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**The Dystopian Hunger
&
Other Games**

Exegesis and Accompanying Screenplay

2016

School of Language and Culture

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A thesis/exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

ABSTRACT

The Dystopian Hunger & Other Games is an exegesis that takes an auto-ethnographical approach to my creative work, *Mindless*. My exegesis investigates the expectations of its contemporary audience in films of the same genre. It also explores the differences and similarities between my screenplay and these films by analysing their themes, genre conventions, character arc and function of the antagonist.

Mindless is an action/adventure/sci-fi film that follows seventeen-year-old Ali in a dystopian world. It is the war on terror though the war finished long ago and Katherine and the corporations in the city continue to feign the war to control society. Civilians do not realise their fear is feeding the city's financial gain by purchasing its security and surveillance systems. The Academy trains Elite Fighters to continue this facade, but even the Elite Fighters do not realise what they are a part of.

Ali finds herself in The Academy dealing with a loss of identity after finding out she is adopted. In her bitterness and anger, she becomes everything that The Academy is looking for: fearless, strong, physically fit and a quick problem-solver. However, the more Ali places her identity in The Academy and other people, the more she loses who she is and her purpose.

Katherine is desperate to open The Academy's secret weapon, the Dome. Once opened, The Academy will have the ability to take out fear and trauma in their Elite Fighters to make them stronger and indestructible. They will also be able to put fear into civilians so that they will be trapped in an endless cycle of fear and prevent ideas of revolution. However, the only person who can open the Dome is Ali. After many physical and emotional setbacks, Ali must face the demons of her past, overcome her fears and fight the real enemy of this world, Katherine and The Academy. Ali needs to learn that to be truly free, she must face the truth.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Esmée Myers

February 20th 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would sincerely like to acknowledge and thank the following people who assisted her with this work. Thank you to my AUT primary supervisor Andrew Bancroft for his continual support, guidance, eye for detail and constantly challenging me to improve with every draft. To my AUT secondary supervisor Paul Mountfort for his help to translate my writing into an academic format. To the biggest supporters of my story and concept: Eleanor Cooke, Courtenay Hollingswoth and Sherilyn Kennedy. And finally, to my fellow AUT Masters of Creative Writing (Screenwriting) class, thank you for the fun, laughter and good, good food and wine shared together.

Exegesis: *The Dystopian Hunger & Other Games*

INTRODUCTION

This exegesis provides critical and self-reflective frames through which my screenplay, *Mindless*, and the script development process explore. The research provocation underlying my screenplay is to produce a script that can meet and fulfil the expectations of an action/adventure/sci-fi contemporary audience, while being different to other films in the same genre in the following four ways: themes, genre conventions, character arc and function of the antagonist.

A. A BRIEF HISTORY OF GENRE AND ITS KEY SIGNIFIERS

Before I explore how my screenplay works to achieve these expectations, I will first give a short summary of the history of each genre and what their key signifiers are.

The earliest action/adventure films date back to the 1920's, featuring silent films, *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *Robin Hood* (1922) and *The Three Musketeers* (1923) (Selbo 2015, p.233). As the years progressed, sound was introduced and the genre grew in popularity in America, deriving from adventure-based novels such as, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) (Selbo 2015, p.233). The action/adventure genre has developed rapidly over the last century drawing from different components found in other genres including; western, war, romance, fantasy and science fiction. By doing this, the genre has been able to extend its reach and stay relevant to its audience.

