

## **SCRATCH EXEGESIS by Albert Belz**

### **PART ONE.**

In this first part of the exegesis, it will first of all give a brief introduction to the history of Scratch and what inspired and influenced this screenplay, and briefly outlining core story. It will then go into deeper analysis of the piece, utilising screen guru, Blake Snyder's beat template from his book (Snyder, 2005) 'Save the Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting that You'll Ever Need' to discuss key writing elements within Scratch such as structure, theme and genre, while contrasting it with various other texts, finally reaching a conclusion as to what makes Scratch a unique screenplay.

The history of Scratch goes back to my youth where I had been deeply affected by a Disney movie 'Child of Glass' (1978). It was a story about a young boy who moved to a Louisiana Plantation where he encounters the ghost of a young girl who had been murdered many years ago by her pirate uncle. In the story the ghost of the girl is cursed and trapped to stay on the property until she is reunited with her porcelain doll. Though it was a Disney made-for-television movie is really scared me as a child. My sister and I would freak each other out as children by switching the light off in a room and calling out the name of the ghost from the movie.

So, this image of a spirit trapped in the world of the living because of some injustice (or 'sin' as later discussed) has stuck with me for a long time. In 2018 I wrote a play that was inspired by the true events surrounding Lost Children of Tuam tragedy in Ireland. The story titled 'Cradle Song'; was set at an old Irish-Catholic home for wayward mothers. A story about a young woman who was trying to decide whether she wanted to abort her child or not, it featured a ghost who wanted her child to be dug up with all the others and buried with her so that she might look after all the lost children of the town.

So, when considering a story to write about, the supernatural would be featuring in some way. At the time I was also having great personal struggles with my step-daughter and her son who I was raising. Unfortunately, our stubbornness and communication failures were causing our relationship as father and daughter to be strained. This also had a great influence on the type of story I wanted to tell.

So began the take of Kare, Marama and their difficult father/daughter relationship. As I continued to write beats and odd scenes for the outline, past injustices, or at least perceived past injustices and the outcome of these, came to be major themes that stuck around. Forgiveness too was a theme that continued to develop within the piece, and since I was keen on a happy ending – forgiveness was how I wanted to end the piece.

### **BEING MAORI AND 'GET OUT'**

As a Maori writer, just about all screen and stage plays that I write have very strong, often innate Maori themes. So, when it came the treatment of in particular the supernatural themes within the script, I asked myself, how might Maori approach this? The afterlife has never been anything to really be afraid of in the Maori world as speaking with ancestors and indeed to some extent ancestor worship, is a kind of regular thing.

The movie 'Get Out' (McKittrick, Blum, Hamm & Peele, 2017) had also recently been released. Within its blend of horror and thriller, its utilised themes of benevolent racism and

black exploitation, as Wilkinson (Wilkinson, 2017) states about the movie "...it's interested in showing how racist behaviour that tries to be aggressively unscary is just as horrifying, and in making us feel that horror, in a visceral, bodily way." Such use of allegory inspired me to further approach the spiritual concepts within *Scratch* from a political perspective. To show Judeo Christian suppression of Maori spirituality as another form of colonisation. Also, other political aspects such as racial profiling and the threat of Maori losing their children to a government agency coming to the fore thematically within the story.

### **A Dude with a Problem Versus a Monster in the House.**

As I progressed with the story-lining and scripting of *Scratch* I was also reading several books to do with Screenwriting. In particular, Hollywood screenwriting guru, Blake Snyder's (Snyder, 2005) – 'Save the Cat! The Last Book in Screenwriting that You'll Ever Need'

I wanted to hear the story in my own head to see if I liked it, to see if it would be a movie that I'd want to spend money on and view with my partner.

With this in mind I engineered several loglines, of which the best at that point was one that focussed on the supernatural elements of the piece surrounding the daughter, Marama, and her children. It read 'When a supernatural force threatens her children, a young mother must unite with her estranged father to awaken a long ignored and dormant secret. But can they reconcile their history before they tear each other apart?'

