn't put a slug into my old woman and she's pregnant. Where's Alec?

EVANS

(pointing)

Brew on?

BEETLE slouches away through the undergrowth, disturbed branches showering water on him.

BEETLE

Of course the bloody brew's on. I do *my* job!

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - MORNING

SHEARWOOD gives the sleeping WHITE a prod with the toe of his boot.

SHEARWOOD

Get up Oscar! You've had your time.

BEETLE appears by the hole.

BEETLE

Brew's on.

SHEARWOOD

Good-oh Beetle. There's a patrol going out today. Put out enough kai for eight men for four days, will you?

BEETLE heads off, muttering.

BEETLE

It don't take long for them to get on your back; come daylight it's Beetle this, Beetle that, Beetle some other bloody thing.

SHEARWOOD stares after him, then reaches down and yanks WHITE's gas-cape off him.

SHEARWOOD

Come on, Oscar, show a leg. When you get your boots on, get over to Malise and tell him to draw a dozen extra mags for the Bren and three mags per man for the Owens. Shake it up!

WHITE sits up and starts pulling on his boots.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Eighteen mags. Remember that? Or d'you want me to write it down for you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE

Get fucked. When you learn to write?

EXT. CLEARING - MORNING

SHEARWOOD heads to the garamut. The slope behind him is dotted with men stumbling around among the trees, cursing the morning air and the Army.

INT. GARAMUT - MORNING

WILDER, seated on the edge of his stretcher, is studying a map. He looks up as SHEARWOOD comes in.

WILDER

Morning, corp. All set for the big test?

SHEARWOOD

Yes, everything's in order Mr. Wilder. Got any orders for the blokes?

WILDER

(impersonal)

Have 'em up here, outside the hut, after breakfast. That's all, corp.

EXT. CLEARING - MORNING

The Section is waiting.

SWEET examines the inside of a Bren magazine, pushing the spring up and down.

SWEET

Where we goin'? Anyone know?

WALLACE

Luna Park, I reckon. Best nookie there.

SWEET

Smart bastard.

MALISE is a few yards AWAY.

MALISE

Out to the crossing for the second act of yesterday's big drama. Someone's got to pick up the stiff, an' you can bet your balls it'll be us.

Scattered laughter.

MANETTA

Can that shit, Malise. Show a bit of respect for that poor dead bugger.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANETTA (CONT'D)

Even if you've got none for anyone else.

MALISE shrugs.

WHITE

Throw me that box of ammo, Wally.

WALLACE

Throw me your weed, and bring plenty with you.

WALLACE picks up the box and heaves it over to WHITE.

WHITE

A man shouldn't live with you, you got no conscience.

WALLACE

I got no weed either.

MALISE watches them silently.

EXT. GARAMUT - MORNING

Using one of the big wooden ceremonial drums as a table, MALISE is carefully filing a cross on the flat nose of a slug he holds in his hand. WALLACE is cleaning the barrel of his Bren. The others look up as LOVATT and WILDER, carrying a map case, come out of the garamut.

WILDER

(crisply)

Well, I suppose you all know we're going out today?

WALLACE gives a savage yank at the pull through and stares down the barrel of the Bren.

WALLACE

Christ, they don't take long chasing us out again, do they?

WILDER

(hard)

What's that, soldier?

WALLACE

(clearly)

I said, it don't take long for them to chase us out again. I thought we'd have a day in camp, at least.

WILDER

(cold)

Well, don't think. Don't question orders, anyhow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

(easily)

Hell, I wasn't questionin' orders, I was just sayin'.

WILDER

Don't say and don't answer back.

MALISE smiles grimly. SHEARWOOD sees it. MALISE, his sniper's rifle across his knees, carries on with the tiny file he's using, and then looks at the men around him.

MALISE

Who's going to pick up the stiff? You know, your cobbler out at the crossing?

WHITE looks to MALISE, then to WILDER and back.

WILDER

(quietly)

That won't worry you, corporal. The major will attend to that. The man will be brought in and buried here. By the way, he was a reinforcement for this unit and his name was Don Hines. Sergeant Don Hines. He was a good bloke. Malise, what are you doing there?

MALISE finishes the last stroke, looks at the slug and stares back.

MALISE

Making a dum-dum. Why?

WILDER

Dum-dum? Don't you know that's against international law?

The men look at WILDER, amazed. MALISE stares at WILDER.

WILDER (CONT'D)

You can't do that!

MALISE

(cheekily)

International law's all right in its place, but it's place ain't here.

MALISE pats his rifle and laughs.

MALISE (CONT'D)

I don't go for the scatter-guns. With one of these babies, you hit a Nip here -

MALISE puts the tip of his finger in the hollow of his throat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MALISE (CONT'D)

- and you lift his scone off. Pretty.  
I don't spray the bloody scenery -  
with me, every slug's a kill.

WILDER looks to SHEARWOOD.

WILDER

You'd sing another song if you found  
the Japanese using dum-dums, wouldn't  
you?

MALISE

Mr. Wilder, when you been around here  
a bit longer you'll realize like we  
all do that dum-dums are the least of  
the things you can expect from them  
animals.

The men nod agreement. SHEARWOOD notes their assent.

SHEARWOOD

All right, break it up! We got  
fifteen minutes. Get your gear and  
assemble at the track junction - keep  
off the track.

WILDER stands silent as the men break away.

The sun fills the clearing.

The dull CLANG of tins as kanakas fill them from the river  
far below, CRIES and CALLS from the distance.

SQUAWKING, SCREECHING, WHISTLING jungle birds.

WILDER

Do you usually interrupt discussion  
between your officers and the men,  
corporal?

SHEARWOOD

(pausing before replying)  
Not as a rule, Mr. Wilder. These  
blokes have been fighting together a  
long time in funny circumstances. I  
think you'd be wise to have a good  
long shoofy and get well settled in  
before you start chucking your weight  
around.

WILDER

Someone's got to be boss. I'll manage  
it my own way, but thanks for your  
interest, corporal.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - MORNING

The complete patrol is by the Bren-pit. Six white men, two SCOUTS and two CARGO BOYS for the food. SHEARWOOD mounts the slope. WOMAI leans on his spears a few yards in advance of the leading man. MUMMAWA is next to him. MUMMAWA does a little war-dance as SHEARWOOD walks to them.

SWEET

Where's the president of the bloody  
League of Nations? Ain't she coming?

SHEARWOOD

(over his shoulder)  
Ease up on the wise-cracks. Check  
your gear. Good day, Womai.

WOMAI

Good day, Masta Alec.

SHEARWOOD

You got savvy 'long this-pella place,  
Japan 'e stop?

WOMAI

Long time no look 'im, Masta Alec.

SHEARWOOD

Hullo, Mummawa, you got savvy?

MUMMAWA shakes his spears and does a little war-dance.

MUMMAWA

Me-pella savvy number-one!

MUMMAWA opens his nearly toothless mouth and spits a stream of betel-juice onto the muddy path. WILDER arrives, adjusting a brand-new map case over his shoulder. SHEARWOOD walks out onto the track, and turns to WILDER questioningly.

WILDER

Take 'em away, Corporal.

SHEARWOOD

OK! Move off!

They mill about briefly, then set off with WOMAI in front, the sun gleaming on his polished weapons and black, oily skin. Then SWEET, SHEARWOOD, WALLACE, his Bren over his shoulder, MANETTA carrying extra Bren magazines. WILDER, WHITE, MALISE, MUMMAWA and the TWO CARGO BOYS. Last is EVANS with his Owen-gun.

Ahead of them for a few yards dance two iridescent blue butterflies. Then they shear off into the jungle. The SQUELCH of mud underfoot. Above, palm fronds rustle and twinkle in the sunlight.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - MORNING

HOWARD is in the Bren-pit.

HOWARD  
Bring me back a Jap, daddy!

EVANS (O.S.)  
Get fucked.

Down the track, the men have disappeared already.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

WOMAI's soft brown eyes dart continuously from side to side of the stream. It is shallow, icy-cold, and foaming over the boulders in a tunnel of green where the trees meet overhead. He frowns as he reaches a fork in the creek. He stops. Behind him the patrol, knee-deep in the water, come to a ragged halt. A fine rain mists down.

MUMMAWA is half way down the patrol. He peers about him. He peels a betel-nut and pops it into his mouth.

WALLACE shuffles through the foaming water to WHITE.

WALLACE  
Look at the old boy.

WHITE holds out his weed tin.

WALLACE (CONT'D)  
You're learning. Papers inside?

WHITE  
Want me to roll the fucking thing for you? I'd like to know where the hell we are.

SWEET  
Suppose the bloody guide would, too.  
Wonder when his Jap mates'll turn up?

WHITE  
Yeah. Everyone reckons he's been working for the bastards.

WILDER stands silent, flips the cover of his watch open.

WOMAI makes a decision and moves off. The patrol starts up and sloshes down the creek.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CREEK - DAY

The junction of a tiny, jungle covered fork in the creek where another, smaller rushing creek joins it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Again, standing at the junction, WOMAI looks around, understanding where he is. Behind him, the patrol stands, waiting for the move off.

WOMAI decides, and again, the patrol moves off down the CREEK.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CREEK - AFTERNOON

The creek buckets round the foot of a bluff, joining a wider, deeper stream flowing in a smooth channel. WOMAI studies the jungle.

SHEARWOOD sloshes past SWEET and stands behind WOMAI. He watches him quietly for a moment.

SHEARWOOD  
You-pella walkabout 'long this-pella  
water before, Womai. You got savvy?

WOMAI smiles. Uncertain. Frowns.

WOMAI  
(hesitant)  
Liklik, Masta Alec. Long time bepre.  
Be'ind, maybe look 'im one-pella  
dewai.

WOMAI points down the larger stream.

WOMAI (CONT'D)  
'Im 'e big-pella dewai, 'im 'e white,  
all-same paper.

WILDER splashes up behind them, his long fair hair plastered over his forehead.

WILDER  
Look, corporal, are we getting  
anywhere? Does this boong know where  
he is, or what he's doing, or is he  
just leading us by the nose?

SHEARWOOD  
(angrily)  
They're kanakas, and like to be called  
that, and nothing else!

WILDER  
All right, this kanaka then. It's  
getting late to be ploughing around in  
these damned creeks. Does he know  
where he is? Is it true he was  
working for the Japanese a while ago?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD

You can cut that shit. The Japs took his wife and kids and he *had* to work for them.

SHEARWOOD looks to WOMAI who stares impassively back.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Mr. Wilder do you know where we are?

WILDER

(staring)

No, naturally I don't, and I bet I'm not the only one.

SHEARWOOD

Would you have been able to find this mob of Japs without a guide?

WILDER pats the map-case at his side.

WILDER

Certainly I would. The major's map's there, isn't it?

SHEARWOOD

You'd have got the guts shot out of you on these tracks - a dozen times. Do you think we've got the monopoly on ambushes around here? As for Womai leading us into a trap, we've got to have guides and that's the risk we take. But I know this. We've never been led astray by one of these blokes, ever. Now why don't you button your bloody trap?

SWEET sniggers.

WILDER

I don't like your cheek, Shearwood. I won't always be the mug lieut, you know.

SHEARWOOD

You're telling me you won't. While we stand around here, we're a sitting shot for the Japs. You'll be dead meat.

WALLACE and EVANS grin. The chat has broken the monotony and the grind.

WILDER

Then get that kanaka moving.

WILDER looks back down the line of dripping soldiers.

EXT. CREEK - EVENING

The patrol slogs down the widening creek.

WOMAI stops and points to a tall white bole-tree that rises out of the jungle ahead of them.

WOMAI  
(triumphantly)  
Dewai, 'e stop!

SHEARWOOD motions the patrol to the bank, then squelches back to where WILDER leans against a tree.

SHEARWOOD  
There's the tree. He knew where he was going, all right.

WILDER  
Yes, he's some guide, I'll hand him that. Now what d'you reckon, corp?

SHEARWOOD looks up past the bank to a thicket of wild ginger.

SHEARWOOD  
Reckon? I reckon we camp here for the night and then get on with the job tomorrow. This is where a Jap track crosses the river - that tree's it. We're a good two hundred yards from it, but there'll be no Japs on it tonight. They're too damned scared of the kanakas after dark.

WILDER  
Better get the men settled in. Be pitch-dark soon.

EXT. WILD GINGER THICKET - DUSK

A can of water is warming up over a tiny methylated spirit stove with its blue flicker of flame. Nearby, MALISE is cutting fleshy ginger stalks. He erects them over a nest of ferns and bracken on the ground. The SOUND of others nearby in the dark cutting and building leafies for the night.

Flickering blue lights from other camp stoves. SOUND of the nearby river.

WILDER finds SHEARWOOD.

WILDER  
I've been thinking about what you said about the recce. A recce at dusk might be a complete surprise to them. I think we'll go in then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD

What's it to be, dawn or dusk?

WILDER

(crisply)

Dusk. We'll do the dusk attack. What have you done about a guard tonight?

SHEARWOOD

(incredulous)

A guard? A guard in this fucken' place?

WILDER

It's the normal thing, isn't it? You can't just all go to sleep alongside a main Japanese track and hope for the best! I'll take my shift with the rest of them.

SHEARWOOD

Listen, Mr. Wilder, in the first place, the Nips never stir out of their camps after dark - they've copped too many pig-stickers from the kanakas. In the second place, have you ever spent a night in the jungle? Unless there's a good moon, and there isn't one tonight, you can't see your hand in front of your face. How far do you think you'd get through that ginger patch in the dark - what do you think I put them into the guts of it for? You slap on a guard tonight and you'll have a blue on your hands. The men wouldn't stand for it.