It has been argued that science-fiction (sci-fi) fiction writing arose between the 17th and early 19th century after the scientific revolution with major discoveries in astronomy, physics and mathematics, though there is no precise date for when it came in to existence (Scholes 1977 p.3). *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) graced our screens during the silent film era, and was the earliest sci-fi movie. It was inspired by Jules Verne's sci-fi/adventure novel, *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), prompting many more of Verne's novels to be

adapted into silent films thereafter (Selbo 2015, p.158). During the 1930's to 1940's, sci-fi films did not gain audience popularity due to the repercussions of the Great Depression and limitations in technology at the time (Crafton, 1999). The technological limitations of the medium meant cinema could not express the screenwriter and director's imagination, as special effects had not sufficiently developed (Selbo 2015, p.160). A boom in sci-fi films took place in the 1950s, termed the Golden Age of Science Fiction. After World War II, two events triggered this; one event was the development of the atomic bomb causing anxiety around a potential apocalyptic effect of a nuclear war and the other event was the beginning of the Cold War with the widespread Communist paranoia in the United States (Hendershot 1999). War, nuclear warfare, terrorists and scientific breakthroughs were major influences on the science-fiction genre.

Identifying the key signifiers in the sci-fi genre can be challenging. This is because the sci-fi genre can come in different forms; space opera, hard sci-fi and soft sci-fi. Space opera is considered a fantasy/adventure in space. Hard sci-fi (a term created by sci-fi writer and critic P. Schuyler Miller) uses links to computer science, robotics, physics, astrophysics, chemistry and other technology (Selbo 2015, p.151). And soft sci-fi often looks at characters living in utopian or dystopian worlds. Julie Selbo describes soft sci-fi as: "social sci-fi." Soft sci-fi uses the sciences that explore society, personality and community. Soft sci-fi often looks at the social aspects of characters living utopian or dystopian worlds, with experiments in reactionary behaviour in controlled environments or characters dealing with the exigencies of societies led by powerful forces with sociological or political agendas. (Selbo 2015, p.151).

Action films, by contrast, have certain components the audiences expect to see. These include a large amount of physicality involved, such as, fighting, gunfights, chases, speeding vehicles and the battle against an enemy. A resourceful hero or heroine is featured taking on an adversary or opposition who creates difficulty for them and causes extraordinary life threatening circumstances. Their mental and physical capabilities are challenged as they chase 'the bad guys', run or fight for their lives. There will almost always be a victory that the protagonist can, however, only accomplish after an enormous amount of physical energy has been executed (Selbo 2015, p.229). In the adventure

genre, a hero or heroine will be characterized with bravery, risk taking tendencies and thrive in thrill-seeking situations. They will have a goal or objective to pursue, which in the beginning may seem hard for them to achieve. They will generally journey to pursue this goal and along the way face challenges that will stretch their physical skills and inner character. In *Film Genre for the Screenwriter* (2015), Julie Selbo also adds:

Adventure films include stories of expeditions that set out to search for lost continents, secrets of the jungle or desert, quests for lost artefacts or persons. Many adventure films are set in a historical period, and may include adapted stories of historical or literary adventure heroes such as Robin Hood, Tarzan, the Knights of the Round Table, Peter Pan, the pirate Jean Lafitte and more. (p.249)

According to scriptlab.com, a major site for discussion of contemporary film genres, adventures films are characterized as ‘[...] generally taking place in exotic locations and play on historical myths. Adventure films incorporate suspenseful puzzles and intricate obstacles that the protagonist must overcome in order to achieve the end goal.’

To summarise, action films focus on the large-scale violence and the energy it takes to defeat something or someone. Adventure films will focus on the journey and choices of the hero/heroine. And in sci-fi, the focus is on the type of world the protagonist is in, the use of futuristic technology they encounter and what social, health or political issues they face. In my research, I will be looking at what a contemporary audience of these combined genres is attracted to today for the market audience.

THE CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCE

Over the last decade there seems to be a new take on these genres with a direct targeting of a Young Adult (YA) audience, with an emphasis on setting the story in a dystopian world. The majority of these YA movies are derived from novels such as, *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Divergent* (2011), and *The Maze Runner* (2009). But why has this genre become hugely popular to the YA audience? In an interview with TIME magazine, actor Theo James, who plays the love interest Four in *Divergent*, suggests:

You grow up in a world where it's part of the conversation all the time - the statistics of the planet warming up. The environment changing. The weather is different. There are things that are visceral and very obvious, and they make you question the future and how we will survive. It's so much a part of everyday life that young people inevitably - consciously or not - are questioning their futures and how the earth will be.