One of the issues I was struggling to overcome while writing and developing *Scratch* was figuring out what genre it fell under in able for me to be able to clarify exactly what story I was telling. I believed I was writing a slow burn horror/ thriller with characters that the audience would really care about. What Snyder (Snyder, 2005) refers to as a 'Monster in the House' or MITH screenplay. He defined it as having (Snyder, 2005) '...two working parts. A monster. A house. And when you add people to that house, desperate to kill the monster, you've got a movie type so primal it translates to everyone, everywhere.'

In his 2007 follow up book 'Save the Cat goes to the Movies' Snyder discusses a third element that makes up the MITH genre which he calls the 'sin'. Of MITH sin he states (Snyder, 2007) "...think about all those teen slasher movies in which 'Mike Myers' and Jason run riot. 'Have sex and die,' says Jamie Kennedy, who lays out the rules for *Scream* and speaks to why guilt in sin is important." Snyder goes further on to describe adult sin (Snyder, 2007) '...like putting career over family, as Ellen Burstyn does in *The Exorcist* and Naomi Watts in *The Ring*...' *Scratch* features adult sin where the protagonist, Kare, has put his own self-preservation over family when we first meet him. Another key element of sin that Snyder points out (Snyder, 2007) is that the protagonist must quickly realise what the sin is or risk losing everything.

When encouraged by his daughter and an elderly tohunga, Kare comes to realise what he did. And it's only when admitting this that he's able to take steps forward in defeating the monster.

Another reoccurring element found in the MITH genre is what Snyder (2007) refers to as 'The Half Man' (Snyder, 2007), 'This is a survivor who has run into the monster before – or has prior knowledge of the evil – and come away damaged because of it'. In *Scratch* this character would be Tohu who certainly has prior knowledge, although he has not come away damaged when we first meet him.

Scratch also, literally has a house and indeed has a monster in the form of the restless spirit. So, it seemed quite simple that as long as I hit all the points outlined in a Monster in the House style genre, then the approach to the first draft would be clear. So that was my goal, keep it simple and write a primal story that appealed to a commercial market. But as I continued with the first draft, elements of another genre that Snyder described as ‘Guy with a Problem’ began to creep into it. This I believe was because I was starting to also focus on the development of characters and themes as the story progressed. Snyder describes ‘Guy with a Problem’ as also containing two core ingredients (Snyder, 2005) ‘A dude, meaning the average guy or gal just like ourselves. And a problem: something that the average guy must dig deep inside themselves to conquer.’

Scratch certainly has a ‘dude’ in Kare who literally needs to dig deep within his psyche to tap back into a long-suppressed gift of speaking with the dead. The fact that the script seemed to straddle two of Snyder’s genre description certainly frustrated me, though the good news was that Snyder also described both as being the most primal stories that can be told. (Snyder, 2005) ‘Primal is good as he said – it appeals to everyone.’

Though accepting that it fitted more into the MITH genre, for the next draft I reworked the logline to begin with in order to focus more on Kare (the Dude with the problem) and give me a line to go back to if I were ever to stroll off in another direction story-wise. The log-line ended up looking thus: “On the verge of retirement a father is reunited with his estranged daughter and must reawaken a long suppressed supernatural gift in order to protect her children from a paranormal entity. But can they overcome their past in order to save their future?”

In this draft I did begin to focus even more on solidifying how the relationship worked between father and daughter, also stressing the importance of whanau (family) in the piece. Throughout writing the second draft I had beat points at the back of mind from Blake Snyder’s (2005) *Save the Cat* book as detailed below. When I finished, I literally applied Blake Snyder’s beat sheet to the finished product to see where it stood.

Snyder’s Beat Sheet (Snyder, 2005) is listed below with approximate page numbers of where each of the 15 beats should take place in the script.

1. Opening Image (1)
2. Theme Stated (5)
3. Set Up (1-10)
4. Catalyst (12)
5. Debate (12-25)
6. Break into Two (25)
7. B Story (30)
8. Fun and Games (30-55)
9. Mid-point (55)
10. Bad Guys Close In (55-75)
11. All is Lost (75-85)
12. Dark Night of the Soul (75-85)
13. Break into Three (85)
14. Finale (85-110)
15. Final Image (110)

### **Opening Image:**

Snyder (Snyder, 2005) describes the opening image simply as ‘The very first impression of what the movie is – its tone, its mood, the type of scope of the film’.

