

2018 MASTER OF ARTS SCREEN:
CINEMATOGRAPHY REQUIRED TASK



Australian Government

Australian Film Television and Radio School

Wonder Inc, by Sarah-Jane McAllan

You may only use the *Wonder Inc* script, for the AFTRS' 2017 Master of Arts Screen:
Cinematography application task

Wonder Inc. (working title)

by

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Based on:

Chris Wormersley's "A Lovely and Terrible Thing"

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An wiry antiquated man sleeps fitfully. Channels of life experience are etched into his face. This is DANIEL. As he tosses and turns he lets out a whimper:

DANIEL
(muffled)
Emily!

Beside his bed rests an ornately framed portrait of a young girl, his daughter EMILY (12).

At the sound of a piercing alarm he sits bolt upright in his bed. This is a sad, lonely but stoic man. There is warmth in his eyes as he looks at his daughter's portrait.

He puts on his slippers, which are placed in careful alignment next to the bed. He smooths his pillow and tucks in his sheets and blankets, smoothing them over more times than is necessary, and then shuffles to the kitchen.

Daniel is now dressed for the day. His colourful pinstripe shirt and tattered suspenders are in keeping with the eclectic but painstakingly arranged paraphernalia that fills his home.

Timber shadow-boxes hang from the walls filled with antique memorabilia, interspersed with animated sepia photographs that come to life with the movement of old carnivalesque physical wonders. With a polishing rag and feather duster, he meticulously cleans, though barely any dust has settled since he last performed this routine.

He looks fondly over the images as he cleans: A contortionist bends over backwards, a long sword dangling above her throat. Someone poses, presenting their hand to the photographer, which has extra fingers. A woman bats her eyelids, her long hair wound innumerable times around her waist and down to the floor. Daniel, as a younger man, wears a sharp suit and shakes hands with a gentleman, DOUGAL SNR, who hands him a plaque. The focus changes to reveal a tear rolling down Daniel's face. He glances down to the plaque which hangs on his wall: LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT - IN RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN VERIFICATION.

With a newspaper and the mail tucked under his arm, Daniel sits down at the table (which is set for one) with his tea and toast.

Pinned all over the walls around the table are extremely old newspaper clippings, letters and photographs which have yellowed and crinkled with time. Emily's face appears alongside headings: "MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE" ... "MISSING, SINCE AUGUST OF LAST YEAR" ... "THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF EMILY'S DISAPPEARANCE".

Spreading out the Daily Notices, he scans them with his long bony finger. He doesn't find what he is searching for.

Opening the mail, finds an threatening letter. "PROPERTY TAXATION OVERDUE. THIS IS YOUR FINAL WARNING."

His shoulders weigh heavily and he sighs.

Moving to his desk, an enormous 'computer' which looks to us more like a steam punk typewriter, bursts to life as Daniel fires it up. At lightning pace it spits out his new messages on thick lined cards. Daniel jumps at the aggressive sound it makes, still not used to this confounded piece of machinery.

Amongst various report cards of verification assignments, are alarming messages: "LAST WEEK'S REPORT IS OVERDUE"... "YOUR VERIFICATIONS ARE AT AN ALL-TIME LOW"... "YOU ARE SUMMONED TO HQ IMMEDIATELY."

3

EXT. WONDER INC. HEADQUARTERS. DAY

3

The cavernous building entryway, set up like an expo in a convention centre, is filled with frantic activity.

Two Japanese sisters dressed in extreme Harojuku garb: electric orange, pinks and greens. They have pierced their eyelids, lips and ears with an unimaginable number of safety pins. They titter and bounce their faces up and down, the safety pins shuddering in time with their wiry pig-tails, as they viciously play a drum set and a percussion kit.

A young man who has had innumerable surgical procedures to transform himself into a real-life vampire, complete with bat wings, is interviewed by a number of rolling news cameras.

Against an enormous green screen, a large group of people from lewd teenage boys to middle-aged beer-bellied men, and even dogs on leashes and babies in arms, are dressed from head to toe in Santa suits. One boy wears fake white beards under his armpits in jest. Several young ladies wear dangerously short red mini-skirts edged with white fluff. On a flashy monitor, the Director looks at the shot, complete with a composited quaint town square background.

Bewildered, briefcase in hand, Daniel makes his way through the crowd until he reaches the door of the CEO's office.

4

INT. CEO'S OFFICE. DAY (CONTINUOUS)

4

DOUGAL sits in a large futuristic swivel chair behind his large corporate desk, marked with the nameplate of CEO. His arms are stretched out above his head. Over the desk hangs a framed portrait of his father, who we recognise, DOUGAL SNR.