James suggests that YA audiences are influenced by what they have been exposed to in society. So what else are YA audiences looking for in these stories? Sarah Gibson's article from moviepilot.com "*Why are we so Obsessed with YA Dystopias?*" narrows down five qualities: the 'no one understands me' mentality, mistrust of authority, coming of age, hope, and escaping from the mundane. The 'no one understands me' mentality is a representation of our journey in the sometimes difficult years of teenage-hood. The YA audience gravitates towards a protagonist who is going through similar circumstances they are. Gibson goes on to say that '[throughout] works of YA dystopian fiction, one constant is the 'no one understands me' mentality, in which an outcast protagonist is a minority, struggling to fit into subcultures created in this setting, feeling isolated, trapped and ostracised [...]'

The mistrust of authority is another aspect that YA audiences are attracted to. Russia Today, a Russian Internet and television news network, reports that in 2013, a poll showed 73% of Americans distrust the decisions made by their government. The portrayal of authoritative figures in YA dystopian movies normally shows them as taking advantage of their authority and mistreating the impoverished people. YA audiences are looking for a protagonist who will stand up and fight for justice, to be a role model of change, courage and also be the voice to the voiceless.

Another aspect YA audiences are drawn to in these genres is the 'coming of age' aspect. A YA audience typically looks for a protagonist who they can identify with and who might be going through circumstances they can relate to, for example, physical and emotional changes, independence and making right decisions. The quality of hope usually resonates with a YA audience; hoping things will get better with time, the hope of knowing who you are and your purpose, and the hope that it is possible no matter who you are, to achieve great things. Even though these films are set in corrupted worlds, our

protagonist will go on a journey to discover who they are, where they belong, and make a difference in their world.

Lastly, one further aspect this audience is looking for is to escape from the mundane, leaving the ordinary world and entering into the new world. There is a moment, usually in the Act 1 turning point, where the protagonist is thrust into a new world. This new world can be a reflection for a YA audience of when they first went to high school, or university, or the start of a new job. These milestone moments help a YA audience identify and learn from how the protagonist deals with them in their new world. Gibson describes the escape from the mundane as:

[...] the (generally hesitant) protagonist, and the teenager is thrown into the unknown - far, far away from the stability of their previous life - setting foot in new worlds of jeopardy and risk, and beginning the inevitable journey that will change their lives. The stakes are high, and everything is at risk for our central character - pretty distant from the mundane existence of normal life.

During the progress of writing my screenplay, I studied and analysed many films. The films that best relate to my research are *Divergent* (2014), *The Hunger Games* (2011) and *The Maze Runner* (2014). These films meet and fulfil the expectations of a contemporary audience, and I will also discuss how my screenplay, *Mindless*, seeks to meet and fulfil similar audience expectations and how it nonetheless differs in certain respects from them.

FEATURES OF YOUNG ADULT MOVIES

To understand how my screenplay suits its target audience, I began to investigate movies that met the expectations of the action/adventure/sci-fi YA audience. I then pinpointed the commonalities between each of them and analysed how these films differ to my screenplay. I focus on their themes, genre conventions, character arc and the function of the antagonist.

Themes

The themes that are popular with a YA audience are normally situations which they are currently experiencing in their day-to-day lives. Whether it's making independent decisions and learning to be responsible for themselves, to facing their fears or fighting for the truth. These are important themes to include as it helps the YA audience learn and reflect on how to make decisions and be inspired to face and overcome their fears.