I had played around with several opening images that included a young Marama in flash-back 20 years ago where she’s six-years-old having a tea party with a ghost before her mother interrupted and called her back in. But I felt that as much as I liked the opening. It didn’t use the opportunity to introduce the scope of the film enough.

By the second draft I had stuck with the flashback element of the opening image, but included a Young Kare into the scene as he prays with Young Marama to rid herself of the ability to speak with the dead. I felt this was better as it established the history between father and daughter from the top.

### **Theme Stated:**

Snyder (Snyder, 2005) describes his ‘theme stated’ beat as, ‘...someone (usually not the main character) will pose a question, or make a statement (usually to the main character) that is the theme of the movie’. In Scratch this statement isn’t made until page 9 where Kare’s friend, Ihaia says ‘True bro, you got the whare, you got the friends - you just need the whanau.’ The importance of whanau is the main theme stated here. I think it’s also important to note that Ihaia also states Kare’s current position earlier on page 8, ‘Sometimes a man just gotta stop and listen to the world...Otherwise you just got a plate full o’crazy in front you.’ Eventually it’s revealed that Kare is not listening to the world around him.

In some ways Scratch shares a similar theme to MITH horror ‘The Ring’ (Parkes, MacDonald & Verbinski, 2002), about a haunted video-tape that curses the victim with only seven days to live once it is watched. Snyder (Snyder, 2007) describes the theme of The Ring as being about ‘...parental responsibilities. In looking at the importance of whanau, Kare and Marama are also faced with parental responsibilities. In Kare’s case the sin of turning his back on them as a young man.

I previously discussed Maori elements of spirituality as having a comfortable relationship to the afterlife and ancestor worship. Ancestors also literally come into play as a theme in Peele’s ‘Get Out’ which breaks the rules by introducing the theme in the opening credit roll, within the soundtrack. Roff (Roff, 2017) states “On the soundtrack, some eerie, disembodied voices chant the words, ‘Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga.’ These are Swahili words that roughly translate to ‘listen to (your) ancestors,’ as the song’s lyrics warn that ‘something bad will come. Run.” So, in Get Out’s case the theme is listen to the voices of your ancestors, don’t forget your history or bad things will happen.

Of Dude with a Problem genre film ‘Die Hard’ (Gordan, Silver & Tiernan, 1988), about a cop who must save his wife and her colleagues from international terrorists. Snyder (Snyder, 2007) simply states “‘Survival’ is our theme – and Bruce’s mission”. Scratch also shares elements of this survival theme. Especially once Kare and Marama re-enter the haunted villa to face off with the super-natural entity.

In the movie ‘Alien’ (Carroll, Giler, Hill, Scott), about an a chest-bursting Alien that terrorises the crew of a spaceship, Snyder (Snyder, 2007) describes the moment early in the film where the crew are having breakfast together as the point where the theme is stated when, “...Parker

(Yaphet Kotto) turns to Kane (John Hurt) and says ‘Anybody ever tell you, you look dead?’ The theme in this case being - What is it to be alive – and human?’

### **Set Up:**

Snyder (Snyder, 2005) describes the first ten pages of a script or at most the first dozen pages to be the set-up. Snyder goes on to list several important elements of the set up. All characters in the story are introduced or hinted at, all character behaviours that need to be set up are done so, ‘...and show why and how the character must change in order to win’.

By the end of page 12 of *Scratch* these elements have been set up. The toxic masculinity that is part of Kare’s world, the fact that he’s suppressed the voices of the dead in he and his daughter and that he’s looking forward to his recent retirement. Marama and the kids are introduced on page 12.

### **Catalyst:**

Snyder describes that catalyst moment as (Snyder, 2005), ‘In the set up you, the screenwriter, have told us what the world is like, and now in the catalyst moment you knock it all down. Boom!’ This is the moment that Syd Field (Field, 2005) describes as the inciting incident, ‘(1) It sets the story in motion; and (2) it grabs the attention of the reader and audience’.

In *Scratch* this moment comes at the bottom of page 15 where Kare decides that he’ll let Marama and the kids stay with him and in doing so confronts her ex-boyfriend, Eru; blocking him from hitting Tawhai.