WILDER

It's not what they'll stand for, corporal, it's what they're ordered to do. And if I say a guard goes on, then it goes on!

SHEARWOOD

And you can trot over and tell them yourself!

(laughs)

You'll soon find out its often what the men think and what they'll stand for. Right now, any of 'em'd make a bloody sight better leader for this patrol than you. They don't want to get their arses shot off, Wilder. If a guard was necessary, it'd go on, no matter what you might say.

The SOUND of the river, and insects chirring, and creaking of branches above.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHEARWOOD takes a deep breath.

WILDER

Sorry Alec. I've got a lot to learn.  
I'll be a while cottoning on. Forget  
about the fucking guard.

SHEARWOOD starts walking away.

SHEARWOOD

(over his shoulder)  
Okay, Mr. Wilder.

EXT. WILD GINGER THICKET - NIGHT

A small fire throws the ginger stalks into gold relief,  
like pencils in the dark. Voices raised in subdued  
altercation.

Angry voices louder.

Rice, bully beef and dried onions bubble in a blackened  
Japanese dixie. Four kanakas face MALISE as SHEARWOOD  
reaches them.

SHEARWOOD

What's the trouble, Ritchie?

MALISE

(savagely)  
There you are! Tell your black mates  
that if the white masters can't have a  
fire, they bloody well can't, either!

In the flickering light, SHEARWOOD looks steadily at  
MALISE.

SHEARWOOD

You know damned well that if there was  
any danger from the track, these  
blokes'd be the last to light a bloody  
fire. It'd be different if they had  
canned heat. Go back to what you were  
doing!

(to Womai)

Womai, ot'er-pella master t'ink maybe  
Japan walkabout 'long road, look 'im  
fire. Orright, you cook 'im kaikai  
quick-time, be'ind, rouse 'im fire.  
Savvy OK?

WOMAI

OK, Masta Alec.

MUMMAWA grins, red betel-juice runs in the lines down his  
mouth. MALISE spits on the ground and swaggers away. WOMAI  
ladles some of the stew out of the pot onto a banana leaf  
and hands it to SHEARWOOD.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAI (CONT'D)

Rice now bullamacow? Number one!

SHEARWOOD

Liklik, t'a's all. Thank you.

EXT. WILD GINGER THICKET - NIGHT

From WOMAI ladling stew onto SHEARWOOD'S banana leaf, to WHITE, stirring his stew in a tin with a green stick. Behind him is the bulk of the humpy. On the other blaze of canned heat is a tin with tea tablets stewing. He stops stirring and listens. Footsteps. WHITE picks up two dixies, and divides the stew into them. SHEARWOOD parts the ginger stalks carefully and squats beside him.

SHEARWOOD

What's for tea, mate?

WHITE

Bloody stuffed turkey. Sorry I didn't catch any fish, but I didn't have time, humping two lots of gear and putting up the leafie and helping Malise with the fucken' rations.

SHEARWOOD

Smells good. I had a bit of rice with Womai. Malise was going to town with them about their fire.

EXT. WILD GINGER THICKET - NIGHT

MANETTA and WALLACE lay together in a leafie. WALLACE strokes his Bren, ill at ease camping with MANETTA.

WALLACE

(softly)

Look at Alice Faye, now. I seen a picture with her in just before I left Torokina. Hot and sexy, but nice. And Grable, too. I go for them.

MANETTA

Yes, they're nice. I like Ingrid Bergman.

WALLACE

Too bloody nice. She'd chuck a micky if you touched her where it wouldn't show. I never been out with a nice girl in my life - only ratbags. I wouldn't know what to do with a nice sheila.

MANETTA

You'd learn if you wanted to. Have a smoke.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

Thanks Kevin. Jeez, tailors?

MANETTA

I got a parcel just before I left Ropai.

WALLACE

Who, your sheila?

MANETTA

No, my mother.

Dull flare of a shielded lighter flickers on the leafy walls. Darkness, then two glowing dots.

WALLACE

You got a sheila?

MANETTA

Yeah.

WALLACE

When you getting married?

MANETTA

I dunno, Wally. Next leave? After the war? I don't know.

WALLACE

The war's never going to end. We'll end, but not the war.

MANETTA

Don't talk bullshit.

WALLACE

No, dinkum. This stoush'll last ten years I reckon. Got to chase the Japs out of China, yet. Then do over Japan. Jesus!

MANETTA

The Yanks'll do that for us. We won't be in it.

WALLACE

Nah. We'll be in it. We'll all take the dive before it's over, you'll see.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - DAY

A well-concealed place in the jungle at the top of a slope to the nearby river. The patrol enters and takes cover.

SHEARWOOD

(to Wilder)

Guess this should do, Sir?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

The river's down there (points) How about we dump the gear there, (points) leave one of the blokes with it until we decide what way we go?

WILDER

Okay.

(to men)

Settle in for a while, fellers.

WALLACE

How about a smoke?

WILDER looks enquiringly at SHEARWOOD. SHEARWOOD nods and men light up.

WALLACE holds out his hand to SWEET who sighs very theatrically and hands over his tin.

The patrol rest. They begin to take off packs.

SHEARWOOD

(to men)

Lovatt says we mount two Opips. One here, one down river a bit. Okay - Pinkie, Ritchie, you'll do the job on this one. I'll take Womai with me and do the other. OK?

(to Wilder)

We won't waste time, Sir.

(to Pinkie, Ritchie)

Pinkie and Ritchie, you can go on down the slope a bit, find yourself a good lookout.

(to Womai)

Come 'long me pella, Womai.

(points down river)

Look 'im Japan.

MALISE and EVANS start off down hill. SHEARWOOD, WOMAI and MUMMAWA start off along the hill side down-river. CARGO BOYS, SWEET, WHITE, MANETTA and WILDER left in the bivouac.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - DAY

In the long coarse grass of the jungle hill-side observation post, EVANS and MALISE are side by side, MALISE dozing off in the heat. Insect sounds, hot sun biting into the back of his jungle greens, EVANS sits erect, eyes on the river. MALISE stirs.

MALISE

Hell it's hot here. The wind can't get at you.

EVANS looks out over the soft-looking tops of the trees in the bottom of the valley.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EVANS

Yeah. Just finishing winter down home.

MALISE

Fuck me! I'd be shearing if I was home.

EVANS

I know what I'd be doing, an' it wouldn't have four legs, either!

MALISE goes back to sleep. EVANS keeps an eye on the river.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - DAY

Further up hill, SWEET and WHITE lie in the grass, waiting.

Further on, WALLACE and MANETTA wait.

The sun is fierce.

MALISE (V.O.)

Beauty! Bring 'em around!

WALLACE

What the fuck?

EXT. HILL-SIDE - DAY

EVANS shakes MALISE's shoulder.

EVANS

(low)

Hey, pipe down, Ritchie. Every bloody Jap this side of Buin'll hear you.

MALISE

What - wha's 'at?

WILDER snakes through the grass down to them. He is quietly joined by WHITE.

WILDER

Jesus, corporal, what're you yelling about?

EVANS

Nothing. We got the willies lyin' around doing nothing.

WILDER

Then do something. Sneak down a bit further. Maybe get a better view. Don't stay too long - we want to be ready to move as soon as Shearwood comes back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As they get ready to move out, a few yards away, WHITE looks up from the grass.

WHITE  
C'n I go, boss?

WILDER is pleased with the "boss". MALISE smiles sardonically at the word "boss".

WILDER  
No, Oscar, you stick around here.  
It's not a picnic.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - DAY

EVANS and MALISE make their way down the steep hill, placing their feet parallel to the slope, pressing and gouging to get a foothold in the thick black loam and decaying leaves.

They slide, clawing at a tree trunk for support.

Behind them, their footprints fill slowly with clear water.

The deeper they go, the cooler and greener it is. They pass a flock of hornbills, feeding and quarrelling in the high branches.

EVANS  
Don't disturb those bastards. They'll  
draw the crabs if anything will.

They reach the edge of a deserted garden with banana palms in rows, clumps of sugar-cane rising out of rioting sweet potato vine. It is cool, green and quiet.

EVANS (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Not bad, eh? Looks as if the coons  
haven't been gone very long. Might  
cop some bananas.

MALISE slings his sniper's rifle, EVANS his Owen-gun, holding them across their chests. They move very cautiously and quietly through the garden. MALISE stops and points ahead.

MALISE  
There's a beaut bunch. If the birds  
haven't got 'em.

They get closer to the tree. Two scarlet parrots fly off, shrieking.

EVANS  
Birds be bugged. Look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALISE looks down at the familiar two-toed footprints at the base of the banana palm.

MALISE  
(mutters)  
Those slant-eyed fuckers are on to it.

EVANS  
Let's grab a bunch and scam.

MALISE  
Shh!

He holds up a finger. They stand rock still in the green-gold light.

MALISE (CONT'D)  
Hear that? Some bastard shouting -  
down the river it sounded like.

A faint high CRY.

EVANS  
(softly)  
Kanakas?

MALISE shakes his head, points to the footprints at the base of the banana palm. He raises his eyebrows and nods towards the river. They creep away together.

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

MALISE and EVANS crawl quietly up a small ridge of loose gravel by the banks of the river. They separate some of the low cover in front of them to look ahead.

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

Ahead of them is a strip of hard, greyish sand. Twelve naked JAPANESE SOLDIERS crowd around one SOLDIER who is carrying a bunch of bananas.

Knee-deep in the green water, three more naked SOLDIERS idly splash each other and one SOLDIER hurls stones down-river like hand grenades. Their cries, and the conversation of the group on the sand come up faintly.

EVANS  
Jesus, that's close. We must've  
walked in as they walked out!

MALISE grins, looking at the high-jinks in the river.

The sun turns the JAPANESE SOLDIERS naked bodies golden. Four SOLDIERS grab a fifth SOLDIER, swing him by his arms and legs and hurl him into the deep pool. He comes up spluttering and shouting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The group on the bank shout back. One of them hurls banana peel at the SOLDIER now surfacing from the deep pool.

EVANS stares at them, understanding for the first time that these naked people are men.

EVANS (CONT'D)  
 (whispers)  
 God almighty! They're just like us,  
 ain't they?

MALISE looks at him strangely.

MALISE  
 What d'you mean?

EVANS  
 Well, they horse around like us. See that bastard practising grenade-throwing with boondies? I done it lots of times.

MALISE  
 So what? I don't get ya.

EVANS  
 I dunno. I suppose if we was to leave 'em alone, they'd be happy as pigs in shit. They got everything they want, the bastards.

MALISE  
 Yeah. Even women. They go for the black velvet and it's not bad, either.

EVANS looks sideways at MALISE, wondering.

MALISE (CONT'D)  
 (laughs)  
 Don't look so bloody shocked. I might be dead tomorrow, and I'm having a bit of what I like in case I go.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A well built SOLDIER, different from the others as he has a short, black beard, throws himself forward on his hands and walks out into the river, legs above in perfect symmetry, green water ruffling white around his forearms.

MALISE  
 Oh, a bloody show-off! Well, sport, you'll do me.

He slowly raises his long rifle to his shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALISE (CONT'D)

Time we stopped fucking around. I'll get this ape while he's still upside-down. You ready?

EVANS quickly pushes MALISE's rifle downward.

EVANS

Grab your bloody brains, Ritchie. What about Alec? He's in close to their camp. You go shooting this mob up, fuck knows what'll happen to him.

MALISE lowers his rifle to the ground. Glares rebelliously at EVANS.

MALISE

Bugger Shearwood!

EVANS crouches low and starts to head back to the garden. MALISE follows him. Two blood-red parrots flash out of a tree and shriek down to the river.

EXT. OBSERVATION POST - LATE AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD and WOMAI lie in a dense thicket of wild bananas beside the river, opposite the Japanese camp. SHEARWOOD's shirt and trousers are dark with sweat, and WOMAI is shiny, his green laplap clinging to him.

In the clearing is the Japanese camp, three huts, two small and one large, made of light saplings and banana thatch. Patches of sweet potato and egg-plant in gardens by the huts.

WOMAI

(whispers)

Masta Alec. Soon sun 'e die. You-me lose 'im this place.

SHEARWOOD gestures silence and nods to the nearest hut.

TWO JAPANESE SOLDIERS, carrying long bush-knives, head through the garden towards the river bank opposite where they are hiding.

SHEARWOOD slides the safety catch on the Owen-gun forward. He tenses. WOMAI puts his hand on SHEARWOOD's neck, holds it there, and gently pushes his head forward until it's behind a screen of leaves. They wait, listening to the footsteps. SHEARWOOD stares at the mound of dirt a few inches from his nose.

From the other side of the river, come SOUNDS of sharp blows of machetes and broken talk. WOMAI takes his hand off SHEARWOOD's neck. SHEARWOOD turns slowly to WOMAI. WOMAI puts his fingers to his lips.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAI (CONT'D)

Too close, too muss! Liklik-liklik!

The TWO JAPANESE SOLDIERS, carrying loads of fresh banana leaves, head back to the huts.

SHEARWOOD raises himself on his knees. He and WOMAI start to crawl back into the denser jungle. They start walking through the trees.

EXT. RIVER - LATE AFTERNOON

SOUND of the shot. MALISE is hit in the shoulder by the JAPANESE sniper's dum-dum bullet. EVANS ducks. The second SHOT ploughs a furrow through EVANS' upper arm.

The air is filled with the flapping and screaming of hornbills, shrieking up from the tree-tops. The shots start to echo up the gully.

EVANS slumps alongside MALISE. EXT.

KANAKA PAD - LATE AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD and WOMAI hear the shots.