In my screenplay *Mindless*, I attempt to meet and fulfil the YA audience's expectations by exploring the themes independence versus dependence, bravery versus fear, and truth versus lies. After finding out she is adopted, Ali makes an independent decision to pursue what she has always wanted to do, join The Academy to become an Elite Fighter. Ali believes that once she is at The Academy, she will finally find where she belongs and her purpose. Throughout the course of the story, Ali has a fear of water and does not understand why. Anytime she is near water, strange flashbacks occur. Ali makes a desperate effort to appear brave and be the best Elite Fighter the Academy could ever want while trying to avoid facing her fear and pretending it does not exist. Ali finally discovers the truth that the side she is fighting with, is the side that is causing all the corruption. She learns that there is no such thing as the Rebels and that the 'war on terror' had been won years ago. In the end, Ali has to face her fear of water (the trauma of her drowning), move on from the past of her birth parents dying, and to forgive her adoptive father (Gareth) for his actions. Ali must learn that without facing the truth, there can be no freedom.

The movie *Divergent* (2014) meets and fulfils various aspects of its contemporary audience with similar themes. The protagonist Tris has to leave her family and become independent by deciding which faction she will spend the rest of her life in (and her purpose). She must also battle and overcome her fears so that she can qualify as a Dauntless member, and finally, she must expose the lies the antagonist has created to protect her community from a mass murder.

One of the elements that make my screenplay different from the other films is its plot. Gareth's betrayal by not telling Ali she is adopted is the trigger for her independence, her

resolve to make decisions for herself. Because she avoids and runs away from her feelings, Ali is not able to overcome her fear of water until she learns the truth of why she was adopted and the importance of making sure the Dome is placed into the right hands.

Genre Conventions

It's vital for a YA audience, in terms of identifying with a protagonist, to experience the conventions they expect as it enables them to live through her exciting journey. It helps them 'escape from the mundane' as Gibson phrases it, and to step into an electrifying world where they can experience new technology and societies. As well as thinking about the future, it is also important to keep it current, especially when it comes to things that might cause anxiety in the YA audience; for example, fears of terrorism. From watching these types of films, a YA audience wants to know if there is any hope in their world and how they might overcome and defeat this kind of terror. These films are not only exciting for the YA audience but can also be educational and inspiring.

Mindless portrays the action conventions of Ali as a resourceful heroine who struggles at getting into The Academy and completing the physical and emotional challenges that test her body and mind. She also takes on life-threatening threats such as the terrorist group the 'Rebels,' The Academy, and Katherine. Katherine is the main antagonist who is in charge of The Academy and is running for President. Victory for Ali will only happen once she accepts the truth and defeats the real evil in this world. The adventure conventions my screenplay explores sees Ali having to solve the various challenges and puzzles throughout the story. She also has to unlock the Dome at the end, a treasure that, if put into the wrong hands, can cause all sorts of damage. The sci-fi conventions used see the story set in a dystopian world, futuristic technology and a society controlled by powerful forces used for political gain. It also uses the sci-fi conventions of keeping the content in line with the current affairs, especially highlighting the ongoing 'war on terror.'

These conventions are also evident in the film franchise of *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015) series. The films are set in a dystopian world, where the protagonist Katniss has to

fight to survive the hunger games. In fact, she must save not only herself but her sister and the entire Districts. The action conventions used in this film range from physical feats, battles, fistfights/fights, blatant invasion and man-against-man/machine/world situations. The adventure aspect is the arena of the hunger games where the world is set in a dangerous and exotic location. *The Hunger Games* would fall under the 'soft sci-fi' genre as it has futuristic technology elements and is set in an alternative world. The story's central focus is on the society and the dystopian world that is being controlled by powerful political forces. Gibson relates this dystopian world to a YA audience:

The dystopian worlds[...] echo the fraught landscape in a teenager's head, and act as both a mirror and a pressure valve, at a fraught time when reality is often stranger than fiction.

One of the differences my screenplay has compared to the other films is the sci-fi element and its relevance to specific current events, especially on the subject of the 'war on terror.' In this dystopian world, the streets are covered with cameras and surveillance throughout the City and the Regions, making sure the people are being protected from the Rebels. However, if the civilians knew the truth, they would learn that there's nothing to be afraid of and that Katherine and corporations have fabricated the Rebels. I was fascinated with the idea that we can sometimes create fear in our minds that does not necessarily exist. I explored this concept with Ali's fear of water and not being able to explain why she has it. Gareth took out all Ali's memories of the car crash she was in with her birth parents where their car crashed over a bridge and into the sea, but the fear of water has stayed with her. Once Ali learns the truth of this fear, it enables her to accept the past, move on from her fear and become empowered.