### **Debate:**

Snyder describes the debate as (Snyder, 2005), ‘The debate is just that, a debate. It’s the last chance for the hero to say: This is crazy. And we need him or her to realize that. Should I stay? Should I go?...but what’s my choice? Stay here?’

From page 12-28 in *Scratch*, Marama and Kare argue about whether she can stay or not. By page 25 Kare insists she get out of his house and out of his life. But by page 27 he’s reminded how dangerous it really is for her and the kids out there after his car is torched by Eru, and he changes his mind. The debate is over – they stay. In the early draft of this, the debate was less clear due to Kare being less defined as a character.

### **Break Into Two:**

Snyder describes the Break Into Two beat as (Snyder, 2005), ‘...the moment where we leave the old world, the thesis statement, behind and proceed into a world that is the upside down version of that, its antithesis’. Act Two.

In *Scratch* this comes on page 29. Kare returns to reno and begins making the place safer for Marama and the kids. He clears out the fire hazards from beneath the house (inadvertently bringing the Gramophone into the villa) and starts setting up a security system. Marama too begins looking for a job. Hints at the haunting become more prevalent.

In ‘*Alien*’ (Carroll, Giler, Hill, Scott, 1978), Snyder describes the Break Into Two point as (Snyder, 2007) ‘When the crew disembarks to venture onto the weird world...By the time John (Kane) is allowed back onboard...we’ve entered Act Two’ In Kane bringing the *Alien* inside

(which is now seeded in him), this bears some semblance to Kare bringing the Gramophone inside.

In ‘The Ring’ (Parkes, MacDonald, Verbinsky, 2002) the Break in Two moment comes when Naomi Watts’ character watches the videotape that everyone is talking about. As Snyder states (Snyder, 2007), ‘Naomi has officially entered the Dark World. She has exactly seven days to live.’ No such timeline is given in Scratch. The rising tension instead comes from the threat that Ripeka poses to the children.

In ‘The Conjuring’ (DeRosa-Grund, Safran, Cowan, Wan, 2013) about a husband and wife team who help people exorcise spirits from their lives, the Break in Two moment comes when the haunting is signalled to the character Carolyn. She’s playing a game of hide and seek with her daughter (Roff, 2019) “She tries to find April in an old wardrobe that came with the house ‘I can hear you breathing.’ But it’s not April. Things are amiss. Enter the upside-down world. Carolyn will have to act.”

### **B Story:**

Snyder describes the B Story beat as (Snyder, 2005), “...the B story of most screenplays is ‘the love story’. It is also the story that carries the theme of the movie”.

In Scratch, the B-Story begins at page 34 where Marama meets Tohu. Tohu is the one who is able to encourage both she and Kare to open themselves back up to listening to the the voices of the dead and even to being able to properly start healing and confronting mistakes of the past.

### **Fun and Games:**

Snyder describes the Fun and Games beat as (Snyder, 2005), ‘...the part of the screenplay that...provides: The promise of the premise. It is the core and essence of the movie poster. It is where most of the trailer moments of the movie are found. And it’s where we aren’t as concerned with the forward progress of the story.’

In the Scratch script this starts at page 33 where the fun and games regarding the haunting and the story of the restless and angry ghost begins and continues. Also, where Marama encounters and starts engaging with Tohu. Tohu questions why she no longer speaks with the dead, a long-suppressed memory for Marama. This eventually leads the story to the midpoint at page 64 a total of nine pages later than Snyder suggests. In the first draft this happened even later as I was enjoying the fun and games too much and really focussed on the hauntings.

### **Midpoint:**

Snyder describes the Midpoint beat as (Snyder, 2005), ‘It’s the point where the fun and games are over. It’s back to the story!’ Previous to that he states (2005, p82) that, “...a movies midpoint is either an ‘up’ where the movie seemingly peaks (though it is a false peak) or ‘down’ when the world collapses all around the hero...”

As previously stated, in the case of Scratch, the midpoint happens at page 64. This is the moment that Marama has had enough of the haunting and her father’s stubbornness. She walks out of the house and takes the kids with her. At this point Kare has failed to maintain his whanau.

### **Bad Guys Close In:**

Snyder describes the Bad Guys as (Snyder, 2005), ‘...people, a phenomenon or a thing.’ He further describes the beat as ‘...the point where the bad guys regroup and send in the heavy artillery. It’s the point where internal dissent, doubt and jealousy begin to disintegrate the heroes’ team.’