SHEARWOOD

(alarmed)

Womai - you-me, t'row 'way leg bloody quick-time!

They begin to run through the trees toward the bivouac.

EXT. HUT - LATE AFTERNOON

LOVATT stands in the doorway of his hut at Tononoi. He hears the shots.

INT. GARAMUT - LATE AFTERNOON

Wide-eyed reaction of KANAKAS stacking cases inside the garamut.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATE AFTERNOON

WILDER

Oscar, stay here with the Cargo Boys and tell Alec where we've gone!

WILDER, MANETTA, WALLACE and SWEET follow MUMMAWA down the slope into the garden. MUMMAWA puts his hand on WILDER'S arm.

MUMMAWA

Siddown 'long bush! Me go look 'im!

He goes off, everyone watches him.

EXT. RIVER BANK- LATE AFTERNOON

EVANS with his one good arm, rips open an emergency dressing with his teeth. He flattens the yellow pad in MALISE'S gaping wound. Pulls out the field-dressing from MALISE'S hip pocket and puts it across the already sodden one.

EVANS

Malise!

EVANS stares at him. Then looks around him. Nothing moves. He takes a handkerchief from his pocket and presses it into his own bad flesh wound. EVANS lugs MALISE on to his belly and reaches for his Owen. He unhooks two grenades. Using his teeth, he takes the pin out of one.

Silence.

EVANS checks MALISE again. The wound is still bleeding. He puts his hand on MALISE' chest, feeling for the heart-beat.

Behind him, MUMMAWA looks around the bole of a big tree, and freezes when he sees the two figures crouched in the shelter of the gravelly fold. MUMMAWA fades into the jungle.

SLUSH-SLUSH SOUND.

EVANS raises his head. TWO fully clothed JAPANESE SOLDIERS, rifles across their chests, are almost across the river. They wade slowly in the thigh-deep water.

EVANS blows on the head of the striker of the grenade.

Looks down at MALISE.

Looks up to the river. The two SOLDIERS are in shallow water. Squelch of canvas boots as they reach the hard sand. They walk to the gravel rise, looking round carefully.

EVANS lifts the grenade to his lips, worries the pin right out with his teeth. Swings his arm back carefully. Heaves the grenade.

CRUMP of the grenade shatters the silence. EVANS looks down the river bank.

ONE SOLDIER is sprawled on the coarse sand, twitching spasmodically, arching his back. The other SOLDIER walks mechanically back to the river, mouth open in a soundless scream. Blood bubbles over his hands where he holds his belly. A few feet from the river, a stream of blood comes from his mouth and he falls forward, his head under the water. A thin banner of scarlet drifts away slowly in the clear green water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EVANS raises his Owen to the crook of his arm, pressing it with his elbow to his ribs. He pulls the trigger.

EVANS (CONT'D)

And here's one for his knob, you bastards!

The SOLDIER at the river's edge shudders.

The ROAR of the Owen-gun shudders up and down the gully.

EXT. KANAKA PAD - CONTINUOUS

SHEARWOOD and WOMAI hear the Owen as they run down the Kanaka pad.

EXT. JAPANESE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The TWO JAPANESE SOLDIERS carrying the bundle of leaves and about to enter the big hut, hear the Owen and stop to stare into the jungle

EXT. KANAKA VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

In the village, naked PICCANINNIES hear the sound and shrink closer to their wide-eyed MOTHERS.

EXT. JUNGLE GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Last of the ECHO of the OWEN. WILDER looks around at the men of the section, close together, crouched behind clumps of sugar-cane.

WILDER

I don't want to start anything while Shearwood's away, but he's got a guide with him. If we do get split up, he'll get back to Tononoi all right. Whatever we do, we'll have to do it bloody quick if we're going to get Evans and Malise out without getting in ourselves.

MANETTA nods, SWEET shuffles his feet impatiently.

SHEARWOOD, WHITE and WOMAI part the bushes near MANETTA and WALLACE who crouch with the Bren, staring out to the river. WILDER cradles his Owen as he crouches next to them.

WILDER (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Good, Alec! The old bloke reckons Malise's hurt, maybe badly. He reckons -

A BURST of fire from the other side of the river. They flatten to the ground. Chopped leaves shower on them and ricochets die away up the gully.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD

Shit! They've brought up a machine-gun, the bastards. Feeling for Pinkie and Malise.

WILDER

Yeah. I don't think they know we're here - yet. Listen Alec, this's what I thought . . .

EXT. RIVER - LATE AFTERNOON

On the slope to the river, WILDER, just ahead of MANETTA crawls through the cover, hugging the earth. Occasional bursts of machine gun fire from the opposite slope.

One burst is very close and a slug nick's WILDER's shoulder. MANETTA is three feet behind WILDER as the last chopped leaf flutters to the ground. WILDER edges round a low bush to see ahead of him about fifteen yards, a glimpse of the river, and EVANS and MALISE.

EXT. RIVER - LATE AFTERNOON

SIX JAPANESE SOLDIERS are crossing the river. The first is close to the bank covering EVANS and MALISE; the last SOLDIER has just left the far bank of the river.

Like the sound of sheets tearing, WALLACE's Bren opens up behind them.

EXT. JUNGLE GARDEN - LATE AFTERNOON

WALLACE is next to SHEARWOOD. The Bren still roars, WALLACE shakes a little with the firing as the cordite drifts back.

WALLACE

(mutters)

Bastards. Bastards. Bastards

EXT. RIVER - LATE AFTERNOON

On the first burst of firing, WILDER and MANETTA, bent double, run from their cover to EVANS and MALISE.

Chips of white foam flick among the JAPANESE SOLDIERS in the river. Screaming with fear, they break up. The last of the party on the far shore, turns to run in panic, but, knee-deep, he crumples in the shallow water and writhes on the sharp rocks. The SOLDIER caught behind him falls over him, his face torn by a ricocheting slug.

Waters that were green are red, then green.

Nearest MALISE and EVANS, a JAPANESE SOLDIER threshes and screams in the shallow water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In front of him, roaring with rage, the bearded JAPANESE SOLDIER is charging up the slope.

WILDER fires his Owen. MANETTA draws close and fires. The JAPANESE SOLDIER stops suddenly, staggers, screams and charges on. For three feet. Then he pitches forward, three feet from EVANS.

WALLACE's Bren has lifted its firing from the river to the bank opposite.

The valley fills with the juddering sound of Bren guns, and the Owens.

WILDER  
(shouting above the din)  
Pinkie! Malise alive?

EVANS nods and points.

WILDER (CONT'D)  
(sees Malise's wound)  
Jesus!! You walk, Pinkie?

EVANS nods again.

WILDER (CONT'D)  
(screams)  
Then piss off! Straight up the hill.  
We'll . . . (Bren and Owen stop firing.  
Sudden silence) (still screaming) . . .  
bring Malise!

The valley echoes with the sound of firing.

SHEARWOOD, WHITE, WALLACE and SWEET with MUMMAWA, WOMAI and two CARGO BOYS just appear among heavy cover on the narrow terrace half-way up the slope.

SHEARWOOD  
(peers down slope)  
Christ . . . we're probably going to  
have to carry Ritchie.  
(turns to Womai)  
Womai, Masta Ritchie sick too muss  
long musket.

SHEARWOOD lays a hand on his own shoulder, and points to MALISE.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)  
Cargo-boy can make something carry  
Masta Malise?

WOMAI  
Can, Masta Alec.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAI speaks quickly and softly in place-tongue, to the CARGO BOYS. They go into the jungle, swinging their machetes.

FIRING starts again.

On the Lower level, MANETTA draws off his shirt and puts it next to MALISE's chest. EVANS kneels unsteadily, picks up his unused grenade nearby, presses the pin back home and hitches it to his belt.

MANETTA

(to Wilder)

Lift him on! You and me take the front half. Pinkie c'n hold up his feet.

MANETTA gently lifts MALISE on to the shirt. MALISE screams weakly.

EVANS

Jesus, it'll kill him. Poor bloody Ritchie.

Firing begins again from the opposite bank. WALLACE replies with the Bren.

MANETTA picks up MALISE's rifle and takes off the sling. He tosses the sling to EVANS

MANETTA

(to Evans)

Put the sling round his ankles to hold 'em up, mate.

MANETTA takes the bolt out of the rifle and throws it wide into the river. He pitches the rifle into the jungle.

MANETTA (CONT'D)

(to Wilder)

Come on, Mr. Wilder! Pick 'im up.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - LATE AFTERNOON

On a narrow terrace halfway up the hill-side among big timber, WHITE, WALLACE, SHEARWOOD and SWEET stare down the slope.

Behind them four KANAKAS are busy weaving strong kunda vine into a couch between two freshly cut poles, lying on the ground. They tie, knot and cut, finishing off the last few weaves. MUMMAWA inspects it and grunts. He speaks quietly in place-tongue to the TWO CARGO BOYS who break off to get armfuls of soft ferns and spread them over the kunda vine.

SHEARWOOD checks his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Heavy breathing below them. SHEARWOOD taps WHITE on the shoulder, and they scramble down to meet WILDER, MANETTA and EVANS, sobbing for breath on the slippery slope. MALISE groans with each bump. EVANS stumbles.

WHITE and SHEARWOOD take an arm of the shirt, MANETTA drops behind to relieve EVANS of the sling. WILDER puts an arm round EVANS and helps him up the slope.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - LATE AFTERNOON

MALISE lies on the bloodied shirt by the Bren gun. His hair is filthy, his face is white. There is a bloody mess on his shoulder. His pale hands lie on the black dirt. Mud is caked on the green trousers and boots. His breathing is very shallow.

WILDER and SHEARWOOD lean close to listen.

WILDER

Wait a minute, Alec. He's in shock. Lost a lot of blood. Must keep him warm. That's the most important thing.

SHEARWOOD

We got no blankets.

WILDER

I know that, but we've got shirts, stuff in the packs. Anyone bring a pullover? Get it out if you did and any dry duds.

WILDER starts to pull his shirt off. He packs it on the stretcher. Then he reaches into his pack. He pulls out a morphine Siret, prepares it and after cleaning a place on MALISE's arm, plunges it in. WILDER looks up briefly at SHEARWOOD.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Morphine. Keep him quiet.

SHEARWOOD looks at him.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Got a few more too, just in case.

SHEARWOOD sees WILDER'S flesh wound.

SHEARWOOD

You've been hit.

WILDER

It's nothing. And I mean *nothing!*

Behind them, MANETTA has pulled out a spare pair of trousers;

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE, SWEET and WALLACE have done the same, plus two woollen pull-overs and a dry shirt. They put them on the stretcher. WILDER helps spread them.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Put the trousers and shirts on the stretcher, and then we'll tuck the strides in round him.

SHEARWOOD looks around.

SHEARWOOD

Womai, Mummawa - where 'e stop?

WOMAI nods up the slope.

WOMAI

(quietly)

Mummawa go look 'im road. Suppose some-pella Japan sit down 'long road, all-same masta.

SHEARWOOD

Hell yes. The fuckers'lll ambush the track all right.

WILDER

Wait till we get to the top. Now, Alec, lift him over.

They move MALISE across to the stretcher, and WILDER spreads the dry trousers over him and stands up.

WILDER (CONT'D)

We better get along. Who's taking first go?

SHEARWOOD

We can't ask Mummawa and Womai. They're warriors. Proud as buggery.

WILDER

Bullshit. If it's good enough for us, it's good enough for them.

SHEARWOOD

You don't understand. Ask them, and they're likely to race off into the scrub.

WILDER

Womai, Master Malise very sick, savvy? You help carry, OK?

WOMAI looks at him silently.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAI  
 (in dialect, to the other  
 kanakas)  
 We'll carry him. Pick him up!

WOMAI bends down to one end of a carrying pole, MUMMAWA to the other and the two KANAKAS jump to get the other end.

SHEARWOOD  
 I'll be buggered.

WALLACE, laughing, pokes SHEARWOOD in the ribs.

WALLACE  
 (whispers)  
 He's a go-getter, our schoolboy, eh?

The stretcher party starts its laborious ascent of the hill.

WALLACE turns to EVANS.

WALLACE (CONT'D)  
 Go on, Pinkie, you bloody old wreck.  
 After the stretcher, so's we can pick  
 you up when you fall over. Gimme your  
 pack -

EVANS resists but hands it over.

WALLACE (CONT'D)  
 An' give Oscar your gat.

EVANS hands his Owen gun to WHITE.

WALLACE (CONT'D)  
 Get going, or we'll be here all night!

EXT. HILL-SIDE - MOMENTS LATER

WILDER is alongside SHEARWOOD.

WILDER  
 Yeah. We'll manage.

WILDER paces himself up the slope.

WILDER (CONT'D)  
 (to himself)  
 Yeah. We'll manage all right.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

HOWARD is in a fox-hole with another SOLDIER, at the junction of the Government road at Tononoi where it joins the track to the garamut. Behind him is LOVATT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Along the track, a large PATROL is trudging towards him. LOVATT spits.

HOWARD nudges the SOLDIER.

HOWARD  
Some poor fucker looks like copping an earful.

The SOLDIER puts a dirty finger by his nose and winks exaggeratedly.

The column is a few yards away.

LOVATT  
(calling out)  
Welcome to Tononoi! Halt 'em there for a moment, Mr. Wansborough. I want a word with you.

HOWARD  
(whispers)  
This'll be good.

The column halts and melts into the cover by the track. WANSBOROUGH, a tall, gangly figure in sopping clothes, walks towards LOVATT.

LOVATT  
Late, Charlie - nearly an hour and a quarter. What the hell happened?