Daniel sits opposite.

DANIEL

I was very sorry to hear about your father, he was a wonderful man.

DOUGAL

Yes he was. He certainly was.

Listen Mr Griffin my father is in fact, indirectly, the reason I've called you in. Things are going to be running a little differently from now on.

Profit margins are getting tighter and it's been a long while since you've brought anything back to the company. I know you've been working for us for, hell, how long has it been?

DANIEL

Fifty-six years this year.

A low whistle from Dougal.

DOUGAL

Isn't that something.

But, it's a dog eat dog world Daniel, and with all due respect, you haven't brought in any biscuits for the dogs in years.

It's a cold, hard fact that none of your obscure leads are going to help you find your daughter. She's gone. You've got to move with the times. We need spectacle at a high turnover.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL

Well sure now, I understand that of course, I'm a business man. But you can't rush the wonder. I've got a few leads this week and I was just heading out to verify one of them as a matter of fact.

DOUGAL

If this lead don't take you anywhere Mr Griffin I sure am sorry but I'm going to have to let you go. You call in and report as soon as you've got something.

DANIEL

(forlorn)

I'll do my best not to let the company down Dougal.

Daniel exits, and two young upstarts are revealed to be sitting with Dougal in his office. They snigger.

UPSTART 1

(imitating)

I've got a few leads this week!

5

EXT/INT. DANIEL'S CAR. DAY

5

Daniel walks, briefcase in hand, to his car. A vehicle as antiquated as he is. Patches of rust have been carefully tended to, though it creeps back through more quickly than he can keep up with.

Daniel adjusts the rim of a wobbly front headlight with careful precision.

As Daniel puts his briefcase in the car we catch a glimpse of the interior, an extension of the memorabilia that he keeps inside his home. A crate of jars filled with powders and tools. Sheaths of documents. The lining of the roof is covered in a collection of assorted stars from printed to hand-painted.

He pulls out one of his report cards and reads it again: "MY DAUGHTER HAS A PRETTY SPECIAL TRICK. MAYBE YOU SHOULD COME AND SEE HER. PUT HER IN YOUR BIG OLD BOOK."

Daniel starts the car and the engine splutters and chokes before finally coming to life. He sets off slowly down the road.

6

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DUSK

6

Daniel's car clacks along a country road, heading for the soft glow of a small farmhouse with smoke trailing from its roof.

Daniel watches the long sweeping grass shivering in the wind as he turns up the gravel drive.

The timber house has aged over time, weathered into sinister and dilapidated gloom.

7

EXT/INT. ANGOLA'S HOUSE. DUSK

7

Daniel treads carefully up the front stairs of the verandah which creak and groan, even under his slight build. The wind whistles around him and he pulls his jacket tight.

He knocks at the door.

It swings open slowly, partially revealing the heavy figure of ANGOLA, masked by shadows.

Daniel takes in the dark unshaven face and menacing glare. Tattoos creep down Angola's neck and disappear under his shirt. His dark overalls are crusted with grit and grease right down to his enormous dirty boots.

Daniel finds himself looking at the floor.

ANGOLA

(gruff)

Yes?

DANIEL

(blurts, startled:)

I'm Daniel Griffin from Wonder Inc.
I've come to verify your claim to fame.

Daniel holds out his business card and Angola inspects it.

DANIEL (CONT)

You must be Angola?

Angola nods.

DANIEL (CONT)

Angola, like the place, is it?

Angola stares at him.

(CONTINUED)

ANGOLA

You know it?

DANIEL

I'm sure I've heard of it.

After an uncertain pause Angola opens the door further and stands back so that Daniel can enter.

He makes his way down the hallway and Daniel follows, noticing the water damage present on the walls as Angola lets out a damp cough.

DANIEL (CONT)

I don't normally come such a long way on such little information, you see, but your message intrigued me.

Inside the sparse lounge room, on a rickety stand, the television blares obnoxiously with the ferocious canned laughter of a grotesque games show. Contestants dressed in bathing suits hurl slime at one another.

There is lounge set and a low table piled with television magazines and empty beer cans. A microwave television dinner is half-eaten and a roast chicken has been whittled down to a carcass.

Angola sits himself down on a sagging velveteen sofa and picks up his dinner. He motions to another seat.

Daniel sits, and pulls out his notebook. As he slowly unscrews the lid of his pen he asks:

DANIEL

So, Mr... Angola...

ANGOLA

If I decide to show you what my daughter can do, how do we come to some kind of... arrangement? About what happens next?