At Midpoint in *Snatch*, the story is at a low, Marama has walked out on her father and taken the kids. But still things get worse for both of them between pages 65-90 as Marama can’t find alternative affordable accommodation, Tohu is really starting to challenge her regarding her ability to speak with the dead – and eventually Ripeka’s restlessness starts to peak to the point that she manipulates Tawhai to place Katarina in a bath of scalding water. Finally, the children’s authority turns up, and the shadow of losing the children to a government agency becomes all too real - all feels lost.

### **All is Lost:**

At page 90 in *Scratch* the All is Lost beat occurs. Snyder describes this as being (Snyder, 2005), “...the opposite of the midpoint in terms of ‘up’ or ‘down’. It’s also the point of the script most often labelled ‘false defeat’, for even though all looks black, it’s just temporary...All aspects of the hero’s life are in shambles. Wreckage abounds. No hope.”

In the opposite to the down point where Marama had walked out on him, she returns to Kare’s life to almost witness the Children’s Authority taking her children. Luckily Liz enters for the save. But still the relationship between father and daughter is a shambles and Ripeka has let them know just how serious she is about hurting the children.

Snyder also mentions a trick of the trade (Snyder, 2005) called The ‘Whiff of Death’ which he describes, ‘At the all is lost moment, stick in something, anything that involves death. Whether it’s integral to the story or just something symbolic, hint at something dead here.’ I only realised the opportunity for this when writing the second draft. So, at the end of the scene with the Children’s Authority a skink that had been in the bathroom, floats outside on the scalding hot water that snakes out of the bathroom.

In ‘*Alien*’ (Carroll, Giler, Hill, Scott, 1979) the All is Lost moment comes when Sigourney Weaver’s character learns that the company she works for knew the Alien was a killer but sent the crew of the spaceship to go and retrieve it anyway. Once the Alien had burst out of Hurt’s chest, the whiff of death became a constant but is furthered in this All is Lost moment when (Snyder 2007, pg.9) ‘Sigourney also learns that (her crew mate) Ian is a robot’, a struggle ensues where Ian is killed but before he dies tells Sigourney that she won’t survive. Ian is The Half Man in this *Monster in the House* tale.

In ‘*The Ring*’ (Parkes, Mac Donald, Verbinski, 2002), Naomi Watt’s character confronts a member of the family who raised the girl (the entity). The girl’s father in this case has survived physically but is mentally harmed by the experience of his daughter. He is the Half Man. The All is Lost moment comes where he (Snyder, 2007 pg.21) ‘realises the curse won’t end and kills himself by electrocution in the bath’. Again, here the audience experiences the whiff of death moment as well.

### **Dark Night of the Soul:**

Snyder describes the Dark Night of the Soul beat as (Snyder, 2005) ‘...the darkness before the dawn. It is the point just before the hero reaches way, deep down and pulls out that last, best idea that will save himself and everyone around him. But at the moment, that idea is nowhere in sight.’

In Scratch this beat happens between page 90-99. Kare, Marama, Tohu and Liz all regroup, gathering and comparing information they have on the entity within the house. Another attack from Ripeka at Liz’s house ups the stakes, but Kare and Marama realise they may have the have the solution.

### **Break Into Three:**

Snyder describes the Break into Three beat as discovering the solution (Snyder, 2005) ‘An idea to solve the story has emerged. The world of synthesis is at hand.’

In Scratch this happens at page 99. Kare and Marama believe they have the solution to deal with Ripeka by returning her dead child’s blanket. At page 100 they have also come to an understanding regarding their history, and both opened themselves up to listen to the voices of the dead again.

### **Finale:**

Snyder describes the finale as (Snyder, 2005) ‘...where we wrap it up. It’s where the lessons learned are applied...It’s the turning over of the old world and a creation of a new world order – all thanks to the hero, who leads the way based on what he experienced in the upside down, antithetical world of Act Two’.