WANSBOROUGH  
(easily)  
Guides, major. We could've followed the bloody track as far as the river, but that slowed us down to blazes. They didn't know whether they were punched or bored after that, until we got out again at the crossing you marked on the map.

Some of the men of the new patrol are clustered round the new grave, topped with a rough bush cross and a single dog-medal with silver chain hanging from it.

LOVATT  
Which scouts?

WANSBOROUGH  
Awa, and that cross-eyed little bastard.

LOVATT  
Lui?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WANSBOROUGH

Yeah. I think he's half silly with the betel.

LOVATT

(viciously)

Lying bastards! I'll towel their black arses for 'em. They told me they knew this area like their own back-yards. Come with me, Charlie. I want a talk with your blokes.

EXT. GOVERNMENT ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

By the grave. WANSBOROUGH and LOVATT are approaching.

SOLDIER 1

Bloody hell. They don't waste much time. Only been here a coupla days and they got one poor bastard planted already. At it again by the sounds of the stoush we heard comin' up. Jesus!

SOLDIER 2

Who is it, Heck?

SOLDIER leans forward to check the disk.

SOLDIER 2 (CONT'D)

Hines? D. Hines? Anybody know him? Wasn't one of our blokes, I bet.

SOLDIER 1

That's orright then. Some other bunny, that's all.

LOVATT

Listen in!

SOLDIERS drift in from the undergrowth, listening as they come.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

You heard that shindig about half an hour ago. Shearwood's mob went out yesterday to do a recce on a joint. Looks like someone got jumped. They won't be able to bring him out tonight. They've got two bloody good guides with them, you'll know them, Womai and old Mummawa.

SOLDIERS 1 and 2 nod. The rest stare back at LOVATT.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

He comes from the area. I reckon they'll make for his place, overnight there, and come on home tomorrow.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOVATT (CONT'D)

I want to go down and meet them there at Mummawa's place. I want half a dozen men to come with me. Sort it out amongst yourselves. I'll be back in fifteen minutes, Mr. Wansborough.

LOVATT turns to go and almost falls over BEETLE. Behind him are two giggling KANAKAS with a huge dixie of tea on the ground between them.

BEETLE

I brung a brew up for 'em, boss. There's some cheese and biscuits for 'em too. They c'n have a feed before they go out.

LOVATT

(astonished)

Who told you they were going out?

BEETLE

I heard the shootin' so I guess you'd be goin' out to have a look-see. Anyway, if they don't go out, the brew won't kill 'em.

LOVATT

You'll kill 'em, Beetle. With kindness. The bastards'll want sheets on their beds next. Go on, give it to them.

LOVATT leaves.

SOLDIER 1

Old hooer!

SOLDIER 2 goes over to the tea and biscuits.

SOLDIER 2

Bloody bottler!

BEETLE

Come an' get it! Remember you thievin' cows, on'y the blokes goin' out gets the cheese and biscuits. Come on. Think I got nothin' to do but wait around for a bunch of cut-lunch commandos . . . . Orright, orright, take it easy - it ain't a bloody birthday.

EXT. KANAKA PAD - LATE AFTERNOON

At the crest of a slope from the garden, MANETTA and WOMAI appear first, followed by the CARGO BOYS at front of the stretcher, TWO SOLDIERS, panting under the weight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The rest of the patrol arrive and stand under cover by the edge of the kanaka pad.

MUMMAWA comes out of the shadows and goes to WOMAI.

MUMMAWA

(in dialect)

Six Japanese are down the road. I've seen them.

WOMAI

(to Shearwood)

Japan sit down 'long road, Masta Alec. Mummawa look 'im.

SHEARWOOD

(softly)

Holy bloody Jesus. Put the stretcher down for a moment, Kev.

WILDER

What is it, Alec? Ambush?

SHEARWOOD

You said it.

WILDER

Which way?

SHEARWOOD

(to Womai)

Japan, where 'e stop?

WOMAI waves along the track.

WOMAI

'Long harp. Two-pella three.

SHEARWOOD

(to Wilder)

Six of 'em. It'll be the same in the other direction too.

SHEARWOOD glances up and down the track, then at the jungle opposite where they're standing.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Looks like a bit of scrub-bashing, eh?

(to Womai)

Womai, suppose 'all 'e walkabout 'long bush-nothing, you can come up 'long 'nother-pella road behind?

WOMAI

(to Mummawa, dialect)

If we head off into the jungle, is there another road we can get to?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MUMMAWA

(in dialect)

There is another road, but it is a long distance through the jungle.

WOMAI

(to Shearwood)

OK Masta. Mummawa, 'e savvy. Long way too muss.

SHEARWOOD

Good on you, Mummawa, you old black bastard.

MUMMAWA grins and does his little dance.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

'Long bush-nothing, eh? Walkabout easy!

WILDER

What track, Alec? You know it?

SHEARWOOD

There isn't any track.

WILDER

No track? Then how the fuck?

SHEARWOOD points at MUMMAWA, who looks around, grunts and heads into the tangle of vines and creepers.

EXT. KANAKA PAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Behind the stretcher.

WHITE

Now I got a feeling this ain't got a happy ending. I usually got butterflies in me guts. Now I've got fuckin' ducks.

WALLACE

You got no guts.

WHITE

Bite your bum. I don't stack on the hero act. I'm frightened most of the time, and now I'm bloody frightened,

WALLACE

What I expected.

WHITE

Get fucked. Bet I got some mates, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They move off to follow the stretcher party into the jungle ahead.

SWEET

You ain't kiddin'! Fuckin' ambush this way. Ambush that way, and Christ knows what's in front of us. Oh, momma.

WALLACE

Nerves of steel, that's what you got to have. I got 'em. That's why they made me a Bren-gunner. Key man.

WHITE

Key man with no bloody weed.

WALLACE

Have it ready next stop. I don't want to have to ask for it twice.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

SHEARWOOD looks around at the living wall overshadowing them. A frond of wild ginger catches in the cross bar of the stretcher, comes free and sweeps down over MALISE.

Ahead, MUMMAWA stops and waits for SHEARWOOD to catch up to him.

MUMMAWA

Dewai, too muss!

MUMMAWA pats the long bush-knife against his flank.

MUMMAWA (CONT'D)

Can rouse'im. Womai, now me-pella can cut 'im 'long knife.

SHEARWOOD

OK.

(to Wilder)

That's one less for the carrying, Clem. They'll have to cut a path for the stretcher.

WILDER

We've got no choice. There'll be a nice old trail for the bastards to follow. And they'll travel a lot faster than us.

SHEARWOOD

Maybe. But it'll be pitch dark in an hour and they don't like to be around much after sundown.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

SWISS and CHOP of machetes as they slash at the vines and creepers hanging overhead. SUCK of boots in marshy ground. MUMMAWA and WOMAI step over a fallen tree.

WOMAI  
(softly)  
Dewai 'long ground.

MANETTA behind them.

MANETTA  
(softly)  
Dewai 'long ground.

He lifts tired legs over the fallen log. Behind him, SHEARWOOD.

SHEARWOOD  
Dewai 'long ground.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

SWEET is the last man in the file. He slogs along, filthy hands, nails broken, long hair tangled on his neck. His head dropping to his chest. The oncoming dark is swallowing up the men ahead.

SHEARWOOD (V.O.)  
Have a blow. Five minutes - and don't smoke.

WALLACE (V.O.)  
Holy cow.

SWEET drags himself up to where the rest have stopped in the gloom. WALLACE heaves the Bren off his shoulder, leans it against a tree and sprawls on his back beside it. WHITE flops down where he is. SWEET unslings his Owen and flops down where he is. He watches the others.

WILDER and SHEARWOOD go over to the stretcher. WILDER feels under the layer of leaves and trousers to take MALISE's pulse. SWEET leans over to WHITE.

SWEET  
Seems to know what he's doing.

WHITE  
Hope to Sweet Jesus he knows where he's going. This bush-nothing stuff ain't my line.

WHITE gestures back down the track through the jungle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE (CONT'D)

They won't need bloodhounds to follow us.

SWEET shrugs.

WALLACE

What if they do?

He pats the Bren.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Wait till they show up and blast the shit out of them.

SWEET

Yeah, that's an idea. You stay behind and tie yourself up a fucking tree. You'll get a Military Medal.

WALLACE

I'd get shot in the ring, that's what I'd get.

MUMMAWA walks slowly along the track towards them. He stares into the silence along they way they have just come. MUMMAWA talks softly to WOMAI.

WHITE

Yeah, but if you got knocked off, I'd save dough on weed, anyway.

WOMAI talks softly to SHEARWOOD.

WALLACE

You'll never have another friend like me. What's Betel Boy want?

WHITE

(whispers)

Japs around, I bet. They c'n smell 'em.

SHEARWOOD, out of WILDER'S hearing, comes down the track to them.

SHEARWOOD

(softly)

All right, on your feet, you blokes. We're moving on. One of the scouts reckons the Japs've got onto our trail.

SHEARWOOD looks to WILDER for confirmation. WILDER nods.

WILDER

You stay, Wal. Hold 'em up a bit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WALLACE circles thumb and forefinger - he's happy. He looks to WHITE and SWEET.

WALLACE

Key man.

WHITE

Key shithead.

MANETTA

I'll stay with Wally. If we don't knock 'em off, we'll frighten the shit outta 'em. Get going, Alec, and leave us Womai.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

Ahead, in the dusk, MUMMAWA uses his bush-knife on the jungle to make a path. Insects are tuning up for the nightly concert.

SHEARWOOD has a carrying pole of the stretcher on his shoulder. WILDER likewise, plus the two CARGO BOYS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

Moments later, the insect noise is louder. Close on a thick vine which is slashed by the bush-knife to fall to the ground. The way forward is clear for the stretcher party behind MUMMAWA.

SCREAM of the Bren, overlaid with the CHATTER of the Owen in short bursts. Short silence, then CRUMP of two grenades close together, followed by a third.

SHEARWOOD

That's that, by the sound of things.

WILDER

I hope they get out OK. We'll wait for them here, Alec.

SHEARWOOD

Yeah.

They lower the stretcher to the ground.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

CLINK of bully tins as clasp knives scrape them out. Squatting beside the stretcher, SHEARWOOD and SWEET share a tin of bully beef and hard, dry biscuits.

Swarms of fireflies trail among the trees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUMMAWA and the two CARGO BOYS sit apart, gobbling bully beef. MUMMAWA starts to peel a betel-nut. He throws a sprig of betel-nut to the CARGO BOYS who peel a nut each and pop it into their mouth.

WHITE sits next to EVANS.

WHITE  
Can we smoke?

SHEARWOOD  
Keep it low and cover it up.

WHITE rolls a cigarette for EVANS, lights it and puts it between EVANS' lips. EVANS sags against WHITE.

Silence.

WOMAI walks quietly in. MANETTA and WALLACE come in.

MANETTA  
You there, Alec?

SHEARWOOD  
Yeah. How'd you go?

SWEET  
How many'd you get?

WALLACE  
About six, I think. We were lucky;  
another five minutes and we wouldn't  
have seen the bastards.

MANETTA  
I reckon we got the lot.

WOMAI  
Japan bugger-up finish! 'Im 'e  
bastard true.

SHEARWOOD  
Nice going. Get some tucker. And when  
you've had a blow, we'll move on.

WILDER  
Move on? In this darkness?

SHEARWOOD  
We got torches. We might've come two  
miles from the river if we're lucky  
and we're leaving a trail Blind Freddy  
can follow. They'll be on to us in  
the morning so we've got to put  
distance between us and see if we can  
get onto another track. We can't hold  
them off indefinitely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WILDER

Yeah, and if we don't get Malise to  
Tononoi soon, he's a gone coon.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The phosphorous-painted fire sticks burn with a cold fire. Some of them lashed to the stretcher make it seem like a float in some fantastic procession. WHITE, WALLACE, SWEET and WILDER carry the stretcher, each of them with a firestick stuck in their packs. MANETTA carries the Bren. SHEARWOOD walks beside EVANS.

MANETTA, ahead of the stretcher, switches on his torch. The pale light gilds the trunks and low boughs of trees. The KANAKAS swing their machetes in arcs of fugitive light. They move forward.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

SHEARWOOD, MANETTA and two KANAKAS carry the stretcher. They move forward. WHITE is carrying the Bren. He shifts its weight.

WHITE

It's the kind o' thing they put in the  
papers. You know - 'Diggers  
courageous fight to save comrade.'

WALLACE

Give me fuckin' strength!

WHITE

Well, it is, isn't it?

SWEET

Get off yourself!

WHITE

Get fucked.

The Bren sags against WHITE'S shoulder. He stares around at the dark.

DISSOLVE TO:

WHITE'S mud-streaked face as he takes the cigarette from his lips and passes it to EVANS for a draw, both of them slumped against the bole of a tree.

SHEARWOOD holds the torch, and MUMMAWA gestures in its pale glow. MANETTA watches them.

Sunk in quiet and fatigue they have stopped for a breather on the lip of a slope. Insect DIN in the hot dark.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANETTA goes over to SHEARWOOD.

MANETTA

What do they reckon, Alec?

SHEARWOOD

We're onto a track, Kev, or almost.

(to Wilder)

We've got to cross this water, Clem, and then up the ridge on the other side. It's not much of a creek, the old boy reckons, but the track's on the top of the ridge and she's mighty bloody steep. There's no way round it.

MANETTA nods. WILDER takes the torch and shines the light down the shallow slope, across the stony watercourse, and up the other side. Up and over a tangled mess of dark green and black. WILDER stares silently ahead.

MANETTA

Well, give it a burl, eh?