DANIEL

Well... there are of course very strict guidelines from the company which govern the types of...

ANGOLA

Your company *wants* what she *has*.

How much do they pay for her to go on the television?

(CONTINUED)

Daniel searches for the right words.

DANIEL

Well there are all sorts of avenues to explore these days... from articles in print volumes to platforms on, ah, multi, uh... multi-platformed devices.

And of course depending upon the age of... your daughter... what is your daughter's name?

ANGOLA

Emily.

Daniel flinches.

DANIEL

... and what is it, exactly, that Emily can do?

Angola puts down his tray and his lips curl into an unsettling smirk.

He gets up and walks out of the room. Daniel is unsure whether to follow or not.

8 INT. HALLWAY. DUSK

8

Daniel follows Angola's brusque steps down the dim hallway to a closed door. On a hook on the front of the door hangs a set of two keys.

Angola takes the keys and unlocks the door, then nods towards it, indicating that Daniel may enter.

Fearful now, Daniel pauses and breathes deeply before he takes hold of the heavy doorknob, and turns.

9 INT. BEDROOM. DUSK

9

As he enters, Daniel steps slowly. Though the room is dirty and unkempt, he has become aware of the aura surrounding a delicate young girl: EMILY (12). She is identical to Daniel's missing daughter.

In marvelous contrast to her surrounds, Emily levitates gently, several feet above her bed. Her nightdress floats over her knees as she dangles mid-air.

(CONTINUED)

An iron belt is fastened about her waist and joined to a bolt in the floor by a length of chain.

She rests the book she has been reading in her lap as she looks up expectantly at the visitor.

Meeting Daniel's eye, she smiles sweetly at the unusual man, the likes of whom she has never seen before.

Daniel stares back at her. First in disbelief, and then with unmasked wonder.

He takes a step forward and holds up his hand towards her. She reaches out and her palm meets his.

Lost in a long moment, Daniel's eyes well with tears.

However, his face in the next moment is suddenly clouded with doubt. He pulls away.

Angola watches him greedily from the doorway.

Daniel turns to him.

DANIEL
Might I use your telephone?

11 EXT. VERANDAH. DUSK 11

Daniel and Angola stand at the front door.

DANIEL
It will all be up to the company of course, and a representative will be here first thing in the morning. No doubt she is in possession of a wonderful talent.

They shake hands, but Angola does not let go quickly. Daniel is aware of the dark grime under Angola's fingernails.

Angola watches Daniel hurry to his car.

12 EXT. CAR. NIGHT 12

Night has fallen.

Daniel's brow is furrowed, deep with worry as he drives along the road.

(CONTINUED)

He pulls the car to a stop just before a fork in the road ahead. Reaching into his coat he pulls out a pocketwatch, and opening it we see a photo of his young daughter.

He closes his eyes for a moment, but then his face strengthens with resolve, and he snaps the pocketwatch closed.

Turning the car around full circle, Daniel heads back towards the house.

13

EXT. ANGOLA'S HOUSE. NIGHT

13

Having left his car some way back, Daniel creeps softly through the dark, on foot, towards the back steps. The sound of the television blaring can be heard within.

In ever so slow motion, Daniel reaches for the handle of the back door. With his eyes closed and fear straining on his face, he tries to turn it.

It opens with a soft creak.

Daniel holds his breath.

When he is sure that no-one has been disturbed, he enters the house and edges along the hallway towards Emily's room. When he reaches it, he feels for the keyring.

When he unlocks the door, Emily is sitting up on her bed, waiting. She smiles nervously.

Daniel carefully tries the keys in the iron belt Emily wears, but to their dismay, neither key fits.

Emily's eyes widen with panic.

Daniel retrieves a tiny tool from his coat pocket, his screwdriver. He carefully unscrews the bolt on the belt, releasing her. Emily leads him to a tiny hole in her wall, through which Angola can be seen guzzling on beer, engrossed in the television. Daniel takes Emily's hand and they make their way towards the back door,

Once outside, they move more quickly, Daniel doing his best to keep up with Emily's pace.

As they break free from the edge of the property her feet begin to float above the ground. Daniel holds her down tightly.

(CONTINUED)

Suddenly in the background, the menacing silhouette of Angola can be seen making his way through the dark, something heavy in his arms.

They run, faster.

The sound of a gunshot.

Daniel stops, and then stumbles to the ground, clutching his chest and losing his grasp on Emily's hand.

They survey each other, one last time.

With tears streaming down his face, Emily strokes his cheek.

EMILY

Don't be scared.

Daniel watches as Emily floats above.

Higher and higher, where no-one can reach her.

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