By the finale Kare and Marama have combined their abilities to be able to communicate with the dead. Wherein they’re able to realise that all Ripeka wants is to be buried with her child. With the whanau he had created in his military friends and the whanau he has regained in Marama and her children; they are able to do as Ripeka wishes and bring a balance and new world order to all their lives. Ripeka is able to rest and Tawhai now has two people in his life who can understand his gift of speaking with the dead, and be the mentors that they were never able to have.

### **Final Image:**

Snyder states that the final image should be (Snyder, 2005) ‘...proof that change has occurred and it’s real’. In the final image of Scratch that occurs on page 114. Marama places a photo of the happy whanau comfortable in each other’s presence and glad to be together. It’s a photo that was taken in the previous scene where all were celebrating what they had achieved together.

### **Conclusion:**

Utilising Blake Snyder’s ‘Save the Cat!’ beat-sheet method I have discussed elements key elements of the piece and outlined core story and character while contrasting it to various other texts of the same genre or similar tone. We can see that it has similarities with several films of its genre but I also believe are able to see that what makes it different is it’s (for lack of a better word) ‘Maori-ness’. It’s meditation on Maori attitudes towards death and whakapapa and very

Maori fear of losing one's children to government (pakeha) institutions. The importance of whanau wins at the end of the day, because ultimately to many Maori, whakapapa and whanau is everything.

## PART TWO

Part one has already covered many aspects of my intentions, experiments, conclusions, and the decisions I made, in constructing the dramatic narrative in my thesis (script). But following is a more in-depth look at the world and themes of 'Scratch', also including a more in-depth synopsis.

### **SYNOPSIS:**

For years Kare has denied a gift that is passed down through generations of his whanau to the eldest child. The ability to hear and communicate with the dead. He has used a mixture of prayer along with the regimented life and dogmatic thinking of a military man to suppress this 'gift' for most of his adult life. Now that he's returned from military service and recently retired, he's looking forward to beginning the renovations on his turn-of-the-century rural villa with the help of his old army buddies. Except that his adult daughter Marama turns up with her two children Tawhai (6yrs) and Marama (1yr). Marama's has left her old gang life behind in order to get her kids out of it and go clean. Like her father, she too has suppressed the voices of the dead. Though her method was to drown her senses in narcotics as a teenager.

Despite initially not wanting to get mixed up in the drama of his daughters' life Kare eventually concedes to the idea of her and her kids staying with him, especially when he sees how afraid Tawhai is of his gang father. As the estranged father and daughter struggle to make the living conditions as smooth as possible between them, they are tested from both within and outside the whare.

Strange events begin to occur within the old villa. Time seems to stop even on digital watches and phones, while Tawhai's begins to behave strangely and an old gramophone switches on by itself but is constantly stuck in a loop. Meanwhile Marama's ex-boyfriend threatens to steal her kids off her.

Still, Marama is able to move forward in cleaning herself up. Kare gives Marama's ex a first-hand example of how badly things will end for him if he continues to threaten his daughter and grand-kids while Marama manages to get a job working in a nearby old folks home. Despite this, things continue to intensify with the paranormal activity within the house. It's clear that a spirit has attached itself to Tawhai and is manipulating him to hurt his sister.

Eventually, with the help of their neighbour and an elderly tohunga that Marama meets at the retirement village; father and daughter come to terms with the idea of opening themselves again to the voices of the dead. But they have both disregarded this ability for so long that they really need to augment their 'gift' together to be able to communicate with the dead as they did before they suppressed it.

After a major paranormal event where they spirit attacked her children, Marama and her father re-enter the old villa to communicate with the kehua (ghost). They discover that the spirit of a young wet-nurse haunts the place. She wants to be buried next to her child who rests in a grave out the back of the house.

With everyone's help, they are able to find the remains of the wet-nurse and bury her with her child. The haunting comes to an end. So too do Kare and Marama begin to heal as they both accept to open themselves to the world around themselves and also to empathise with each other.

## **WORLD**

Scratch takes place in a Covid-19 free present-day Aotearoa. The main location is a rural New Zealand on the outskirts of a small city such as Palmerston North, Hamilton or Wanganui. There's a history to the location and land that effects the events.