EXT. CREEK - NIGHT

The patrol wades knee-deep through the stony creek and emerges against the beginning of the slope. It is steep enough to lean against. They stare at it.

WILDER

We'll zigzag.

They nod. WHITE shifts the Bren and winces as the strap bites into his shoulder.

It starts to rain.

EXT. RIDGE - NIGHT

The soft rain is turning the slope to grease.

SHEARWOOD and MANETTA carry the stretcher. They slip to their knees. MANETTA grabs the greasy slope with his free hand.

Behind them, the others slip in the mud.

Boots suck at the mud.

White men are turning black with mud - in their eyes, hair, hands.

MANETTA and SHEARWOOD inch forward, stagger, fall to their knees in the mud again.

And again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANETTA reaches out again to grab the mud.

SHEARWOOD  
(viciously)  
Fuck you!

Time slows as they fight against the ridge.

SWEET licks the mud on his lips.

WHITE, trying to clear his eyes, wipes more mud into them.

The carrying poles rub into raw patches on shoulders.

Ten men, in the dark world, strain like animals and curse like maniacs.

The rain drifts down.

DISSOLVE TO:

EVANS pants heavily. His wounded arm drags in the sling from MALISE' rifle. He pushes himself forward against the mud, the torch light swinging in the dark.

He staggers suddenly. He stares across the top of the ridge where, six feet away, the torch light plunges out among the feathery tree tops down the other side.

EVANS  
We're up. Up.

EXT. TRACK - NIGHT

MANETTA presses his hand on the carpet of leaves on the track at the top of the ridge. He closes his eyes. Around him the others are slumped beside the stretcher, sobbing for breath. Their chests heave, and their limbs tremble.

EVANS turns the torch light off.

EXT. TRACK - MOMENTS LATER

Chests still heave in the darkness and the rain. SHEARWOOD and WOMAI talk in whispers.

WILDER  
(to Manetta)  
What's all that?

MANETTA  
Alec asked him where we're heading and he said to his village Kahila Two. He says the Japs took the old Kahila and killed off a few of the men and women and kids, so the rest upped traps and found another joint in the jungle.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANETTA (CONT'D)

They built new houses and planted a new garden and called it Kahila Two.

WILDER

Poor buggers. Very far?

MANETTA

Yeah. A good way.

WILDER

Then let's get going, eh?

WALLACE, WHITE, WILDER and SWEET stoop to pick up the stretcher. They make to move off.

WALLACE

Wait. I'm gonna make a pad for my shoulder.

WALLACE pulls down a sapling, strips the leaves off and puts them between his skin and the carrying pole.

SWEET

Lover boy's got nerves of steel all right.

WALLACE

Got to look after my skin. Remember what it said in the good book about march discipline. Make yourself comfortable on a patrol.

SWEET

Since when could you read?

WALLACE

I looked at the pictures. Get going, mug.

SWEET

Get fucked.

They move off. WALLACE stops.

WALLACE

Christ. Pull up!

SHEARWOOD

(alarmed)  
What's the matter?

WALLACE

Bloody stinging-bush. Oh, you *bastard!*

WALLACE sweeps the leaves from his shoulder.

SHEARWOOD

Come here with the torch, Kev.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WALLACE

Oh, you *bastard!* God almighty, the  
*itch!*

WHITE

Spit on it, Wally. Spit's good.

WALLACE

Spit in your fuckin' eye!

The torch beam shows a blister about as big as a boot-polish lid on WALLACE's shoulder.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Change sides with me, Oscar. I'll  
carry on the other shoulder. Put your  
beret on the pole or you'll have the  
bloody thing. Fuck! The *itch!*

EXT. RIDGE - NIGHT

The rain has stopped. The ridge down is easier going.

EXT. PLATEAU - NIGHT

On the edge of the ridge, they continue across a wide plateau. The yellow light of the torch shines ahead.

EXT. HILL-SIDE - NIGHT

A starlit deserted garden on the side of a hill. The patrol crosses through it like ghosts.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The phosphorous sticks glow on the side of the stretcher as they start to climb the gentle slope of a hill. EVANS stumbles and falls. WHITE picks him up.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The lights round the stretcher burn, but the stretcher is still. The men rest in the dark.

INSERT

Tiny green numbers dance and pulsate. They become clear. The time on WHITE's watch shows a few minutes after midnight.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

WHITE stares closely at his watch. He leans across in the dark and grabs MANETTA. WILDER is close by.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE

Kevin. You awake? Jesus, everybody's sleeping!

MANETTA

I'm not, but I'm bloody stiff. I don't think I'll be able to get up.

WILDER

Me, too. Like a bloody board.

WHITE rubs his hand down his wet chest and feels the wet ground.

WHITE

One day we'll pay for this. When we're forty or so, we'll be poor old bastards with rheumatism and worms and Christ knows what. Stands to reason.

WILDER

(softly)

I'd be glad to know for sure I'll reach forty.

Silence.

WHITE

Bloody quiet when the wogs stop their fucking row. I spent a couple of weeks on a farm when I was a kid. First few nights, d'you think I could sleep? Not on your life. Know what kept me awake? The bloody quietness.

MANETTA

(dryly)

And you've never liked it since, eh?

WHITE

You're having a go at me, you bastard. Anyway, I don't like it. I used to sleep on the veranda at home, done in with fibro, and plenty of noise all the time. I used to hear the sheilas going home from dances - you could tell them the way their heels'd click on the footpath, and they'd giggle and laugh. And the milk-carts and everything.

WILDER

You'd better wake the others, Oscar.

WHITE

Yeah, I suppose. I had a picture on the wall out of *Man Magazine*.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WHITE (CONT'D)

Big blonde, sitting in the bath  
talking to some bloke on the phone.  
She had two big tits -

MANETTA

She'd'a looked funny with three.

WILDER sits up and shakes SHEARWOOD on the other side of  
him.

WILDER

Wake Albie and Wal. Time to get going  
again, Alec.

SHEARWOOD groans and sits up.

SHEARWOOD

Yeah. I suppose so.

SHEARWOOD switches on the torch and flashes it around the  
group.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

Come on Oscar, Albie. On your feet!

WALLACE

My *bloody* shoulder!

SHEARWOOD goes over to the two KANAKAS and points to the  
stretcher.

SHEARWOOD

Quick-time!

The two KANAKAS don't move. They stare back at him.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

What name?

One KANAKA rubs his stomach, the other groans softly.

KANAKA

Work too muss! Me-pella sick 'long  
bel'.

The patrol, standing now, watches SHEARWOOD.

KANAKA (CONT'D)

No can carry.

SHEARWOOD

Maski this bloody humbug, you black  
kanaka bastard! S'pose you no work 'im  
strong, orright, be'ind, Guv'man  
calaboose 'im you-pella!

The KANAKA shuffles uneasily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KANAKA

Guv'man no can calaboose 'im man.  
 (laughs uneasily)  
 Guv'man bugger-up pinish!

SHEARWOOD smacks the KANAKA in the mouth. He bleeds. He looks for an escape route in the jungle.

SHEARWOOD

You cheeky bastard! White soldier all-  
 same Guv'man. S'pose you-pella run  
 'way, orright, be'ind you die-pinish  
 'long rope!

SHEARWOOD mimes a noose. WOMAI rattles his spears gently. The two KANAKAS go over to the two carrying poles.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The patrol slogs through the jungle, SHEARWOOD ahead, with the torch. A KANAKA behind him, carrying the stretcher, coughs and stumbles.

There is the SWISH of wet bushes and the rustling TRAMP of men behind him.

WILDER (V.O.)

Dewai 'long ground.

SWEET (V.O.)

Dewai 'long ground.

The SOUND of running water.

SHEARWOOD

(softly)  
 Womai! This-pella wadder, name b'long  
 him. Maar River?

WOMAI

No got! Name Oresai. Maar River long  
 way too muss.

SHEARWOOD looks across to MANETTA, walking mechanically, his head on his chest, feet feeling their way on the ground.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Without warning they burst out of the jungle and stand on a stony, shelving beach. SHEARWOOD switches off the torch. The stars shed pale lightness.

WOMAI points across the river.

WOMAI

'Long harp, number-one road 'e stop.  
 Pinish bush-nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They put the stretcher down. They stare silently at the black water, where it glows faintly against boulders.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

One by one, they sink onto the stony beach. Only the NOISE of the river. The wink of a sheltered cigarette breaks the darkness.

WILDER moves first. He goes over to where SHEARWOOD and MANETTA squat together side by side.

WILDER  
(softly)  
We'd better organize this, Alec.

SHEARWOOD stands up.

SHEARWOOD  
Yeah. It might be a bit tougher than we reckon. I think you and Kevin better stay on the stretcher with the two kanakas. You're the biggest. Womai and the old boy and Wally and I'll walk with you and steady you over the rough spots.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Four white men and four black men carry the stretcher down to the water's edge. Behind them, very unsteady, EVANS stares at the incline to the water.

EVANS  
Get going. The sooner we get goin' the sooner we get across.

The cold river shakes the stretcher party off-balance when they're only shin-deep.

WALLACE  
All right, wait for us, you old wreck. We don't want to spend next week dragging the creek for ya.

INT. RIVER - NIGHT

The wide feet of the KANAKAS feel forward slowly and curl round the stones on the river bed. The steel-shod boots of the Australians slip and plunge.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

They sway forward as the water reaches their knees. They stop. They feel their way forward. The water is to their thighs.

The rough carrying pole slides across SHEARWOOD's shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The ROAR of the water drowns any talk.

The water is nearly past their waists and they stop again.

EVANS is behind the stretcher; WHITE and SWEET either side of him.

EVANS nods ahead at the stretcher party.

EVANS

That's where . . you should be, you  
two, helping . . . . with. . .

The water wrenches them sideways.

They desperately keep their foothold and inch forwards again.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

They near the steep bank opposite. There is a stony shelf below it. The stream is very deep here, and twenty feet away, the unbroken water foams against a great boulder.

SHEARWOOD and MANETTA edge up out of the water, the stretcher tilted at a sharp angle from them.

EXT. STRETCHER - NIGHT

The stretcher tilts more. The Bren gun starts to slip down the stretcher.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

A KANAKA carrying the stretcher inches forward. The Bren slips off the stretcher and hits him on the forehead. He ducks, struggles to keep his balance. All eight men, now seriously unbalanced, struggle and flounder. The stretcher sways above them.

SWEET

Oscar! The Bren! Hang onto Pinkie.

SWEET plunges forward to grab the Bren and help steady the stretcher.

WHITE digs into the sand of the channel bed, leans against the current with one arm around EVANS's waist.

EVANS

(weakly)  
I don't feel. . .I don' . . .

EVANS slumps against WHITE. WHITE grabs the front of EVANS shirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE  
(panicked)  
Alec!

Three feet ahead of him, SWEET looks over his shoulder but can't leave the stretcher. SHEARWOOD turns the torch back to pick out WHITE'S desperate face. He leans almost horizontal against the water that races against his chest. One arm strains away from. EVANS body see-saws in the foam.

SWEET  
(yelling)  
Hang on, Oscar!

The two KANAKAS look over their shoulders.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

The stretcher begins to move up the bank.

WHITE  
I can't hold him!

SWEET breaks away from the stretcher, plunges knee-deep into the water, holding his Owen-gun out by the barrel.

SWEET  
Grab it!

WALLACE goes past to grab EVANS.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

WHITE's fingers are relentlessly pried open by the river.

He hooks his free arm through the sling on the Owen-gun. The current pulls him forward.

WHITE  
(screams)  
Ah, Christ! He's gone!

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

SHEARWOOD turns round.

SHEARWOOD  
Jesus Christ!

SHEARWOOD turns the torch light on to WHITE, hanging at the end of the Owen-gun. The light moves from him into the darkness of the river channel. The light stabs EVANS, crushed by the water with his back to the rock. His arms are flung wide, his face is bloody, his mouth sags open. EVANS screams and the sound carries above the roar of the river.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

EVANS hangs against the rock for a moment. A swirl of current takes him around the side of the rock and out of sight. The wet surface of the rock glistens.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

SHEARWOOD, with MANETTA and WILDER behind him, race along the rocky shelf at the river's edge. SHEARWOOD flashes the torch light over the tumbling water.

The torch light keeps dashing backwards and forwards over the river. There is no way past a pile of big rocks to get further downstream.

MANETTA

Come on. It's no use. He's gone.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The starlight picks out the tableau on the beach. SHEARWOOD lifts his head to take it in. MANETTA is on the other side of the stretcher, asleep standing up, arms folded, head on his hairy chest.

The two KANAKAS squat on their haunches, staring ahead, arms across their knees. WILDER, SWEET and WALLACE are slumped against a boulder at the edge of the river. WALLACE has the recovered Bren leaning on his knees, hands across the muzzle and his forehead resting on his hands. WHITE is standing with MUMMAWA and WOMAI in the shadow of a big boulder.

The river has washed them all clean.

SHEARWOOD looks down at his own clean white chest. It feels like a dream.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

A CLATTER of boots across the stony beach. WHITE, skinny, in his wet pants, and his huge boots, stumbles towards them

They look. WHITE stops close to SHEARWOOD and MANETTA.

WHITE

(strained, unnatural)

Swimming parade! All ranks *will*  
attend, men *will* carry towels.  
*Bullshit!*

He stares at his naked chest and arms. Wipes his hand over his chest and then holds it out to stare at it, back and front. He looks up at SHEARWOOD.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE (CONT'D)  
 (surprised)  
 Remember that day, Alec? We're all  
 stark bollocky and that jeep-load of  
 Yank nurses came down . . .

The river swallows his voice. Above the sound, WHITE's sobs carry to the men staring at him blankly.

WHITE (CONT'D)  
 I let him go! I let him go!

The men stare at him. WILDER steps forward and smacks WHITE hard on each cheek. WHITE's head jerks backwards.

WILDER  
 (harshly)  
 Get hold of yourself, Oscar!

WHITE stares at him. He looks at the white faces around him, and hears the river.

WHITE  
 (whispers)  
 Sorry, boss. I mus' be . . .tired or  
 something.

WILDER  
 We all are. We'd better move off,  
 Alec.

SHEARWOOD stares at the carrying pole at his feet. The two KANAKAS take their places. MANETTA stoops beside SHEARWOOD. SHEARWOOD bends down and takes hold of the carrying pole.

EXT. KANAKA PAD - PRE-DAWN

A thick carpet of leaves on a track. Mechanical rise and fall of boots on the track.

EXT. KANAKA PAD- PRE-DAWN

The patrol walks like zombies along the track. MANETTA is sleep-walking. His head falls back with a start and wakes him up. He shakes his shoulders and keeps going.

SWEET's head falls onto his chest and he sleep-walks along the track.

EXT. KANAKA PAD - PRE-DAWN

The patrol walks along the pad which twists along the razor-edged top of a heavily forested ridge.

EXT. KANAKA VILLAGE - DAWN

Pigeons BOOM in the jungle. The stretcher party stops in front of SHEARWOOD.

In the clearing in front of them is the shape of a house-garamut. The light under its steeply pitched roof is pale gold from a tiny fire inside. Three KANAKAS appear at the open end of the garamut and are silhouetted against the inside glow.

Behind SHEARWOOD, the patrol has propped where they stopped, asleep on their feet. The CARGO BOYS put the litter gently on the ground.

WILDER

This it, Alec?

SHEARWOOD

I think so.

(turns to Womai)

Womai. You talk-talk this-pella

Kanaka

(points to Kanakas in the  
garamut)

WOMAI LEAVES.

WILDER

I'll wake the others. I think they've been asleep since we left the river.

SHEARWOOD

Yeah. I had forty winks myself.

INT. GARAMUT - DAWN

By the hot glow of the fire in the garamut, and under a pile of leaves and clothes that looks like jungle trash is MALISE. His chest rises and falls gently.

Kneeling next to the stretcher, WILDER reaches out and feels MALISE's forehead. Next to him, swaying with exhaustion, MANETTA and SHEARWOOD.

SWEET and WALLACE are slumped against the garamut wall, asleep.

SHEARWOOD

He seems all right. What do you think, Clem, is that wound likely to go bad or anything? Should we wash it out, d'you reckon?

WILDER shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILDER

Later today. I'll give him another jab.

SHEARWOOD

OK. I'm going out for a piss.

INT. GARAMUT - DAWN

SHEARWOOD picks his carefully through the thin darkness inside the garamut. His boot bumps WHITE. He shines his torch on him. He is streaked with filth, with deep shadows under his eyes, and lying like a dog in the dusty floor of the garamut.

SHEARWOOD sways on his feet, rubs his hands on his eyes and groans.

WOMAI comes up behind him.

WOMAI

Masta Alec. You sit down 'long fire.

SHEARWOOD

This-pella kanaka, 'e got blanket?

WOMAI

Something b'long Japan, t'a's all.

SHEARWOOD

Bring 'im, 'e come, eh?

A KANAKA brings up a thin Japanese blanket.

SHEARWOOD throws the blanket over WHITE.

WOMAI

Masta Oscar, all-same piccanniny.

SHEARWOOD looks outside the garamut where pale blue dawn light filters in.

SHEARWOOD

Yeah, all-same piccaninny, true.

EXT. CREEK - MORNING

Dressed in a borrowed laplap, SWEET sits on the bank of the stream. Steaming in the hot morning sun, his washed clothes hang over nearby bushes.

In the creek, MANETTA, WALLACE and WHITE wash themselves and their clothes by standing in the rushing water and patting themselves out of the mud and jungle dirt.

INT. GARAMUT - LATE MORNING

The doorway is crowded with KANAKAS. They're watching WILDER at work on MALISE.

WILDER patiently drips hot water on to the sodden, blood-stained patch on MALISE's shoulder.

WALLACE

Aren't you afraid it'll start bleeding again? I wouldn't be game.

SWEET

Pigs arse you wouldn't. You'd stick a knife in your own granny for a smoke.

WALLACE

Which reminds me.

WALLACE puts out his hand.

SWEET

Can't. Not in the operating theatre. There's a man's life at stake.

WALLACE

Smart bastard.

WILDER gingerly lifts the edge of the pad on MALISE's shoulder. He squeezes more hot water on it and pink streams fall across MALISE's chest.

WILDER

Alec, pound those sulpha tablets will you?

WILDER lifts the edge of the pad and it comes away gradually.

WHITE

(softly)  
Fucking hell!

MANETTA reaches for the cross at his neck. Nearby, MUMMAWA is putting a poultice of leaves on WALLACE's blister.

WILDER

Open three of those dressings, Kevin.

INT. GARAMUT - MOMENTS LATER

WILDER sprinkles the ground sulpha powder into the jagged crater of MALISE's wound. The powder reddens. He puts one, then the other dressing on it, pressing down gently and firmly. He binds the third dressing across it. Then he winds a clean, dried laplap into a sling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILDER leans back on his heels and wipes his hands over his sweaty forehead.

WALLACE

Where'd you learn all that? You a doctor, or something? In civvy life?

WILDER

No. I was a counter-jumper.

WALLACE

Were you? So was I! What was you in?

WILDER

Carpets and lino.

WALLACE

Well, hell. I worked in a grocer's. I wouldn't have thought you was a counter-jumper.

WILDER

Well, I was. You blokes take off for a while. I'll look after Malise.

INT. GARAMUT - MOMENTS LATER

SHEARWOOD and WILDER look down at the wounded man on the stretcher. Filing out the door of the garamut, the men bicker.

WALLACE (V.O.)

About that smoke. Decorate with the weed.

WILDER

(to Shearwood)  
Funny that Malise should've copped a dum-dum, of all people.

SWEET (V.O.)

Bite the boongs for fuck's sake. I've got to pay good dough for this.

WILDER

He'll be all right I think. When he wakes up he might want some tucker.

WALLACE (V.O.)

It's made round to go round. I've got better things to do with my dough than spend it on weed.

SHEARWOOD

I'll get the kanakas to knock off a pigeon. Boil it and whack in some rice for body.

EXT. GARAMUT - AFTERNOON

The sun drenches the small clearing beyond the garamut.

The RING of axes as KANAKAS fell trees at the edge of the jungle.

MANETTA, SWEET, WHITE and WALLACE are around the ceremonial garamut drums. Some lean against them. They smoke and talk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A little distance away, SHEARWOOD is arguing with WOMAI.

MANETTA looks over, but can't catch what they're saying. They carry on smoking.

WOMAI leaves.

WILDER comes from inside the garamut and joins SHEARWOOD.

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

Behind SHEARWOOD and WILDER, MANETTA is walking through the village towards the edge of the jungle.

SHEARWOOD  
(to Wilder-)  
. . . they reckon Malise's been  
fucking the maries. It's bad.

WILDER  
Jesus. Not the maries. Those old  
bags.

SHEARWOOD  
Not all of them.  
(nods to the jungle edge)  
They're not too old.

WILDER looks over to where the MARIES are working the ground for a garden.

WILDER  
Even so. The kanakas'd kill him for  
that. He's a strange bastard, Malise.  
Listen, Alec, what time d'you think we  
should push off?

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

MANETTA walks towards the jungle edge.

Not far away, twenty naked MARIES are working in a line, breaking the new earth with sticks.

On the far side, a few KANAKAS are hacking at fallen trees. Other KANAKAS are burning fallen logs to make way for new gardens.

Further behind is a large papaw tree with men of the patrol in its shade.

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

Under the papaw tree. The dark patch of shade contrasts with the glaring sunshine in the clearing. WALLACE, WHITE and SWEET. Bare chested, and smoking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

. . . there's me a counter jumper,  
and Albie too. Now it turns out  
Wilder's one as well.

WALLACE blows out a cloud of blue smoke. It hangs in the  
air, then the breeze takes it away.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Kevin works for his old man's fish  
shop, Alec's a clerk and Malise's a  
jackeroo, working for meat and damper  
somewhere out the back o' bloody  
Bourke.

SWEET

Well, if we was lawyers or something,  
we wouldn't be walking our guts out in  
this outfit. We'd be fucking a blonde  
in Victoria Barracks or something.

WHITE

Fucking a blonde.

WALLACE

So what did you do, Oscar, apart from  
robbing poor boxes?

WHITE

Get stuffed. I worked about a year in  
a pickle factory, and then a cake  
joint, and then I heard the bugle.

WALLACE

Stop it, you're killing me.

WHITE

(grins)

That pickle factory. The things the  
sheilas'd do to a man.

WALLACE

Get off yourself. You must've been  
fully thirteen. Your next'll be your  
first.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

They have changed positions, but still talk and loll in the  
shade of the papaw tree.

Beyond the shade, KANAKAS work, MARIES dig in the garden,  
and by the edge of the jungle, MANETTA smokes. SHEARWOOD is  
slowly walking through the village to join MANETTA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WHITE

. . . something'll turn up.

WALLACE leans over and takes SWEET'S tobacco. He starts to rub the weed gently.

WALLACE

None of us'll have to worry about  
after the war. None of us'll see it.

SWEET

Bulldust.

SWEET gets his tobacco back.

SWEET (CONT'D)

Shit.  
We'll be lining them up at Young and  
Jackson's before you know where you  
are. This stoush's nearly over.

WALLACE

It's good for another three years.  
We'll take the long drop before it's  
over.

They fall silent.

SWEET starts to sleep.

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

MANETTA and SHEARWOOD stand in the shade at the edge of the jungle.

SHEARWOOD

We were extra good friends, her and  
me, because between us we ran our  
joint. Yeah, I was about nineteen  
when she died. The old man was a funny  
bloke - he loved us I guess, but I  
think he was always surprised to  
realize that he had a family, even  
after we were grown up. He used to  
get his nose into a book and then he'd  
never hear you even if you bellowed  
into his ear. He'd look up at you as  
if he'd never seen you before, or as  
if you were some salesman or  
something.

MANETTA

(smiling)  
Out of this world, eh?

SHEARWOOD

I'll say. Mum used to go crook, but  
it didn't get her anywhere.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

God she was a battler.... Nine years ago. Anyway, she died.

MANETTA

(gently)  
I'm sorry.

SHEARWOOD

Everybody dies. She was sick for a long time and she knew she'd had it. There's nothing waiting for you like you say, on the other side of the door. It's finish. And that's how it'll be with me, and you, and poor bloody Ritchie, if he croaks. Finished. And I don't know that I want anything else, either. Once around the track'll do me.

MANETTA looks steadily at SHEARWOOD.

MANETTA

Well, things aren't as cut and dried as you think. I know that something will happen some day and you'll feel the same way about things as I do. My old man used to say that faith was like the backbone of a fish - everything else clings to it, and it lasts when everything else has gone. He's a beauty. He and your mother would have been good mates, like we are.

SHEARWOOD grins and flips the cover to his watch.

SHEARWOOD

Yeah.  
We'd better go and stir up the boys.  
We'll push off in a couple of hours and they'll want a bit of tucker before we start.

They head towards the garamut.

INT. GARAMUT - AFTERNOON

WILDER is stirring the pigeon and rice in a blackened dixie over a tiny fire.

MALISE mutters and stirs. WILDER looks over to him. MALISE's eyelids flutter open. He looks sideways at WILDER. He blinks.

MALISE

(stumbling over the words)  
What . . . happened . . . Wilder?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILDER straightens up and goes over to the stretcher. He looks down at MALISE.

WILDER  
You were hit. In the shoulder. You lost a lot of blood. How do you feel?

MALISE  
Where are we?

WILDER  
At a kanaka village, on the way home to Tononoi.

MALISE  
How's Evans?

WILDER  
He's . . . OK.

MALISE closes his eyes. Then opens them and stares at WILDER.

MALISE  
Don't bullshit. He's dead. How'd I get in here?

WILDER  
We carried you.

MALISE  
Who?

WILDER  
We did - and the kanakas.

MALISE  
You too?

WILDER  
We all had a lash.

MALISE closes his eyes and lies very still. Then he opens his eyes.

MALISE  
(softly)  
Must've been quite a carry, eh?

WILDER  
Wasn't easy.

MALISE  
You big Anzac. Make sure you tell some bastard.  
(whispers)  
You'll cop a gong out of it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WILDER goes back to the fire.

WILDER

Do you want this soup? It'll do you good.

MALISE

(whispers)

Stick your soup!

MALISE turns his head away. WILDER sits on the floor, his back against the wall. He puts his elbows on his knees and drops his head into his hands.

EXT. CLEARING - AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD and MANETTA are crossing the clearing, heading towards the papaw tree and the blokes asleep in its shade.

LOVATT and his patrol enter the clearing. MANETTA and SHEARWOOD join them, and together they head to the garamut.

The men under the papaw wake and head to the garamut.

INT. GARAMUT - AFTERNOON

WILDER looks up to see LOVATT staring at him. He stands up immediately.

WILDER

(cool)

Good day, Major. This is a surprise.

LOVATT

Yes, Mr. Wilder. How are you - how's Malise?

LOVATT goes over to the stretcher and looks down at MALISE.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Is he all right?

WILDER

I don't know - he seems OK. He lost a lot of blood, but he seems OK. We put a dressing on it this morning. Sulpha.