It's a world where the dead have a voice and there are those who are special amongst us who can speak to them. These people are linked to whakapapa (genealogy) that has been able to talk to the dead for generations. However, since being well-colonised to see the idea of speaking to the dead as something dark and dangerous, both main characters have chosen to suppress this gift, each on their own way. In shutting themselves off from this world and from each other, they lose a core part of themselves and indeed become aliens in their own world. Not until she recognises that her son too is able to communicate with the dead, does Marama accept to open up and even begins to forgive her father regarding feelings of abandonment as a child.

In opening themselves to re-connect with the voices of the dead and indeed their own past are they able to remove themselves from the loop of pain that exists in their lives and genuinely begin to heal.

## **THEMES**

As mentioned in part one of this exegesis - at its surface, Scratch is what writing guru Blake Snyder might have described as "Monster in the House" genre. The angry spirit of a ghost haunts a whanau who have moved into the house. The haunting causes further tears to appear in the already very strained relationship of a father and daughter. But ultimately love wins at the end of the day when they open themselves to their long-suppressed ability to communicate with the dead and discover the truth behind the haunting. Order is restored when they fulfil the wishes of the misunderstood spirit to be buried next to her own child.

Scratch was inspired in part from my own life in regards to the relationship I personally have with my step-daughter and my grand-son. Of course, there are many fictitious elements thrown into the Scratch mix, but at its core is a love between father and daughter which is often tested by their own stubbornness and lack of taking a moment to stop, breath and listen to the world around them.

### **Toxic Masculinity**

There are also much deeper elements that I wanted to touch upon with scratch regarding toxic masculinity, race and society in New Zealand. I wanted the story to capture elements of all of these without having them jammed down the audience throat per say. Kare is a warrior, in that he has fought with special forces (S.A.S) in Iraq. He's tight with his unit and now that he's returned, he's searching for peace. But in his search, he must come to terms with his relationship with his daughter. In doing so he's faced with her boyfriend Eru. A man who in many ways might mirror Kare. In the same way that Eru is in a gang, Kare too was in a gang (the New Zealand Army). Both share places of empowerment within that gang as leaders, since Kare was a Sergeant, his mates who he served with in Iraq still call him Sarge. Like Eru, Kare never backs away from a fight, will always speak his mind without thinking consequences or hurt to those around him, and is firm in his own righteousness and perceived entitlements as a

male. These are the same entitlements that shut out the guilt of taking part in morally ambiguous wars in other people's lands.

It's only when faced with this mirror of himself does he start to question his own decision-making and what he's modelling to his grandson.

### **Colonisation & Spiritual Suppression**

I also wanted the piece to touch upon colonisation and spiritual suppression. These themes made up of Kare's backstory which is revealed near the end. His father being a preacher in a colonising faith that suppresses the voices of those who have past, through prayer and the word of God. In suppressing such voices, he is also suppressing a big part of his cultural identity, turning his back on, and shutting out the voices of his tupuna. In fact, the more distance he made from his whenua (land) to fight in morally ambiguous wars overseas in lands that he cares little for; then, he discovered, the less chance of hearing those voices which the yoke of colonisation has made him fear from the moment he walked into his first Bible class.

Like colonisation the suppression cycle continues through to the next generation to his daughter Marama. With her father's failure to prepare her for what was to come when she heard the voices, Marama turned to drugs and other colonising 'evils' such as alcohol to suppress the voices. Her lack of identity causing her undervalue her existence as a Maori and open herself to gang culture and the likes.

### **Racial Profiling and the Threat of Losing Maori Children to a Government Agency**

Both Marama and Kare find themselves on the wrong end of racial profiling within the story. When Marama takes her child to the doctors, the doctor overreacts upon seeing the bruising and scratches. Marama can hardly say what she really thinks is causing the injuries for fear of really been seeing as insane and immediately raising suspicions within authorities. Instead, angry and frustrated, she exits the clinic.

With words from the local kohanga and doctors regarding Katarina's bruising, the 'Children's Authority' send some women around to investigate. When the women see Kare and his predicament, they too make an on-the-spot call that includes a good dose of racial profiling. With the underlying threat of losing the children to a government agency. When he orders them off his land, they are about to call the police and wait in the car for them to turn up. Except that Kare's pakeha mate is able to placate them and get the women to back down. Kare half jokes that he wishes he had somebody like Liz to join him should he ever need a bank-loan, another area where Maori often find themselves getting profiled.

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