SHEARWOOD

He been awake yet?

WILDER

Yes, a while ago.

SHEARWOOD

Eat any of the pigeon?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILDER  
No - didn't want it.

By the door to the garamut.

WHITE  
(whisper)  
Hell. Bet Lovat'll scoff the pigeon!

SOLDIER 1  
Old bastard walked the arse off us.

WHITE  
You smell like it.

SOLDIER 1  
Get fucked. Malise badly hit? And how  
about old Pinkie - what happened to  
him?

SWEET turns away.

WALLACE  
(hard)  
Give us a burn. We're all just about  
out of weed.

SOLDIER 1 hands over some weed.

WHITE  
Jesus, mate. You'll learn.

By the stretcher. LOVATT stares at MALISE, kneels to feel  
his pulse, puts his hand on MALISE's forehead.

LOVATT  
He'll do.

LOVATT stands up.

LOVATT (CONT'D)  
No temperature, anyway. You ready to  
move, Mr. Wilder?

WILDER  
(uncertain)  
Move?

LOVATT  
Yes, move. Scram.

WILDER looks down at the laplap he wears.

WILDER  
Well, not quite. In half an hour,  
maybe. We were planning to move on at  
sundown.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOVATT looks to the doorway of the garamut, crowded with the men from both patrols. MANETTA winks at WILDER. WILDER nods back at MANETTA.

LOVATT  
(harshly)  
Your first patrol, Mr. Wilder. You lose one man and get another damn near killed. I thought it might have made you a bit more careful.

The men at the door look sideways and shrug.

LOVATT (CONT'D)  
What the hell would you do if a mob of Japanese attacked now? Hit the tall timber in your skirt?

WILDER  
(shaken)  
The kanakas told us the Japs didn't know about this place. We thought we'd have to carry the stretcher in to Tononoi tonight.

LOVATT  
You'll learn, if you last long enough. Get the patrol under way immediately. Fifteen minutes'll do you.

WILDER heads to the door. The men part to let him through.

WHITE  
(to Wilder, but stares at Lovatt)  
I'll get your duds, boss!

EXT. CLEARING - EARLY AFTERNOON

WHITE and WALLACE are collecting the drying clothes from bushes. Behind them, men are preparing to leave the clearing.

WHITE  
Lovatt's got a bloody nerve, going up Wilder like that! The great hooer - he didn't even know what happened, properly. Wilder's OK.

WALLACE  
We'll see.

EXT. CLEARING - EARLY AFTERNOON

The LOVATT and WILDER patrols are mingling together at the edge of the clearing where the jungle ends. The garamut and other huts throw deep shadows in the fierce sunlight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The KANAKAS and MARIES still work in their gardens, and smoke from the burning trees twists into the sky above it all.

LOVATT (V.O.)

Right. Before we move out, Mr. Wilder wants to know if any of you have got any bully and biscuits left over? How about leaving it with these blokes here. They're short of tucker and we'll be home by tea-time.

From high up, a tiny SOLDIER with a hessian sack, collects food from some members of the patrol, hands it over to a KANAKA who makes his way over towards the garamut as the patrol gets into order to move off.

They head from the edge of the clearing and vanish into the jungle.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

WOMAI is in front, followed by LOVATT, then the stretcher party and the rest of the joint patrol move along the track.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

SHEARWOOD brings up the rear of the patrol. A "Hullo!" from the jungle. Ahead he sees a KANAKA come out of the jungle to the edge of the track.

LOVATT signals a halt. He beckons the KANAKA forward and talks to him in whispers.

The men in the patrol edge into cover at the side of the track.

LOVATT beckons WILDER and SHEARWOOD up.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

WILDER, SHEARWOOD, LOVATT and the KANAKA stand at the base of a huge fig-tree with root buttresses higher than they are.

LOVATT

He says he was hunting pigeons near the village when he saw some Pongos coming along the track. This way . .

Beyond them is a branch track, climbing a low slope.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

(to Kanaka)

This pella Japan? Plenty man? Lik-lik?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KANAKA

One-pella ten, now t'ree.

SHEARWOOD

Thirteen of 'em.

LOVATT

Someone shoul'da told the silly bastards its an unlucky number.

WILDER

How far back?

LOVATT

(in Pidgin)

Japan long way? Lik-lik?

KANAKA

Lik-lik, t'as all.

LOVATT looks back down the track.

LOVATT

He reckons the buggers are not far off - maybe twenty minutes. This'd be a bloody good spot to stop 'em. What do you think, Alec?

Before SHEARWOOD can respond.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Hmm. Mr. Wilder? Suppose we set up a small ambush down here, and the rest of the patrol wait up the top of the rise?

LOVATT waves his hand to show the rise.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Wait . . . maybe half an hour. If they haven't shown up by then, we'll fuck off. It's a clear run home from here.

As LOVATT is speaking, WILDER and SHEARWOOD study the track. LOVATT takes a tin of tobacco and a packet of papers from his web pouch and hands them to the kanaka messenger. He grins.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

You good-pella too-muss!

The KANAKA has a wide grin as he takes the tobacco and heads back into the jungle.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

Mr. Wilder, how much do you know about setting up an ambush?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WILDER

(cool)

As much as I learned at Officers  
Training School, Major.

LOVATT

OK. Now's your chance to put it to  
work. Until we get back to camp,  
you're in charge, Mr. Wilder. What do  
you reckon? And remember, whatever  
you decide, you'll have to pull your  
finger out!

WILDER

(still cool)

Okay, Major.

WILDER studies the track, the jungle, the fig-tree for a  
moment.

WILDER (CONT'D)

I'll mount the ambush down here  
(points) with two blokes. Wally with  
the Bren and Alec as a standby this  
time just in case I fuck it up.  
(at Lovatt)

You go up the hill, Major . .

While WILDER outlines his plan, one by one, we discover the  
men in the patrol, in cover at the edge of the track,  
listening to the plan, resting their weapons, waiting in  
silence.

WILDER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

. . . set up a defensive position.  
If things go wrong, it might be them  
coming up the hill, not us. If it goes  
to plan, Wally comes half-way up the  
hill to give Alec and me cover when  
we want to come out. We cover  
him til he gets into position. When  
Alec and I are ready, I'll put a  
couple of bursts into the other side  
of the track in case any of 'em looks  
like putting his bloody head up. Then  
I'll toss a grenade over and then  
Wally opens up to cover us up the  
hill. And we rejoin you and the  
blokes (looks up the rise) up there.

Back to LOVATT.

LOVATT

Good as you'll get, Mr. Wilder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WILDER  
(to Shearwood, then Wallace)  
Okay with you, Alec? Wally?

SHEARWOOD nods.

WALLACE  
Like I said, fellers.

WALLACE looks back down the line and grins. Pats his Bren.

WALLACE (CONT'D)  
Key man!

SOLDIER 2 (V.O.)  
Get fucked.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

LOVATT is at the head of the file with the stretcher as they move off, leaving the others behind. Follow the stretcher party up the hill.

WILDER (V.O.)  
Wally, get into position - ah, fifteen paces towards the bend. Don't waste any time.

Back to Ambush party.

WALLACE  
Hell, if we can't do 'em over with my Bren and your two Owens and a bundle of grenades . . we shouldn't be in the fucking business.

WALLACE picks up the Bren and, doubled up, hurries to a spot fifteen paces from the bend in the track and settles in amongst cover.

Back to Stretcher party.

WHITE  
Jesus wept! Thirteen of the fuckers. Well, we got six back there a bit, and I reckon we musta got ten or more at the river. Should get a bloody bonus!

Back to Ambush party.

WILDER  
(decisive)  
Alec. I'll stay right here. If they go past the junction, I'll let the scout and two go by. I can take them out with one good burst if they're anything like closed up.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILDER (CONT'D)

And the one behind the scout's likely to be the officer. You take four-five and six. And Wally's Bren can knock off the rest. Okay?

SHEARWOOD

What if the scout decides to bring 'em up the hill?

WILDER

I'll let him come in far enough so's I'll know what he's going to do, and I'll plug him. When I do, you and Wally go into your dance.

SHEARWOOD

Apples, mate.

WILDER settles into cover where he is, and SHEARWOOD moves into cover behind a curtain of creepers hanging from a tree.

Down the track to the bend, the three men are invisible. Up the track, the stretcher party has disappeared also.

EXT. HILL-TOP - AFTERNOON

The Stretcher party has reached the top of the track at the hill.

LOVATT

Okay you lot. Sort out good positions for yourselves. I'll be right here. .  
. .

LOVATT stamps on the ground where he is at the top of the track. As he speaks, the men take up their positions

LOVATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

. . .with the Bren. Owens either side, sniper wherever he thinks he'll get the best shot. Stretcher behind.

LOVATT waves to a position to the rear.

LOVATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When you're set you can have a blow. When the ambush opens up - if it bloody does - you know what to bloody do!

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

The track at the jungle edge. The vines hanging from the trees are still. Nothing moves, but the SOUND of hornbills breaks the silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Behind the vines, WILDER moves his eyes and it is only this small movement that shows there is someone there.

Further down the track a few paces, the jungle is impenetrable. WALLACE is invisible behind his Bren until he moves his face closer to the butt and looks down the track.

EXT. HILL-TOP - AFTERNOON

SWEET drinks from his water bottle. WHITE aims his weapon down the track. MANETTA checks his weapon.

LOVATT (V.O.)  
(loud whisper)  
Fifteen minutes . . .

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

The track is empty. The jungle is still in the hot and steamy afternoon.

A bird CALLS.

Silence.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

The track is empty and the deadly trap waiting behind vines and wild ginger is invisible.

A JAPANESE SOLDIER appears round the bend in the track.

WALLACE (V.O.)  
(whispers)  
Visitors, Alec.

SHEARWOOD (V.O.)  
(whispers)  
Visitors, Clem.

WILDER's eyes widen. He sees the SOLDIER. It is the forward SCOUT.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

The forward SCOUT, a mid-height, skinny, bow-legged Japanese SOLDIER pauses on the track. He stands rock still then holds up one hand to halt those unseen behind him. The SCOUT peers about very cautiously, moving only his head from side to side.

The SCOUT lowers his hand, sweeps it past his thigh to indicate a forward movement. He starts moving forward. He clasps the stock and barrel of his weapon held diagonally across his chest, hip to shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Other JAPANESE SOLDIERS appear from around the bend, turning their heads from side to side mechanically, suspiciously.

Like the SCOUT, the patrol hold their weapons hard against their chests. They wear khaki peaked caps with the blood-red rising sun emblem. The red is a shock against the green of the jungle. Khaki shirt, bloomer-like khaki trousers, khaki puttees, canvas shoes cleft so that the big toe is parted from the other four. A distinctive pattern in the mud and leaves of the floor of the track.

Ten yards from the bend, the SCOUT stops again. Five SOLDIERS are on the track. The SCOUT stares straight where WALLACE is.

WALLACE, unseen, stares back.

WALLACE

(mutters)

Okay, you prick! Take a good look.

Silence.

WALLACE sees the SCOUT and the other SOLDIERS move forward again. Three more SOLDIERS appear around the bend in the track. More SOLDIERS appear around the bend until there are twelve behind the SCOUT - all in the open on the track.

WALLACE stares down the track as the JAPANESE SOLDIERS travel very slowly, very close to each other, heading towards him. The SCOUT is a hundred yards away. WALLACE's index finger is poised on the trigger of the Bren.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON

The trigger finger of the SCOUT is poised on the trigger of his weapon.

The SCOUT is now twenty five yards away. He stops and stares very fixedly at the cover opposite where he stands. He smells the danger.

He moves forward again. He half-turns to speak softly to the OFFICER behind him. The SCOUT swings around and points to the spot he has been staring at.

WALLACE shifts his glance from the SCOUT and the OFFICER behind him, to the track junction a few yards to his right.

The SCOUT turns to the OFFICER, raises a hand pointing straight ahead, swivels it to show the right-hand turn and lifts his shoulders to ask the question.

The OFFICER takes no notice and swivels his head left, ahead, to the right, ahead; then, left, ahead, to the right, ahead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILDER, behind his cover, is silently staring at the OFFICER, willing him to do something.

The JAPANESE OFFICER gestures forward along the track, and the file begins to move carefully into a loose bunch, still in cover.

WALLACE lets them move past him.

With the SCOUT moving up the track, then onto SHEARWOOD, with his Owen gun, behind a curtain of creepers.

The SCOUT and the file move up the track and the SCOUT is now almost level with . . .

WILDER and his Owen.

WILDER's Owen gun is aimed at the SCOUT's heart.

The SCOUT moves past. WILDER's finger on the trigger and the Owen fires.

The SCOUT leaps sideways into the air; the OFFICER crumples into a kneeling position; the Bren and SHEARWOOD's Owen open fire.

The OFFICER topples sideways slowly, blood gushing from his mouth.

WILDER aims at the third JAPANESE SOLDIER heading for the edge of the track and he drops; the fourth SOLDIER is hit as he dives into cover.

WILDER fires another burst up the back of the third man who bucks and kicks in a bizarre sort of tap-dance.

The Bren and SHEARWOOD's Owen has stopped firing. There is no reverberation, no fading of echoes here. The jungle has absorbed all the racket of firing.

WILDER automatically slots another magazine into his Owen. Puts spent magazine into his webbing pouch.

WILDER looks down the track and the file of men. Further down are four dead JAPANESE SOLDIERS.

SHEARWOOD, surrounded by blue smoke from cordite, puts his empty magazine away as he stares at the four dead JAPANESE SOLDIERS on the track near him. He looks down the track to count five more dead SOLDIERS.

WALLACE, smoke wafting around him, looks away from the butt of the Bren to count the five men he has killed.

Small rivers of gleaming blood on the grey dirt.

WILDER (V.O.)  
Bloody good, Wal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WALLACE

You know, they might come back later on to pick up these blokes. What d'you reckon - booby-trap 'em with a couple of grenades? Boom-boom for the bastards?

SHEARWOOD

Not on, mate. Suppose a mob of kanakas come along on walk-about. Maries and picaninnies and so on. Boom-boom for them, not the bloody Japs.

WALLACE

Well . . . yeah.

WILDER and SHEARWOOD fire two short bursts into the cover on the other side of the track, spacing them equally in the few yards where any survivors might be. There is no sound. No movement.

SHEARWOOD fires two short bursts across the track.

SHEARWOOD

Bugger-all doing here, Wal.  
(glances to Wilder)  
Reckon we piss off, Clem?

WILDER

You take it, mate. This time.  
(laughs easily)  
Monkey see, monkey do!

SHEARWOOD

Okay.  
(to Wallace)  
(You first Wally. Drop half-way up the hill. We'll give you cover - couple of bursts to keep their fucking heads down.  
(laughs grimly))  
If there's a bugger of 'em can get his head up! When you get set, give us a burst - over our heads.

WALLACE

Okay - and when you're ready to pull out, hit 'em with a grenade. I'll give you cover.

SHEARWOOD

Spot on, mate. Fuck off!

WALLACE stares momentarily at the track.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WALLACE

Okay, you blokes. See you up the hill.

WALLACE moves off through cover. SHEARWOOD follows his retreat. WILDER glances down at the track, sees Japanese Scout's weapon. Checks the other side of the track for movement. Reaches out and grabs weapon by the sling. It is covered with blood. Soft oath of revulsion. He snatches handfuls of grass, cleans blood from butt and slings weapon. WILDER holds it up for inspection. He grins, a bit embarrassed, at SHEARWOOD.

WILDER

(apologetically)  
Souvenir - my first job!

SHEARWOOD

(grins)  
Yeah. Go for it.

SHEARWOOD turns away for a moment to scan the track. WILDER slings the Japanese weapon with his Owen, on his shoulder. SHEARWOOD turns back to WILDER.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

(grins)  
Look bloody good on your bedhead at home.

Short burst of Bren from up the hill. Leaves flutter down onto them.

WILDER

Wally's set. Guess we pull out?

SHEARWOOD

Yeah.

WILDER

(authoritatively)  
You go first, mate.

SHEARWOOD

Sure.

SHEARWOOD heads off.

WILDER unhooks the grenade again, blows on the pin, and heaves it across the track. He has four seconds to get clear.

WILDER still keeping in cover, heads up the hill.

The clink of WILDER's Owen against the SCOUT's rifle.

Silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

The grenade explosion is quickly smothered by the jungle. WILDER stops. Silence. Then a rasping SCREECH of agony from behind WILDER. WILDER winces.

WILDER heads back to the grenade explosion. He sees a badly wounded JAPANESE SOLDIER, face down in the greenery, trying to raise himself up. The SOLDIER screams again.

WILDER unslings his Owen and fires a burst from the hip into the SOLDIER who dies. WILDER looks briefly at his handiwork, then pushes through the jungle back to the track.

The smoke from the cordite wreaths through the leaves and vines - otherwise, no sign in the jungle of an ambush.

Away from WILDER as he moves quickly up the track. The SCREAM seems to follow him. The track swiftly becomes invisible among the jungle. Higher still above the trees, rivers and ridges until the whole island itself is a small green circle in a rippling afternoon sea. The SCREAM is fainter now.

EXT. TONONOI - EVENING

The Garamut stands small in the enlarged clearing. Smoke from fires drifts into the hot air, and there are rows of humpies for the extra KANAKAS who have come to the safety of Tononoi base.

The RING of axes, CRASH of falling trees, SHOUTS of kanakas.

EXT. TRACK - EVENING

HOWARD lounges in the Bren-pit on the track to the ridge and looks out of the corner of his eye. Another SOLDIER, is squatting, grass-hopper-style, alongside the Bren-pit.

The burial mound for D HINES, with falling leaves on it, a finger of vine over the rough cross and the red meat-ticket dangles on a chain.

WOMAI appears around the bend of the track from the south.

SOLDIER (V.O.)  
Here comes the mob!

HOWARD strains to see who is returning.

The patrol comes around the bend. The stretcher party, kanakas reach the turn-off from the main track down into the troop area.

The line gets closer to HOWARD. WILDER behind WOMAI, then LOVATT, then SHEARWOOD, WHITE, SWEET, MANETTA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD checks to see where WALLACE is. Nowhere to be seen.  
And SWEET is carrying the Bren.

SOLDIER  
Pinkie isn't there. Nor Malise,  
neither.

HOWARD  
(flatly)  
Nor Wally.

SOLDIER  
(to passing file, generally)  
Jesus - you lot back again? Thought  
we'd got rid of y's.

SOLDIER 1  
Get stuffed.

A FIGURE comes jog-trotting around the bend to catch up  
with the tail of the line.

HOWARD  
(breathes)  
Wally.

EXT. HUT - EVENING

The patrol comes to a halt outside LOVATT's hut, in a  
column-of-lump.

WILDER  
Stand easy, fellas.  
(to stretcher bearers)  
Don't put it down yet.  
(to Lovatt)  
I'm going over to the RAP tent with  
Malise, Major. See you later on?

LOVATT  
Okay, take over, Mr. Wilder.  
(to patrol)  
Bloody good show.

LOVATT turns into his hut. WILDER turns to SHEARWOOD.

WILDER  
Where's the RAP, Corp?

SHEARWOOD  
(to nearest man in file)  
Take Mr. Wilder over to the RAP. Then  
break off.

WILDER walks towards stretcher with SOLDIER.

WILDER  
Take over, Corp?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The SOLDIER by the Bren pit has followed the patrol down. WILDER and STRETCHER PARTY head off.

SHEARWOOD

Okay, you blokes. Take the weight off your feet for a moment. (laughs) Yes, Wally, you can smoke!

The men hunker down. Some sit, some stretch out, one or two pairs sit back-to-back, supporting each other. Most light up cigarettes. WOMAI and MUMMAWA stand slightly apart, leaning on their spears, watching what's going on. The SOLDIER alongside WALLACE shrugs with theatrical resignation, begins to extract his tobacco tin.

SOLDIER

Okay, Okay - gimme fucking time.

SOLDIER takes out tobacco tin, hands it over to WALLACE who takes out weed and paper and hands it back.

WALLACE

Ta, mate.

VARIOUS VOICE OVER

Who went off?  
How many did you get?  
Get off yourself -  
Who's on the stretcher?  
Yeah and it skittled the whole bloody joint.  
Poor old Pinkie, eh?

SOLDIER

(to patrol)

Anyone tell you blokes the war's just about fucked?

WALLACE, rolling a smoke looks over to him.

MANETTA

Who shot you that load of bullshit?

SOLDIER

No, Kevin, it's dinkum.

SOLDIER 2 (MACK)

Yeah, right off the third seat from the fucking door.

WALLACE outs his cigarette between his lips. To MACK.

WALLACE

Like the man, says, Mack - bullshit!

WALLACE lights up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SOLDIER

(defensively)

Well . . . the sig at Division told  
our sig . . . he reckons the Yanks  
split an atom, or some fucking thing,  
and dropped it on some joint in Japan.  
Fried the fucking lot. One bomb!

WHITE

(wondering)

Jesus, Wally. It might be over. The  
fucking war. Over.

SOLDIER 2

Get off yourself, for Christ's sake,  
Oscar! Pure Yank bullshit, it is.  
You can smell it a mile off!

WALLACE blows out a huge cloud of smoke.

WALLACE

Resign yourself, mate. You'll still  
be using your good old Owen come  
fucking Christmas.

SHEARWOOD has reappeared from LOVATT's hut.

SOLDIER 2

And bloody happy to have it, too!

SHEARWOOD

Okay patrol. Break off for tea and  
don't drag your feet, Beetle'll have a  
bloody foal.

PATROL get to their feet, move off.

VARIOUS VOICE OVER

. . . atom bomb . . .  
. . . bullshit . . .  
End of the war?  
. . . fucking . .

SHEARWOOD

(to White)

Not you, Oscar!

WHITE turns back, resigned.

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

I want you to take Womai and Mummawa  
over to the cook-house. Tell Beetle  
to lash 'em up with a bloody good feed  
- whatever's going. Tell him I said  
so if he bucks.

(to Womai)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D) Womai  
 - you-pella now Mummawa walkabout  
 'long Masta Oscar, 'long  
 'ouse cook. Kiss'im plenty-pella kai-  
 kai 'long you-pella.  
 (grins and rubs his belly)  
 Plenty good-pella!

WOMAI  
 Plenty good-pella true, Masta Alec!

WHITE  
 (soft, sarcastic)  
 An see if you can dig up a few more  
 jobs for me. I just fuckin' hate  
 sittin' around doin' nothing!

SHEARWOOD  
 You do as you're told and you'll be a  
 lance-jack one day.

WHITE and KANAKAS head off towards cookhouse. SHEARWOOD  
 watches them go, looks around briefly, goes into LOVATT's  
 hut.

INT. HUT - EVENING

LOVATT is trimming the wick on a slush lamp. He finishes  
 his job, lights it and it flickers feebly, not making much  
 impression on the twilight.

He turns to SHEARWOOD.

LOVATT  
 (crisply)  
 What's the matter, Alec? You look as  
 if you've lost a pound and found  
 sixpence!

SHEARWOOD  
 (shrugs)  
 It's no use saying one thing and  
 meaning another, boss. I thought that  
 was a crook turn you stacked on at  
 Kahila Two this afternoon, when you  
 went up Wilder. In front of the mob,  
 too.

LOVATT  
 Go on.

SHEARWOOD  
 He did a good job on the patrol. He  
 started out red-raw and made plenty of  
 blues. But he didn't mind being told,  
 and by Christ, he learned plenty from  
 what he saw. It wasn't his fault that  
 Pinkie went off, or that Malise was  
 wounded.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEARWOOD (CONT'D)

It's not the first time we've blued a show and it's not the first time we've lost a man.

(pauses)

I can't see why you went up Wilder at all. It's none of my business, even, but I just can't see why.

LOVATT

(dryly)

As you say, it's none of your business. And don't get hot under the collar.

LOVATT walks away and stares out into the gathering darkness. SHEARWOOD waits in silence.

Insects swirl around the flame and fry themselves to die on the lid of the tin holding the lamp.

NOISES of the camp seep into the hut.

LOVATT (CONT'D)

You know what a funny lot of blokes we've got, Alec. They'd stick up for any bastard at all if they thought some big bugger was standing over him. I wanted them to hear me go up Wilder, and by hell, I know what they were saying five minutes afterwards. "That bloody Lovatt, who the hell's he think he is?" Am I right?

SHEARWOOD

Well, yes.

LOVATT

You bet I am! They'll hate my guts for a while, but in a month they'll be eating out of Wilder's hand. They got guts to spare, Alec, but they've got no bloody brains.

LOVATT goes over to a box, takes out a whiskey bottle and starts to unscrew the top.

SHEARWOOD

That's all right. Makes Wilder look good, but it doesn't win any fucking popularity stakes for you.

LOVATT

I don't need popularity. They'll do what I say and like it. Respect's good enough for me, and trust. That's enough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOVATT pours whiskey into two enamel mugs and hands one to SHEARWOOD.

INT. HUT - EVENING

LOVATT holds the bottle up, shaking it and squinting at it through the wavering flame of the slush-lamp.

LOVATT

Toss her down, Alec. I think she'll stand another.

EXT. TRACK JUNCTION - EVENING

WALLACE slumps into the Bren pit beside HOWARD. He slides the Bren to the ground. As WALLACE talks he takes of his patrol gear. Webbing first.

WALLACE

Jesus, mate, you look crook. Still got the shits?

HOWARD

Gone, thank Christ.

WALLACE

What goes round comes round. I got the bastards now. Yesterday. Had to drop me strides back there a bit. (gestures back along the track) Gave the Bren to Albie to bring 'er in.

HOWARD

So that's why . . .

WALLACE

You didn't see me come in with the blokes, eh?

WALLACE unhooks grenades and places them in purpose-made holes in the Bren pit.

HOWARD

Fuck me . . . I thought you'd been . . .

WALLACE

Knocked off? You silly old bastard!

HOWARD

Well . . . we knew someone had . . . and Albie was carrying the Bren.

WALLACE

Not me, mate. My old man told me a thousand times I was born to hang!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Yeah - born to hang, you bastard!  
 (laughs, then looks at  
 Wallace)  
 How was the patrol?

WALLACE

Oh . . . you know. Bit 'a this, bit 'a  
 that.  
 (laughs)  
We won!

Behind them in the Bren pit, and towards the main track, a patrol of eight men is taking off down the track. WALLACE and HOWARD watch them for a moment.

HOWARD

How's the new bloke?

WALLACE

He'll do. Give's a burn, mate. I'm out of weed.

HOWARD

(laughs)  
 Jesus! Now I know you're back!

HOWARD takes out his tobacco tin and lighter from his hip pocket. He takes out two ready-rolled cigarettes. He puts both in his mouth, lights them, and hands one to Wallace.

Both sit for a moment in silence, smoking, watching the patrol on the track.

The tail-end disappears into some trees.

WALLACE blows a cloud of smoke after it.

END. FADE OUT.

(CONTINUED)