Function of an Antagonist

For a strong antagonist, Julie Selbo from her book *Film Genre for the Screenwriter* (2015) writes:

The protagonist and antagonist in a successful film in the action genre must be

well matched in determination and resourcefulness. The antagonist often lacks a sense of morality or humanity[...] (p.238)

The function of the antagonist is an important element to include in a YA genre film as it enables the YA audience to relate it to any authoritative figures they might have in their lives. These figures could be the government, police, teachers, parents, or guardians. It potentially helps them feel understood, especially if there is a mistrust of authority in their lives. Gibson articulates this point in her article:

We learn that so much of the poverty stems from the policies of the oppressive government, used to instil fear in and control the population - something which rebellious teens struggling with teachers, parents, and a seemingly overwhelming amount of rules and regulation can relate to.

The antagonist in my screenplay comes in various forms. From the beginning, the threat of the Rebels is increasing, and the 'war on terror' seems endless. Ali wants to make a change and defeat the Rebels, however, the Rebels are not even real. Katherine, The Academy and the big corporations are the real antagonists and the 'war on terror' ended years ago. Katherine and the corporations kept up the facade as they learnt that 'fear feeds financial gain.' If they opened the Dome, it would enable them to control society by either taking out fear or inputting it in people. They would take out the fear and trauma in their Elite Fighters to make them stronger and indestructible, and they would put fear into civilians to trap them in an endless cycle of fear and prevent ideas of revolution.

Katherine's motivations for opening up the Dome is not only for maintaining this facade of the Rebels but she also wants to erase her trauma and memories of what happened to her in the past. When there was a real war on terror, Katherine's daughter was killed in one of their attacks. Katherine blames herself for not being able to save her which caused bitterness and determination in her to create a better, controlled and safe society so that no more daughters will be lost.

In *The Maze Runner* (2014), the Maze itself acts as the antagonist for the majority of the film. Thomas and the boys have to overcome, defeat and unlock the Maze in hopes of

discovering who they are and what their purpose is in this world is. The Maze has physical power, is vastly complex and acts as a ‘ticking clock’ to destroy its opponents.

Another way I have made my story different from the other films was by creating a unique type of antagonist. I was fascinated by the idea of Ali placing her hopes in Katherine to be like a mother-figure to her, but that in fact she eventually has to face her and defeat her. I also wanted to make Katherine someone you weren’t sure whether to trust or not. I worked to achieve this by creating a detailed backstory for Katherine where her core motivation for wanting to control society was because of guilt of not protecting her daughter. This guilt humanised Katherine where her intentions for change are good, but her way of going about that change by controlling society isn’t.

Character Arc

Another expectation the YA audience has is to feel connected to the protagonist. This connection includes all the elements previously mentioned earlier - the ‘no one understands me’ mentality, coming of age, mistrust of authority, hope and escaping from the mundane. This connection helps them to see through the protagonist’s eyes and feel and experience what they might be going through. This perspective of the protagonist enables the YA audience to understand their personal flaws, trials, successes, change and their potential for growth in their lives.

In my screenplay, Ali goes on an emotional journey where she begins the film as slightly awkward, fearful and unsure of where she belongs. After finding out she is adopted and losing her sense of identity, Ali starts to locate her identity in The Academy, wanting to be the best fighter they have had. Never knowing her mother, Ali also seeks to find a mother figure in the antagonist Katherine. As Ali places more of her identity into The Academy, the more her relationship with her best friend Eva is strained.

Ali is on the road to self-destruction and cares about things she never used to before: image, money and fame. But this road comes to a halt as Ali’s past catches up with her. Ali, Katherine and Val come face to face with Eva (who has joined the ‘Rebels’) and

Gareth, who are trying to destroy the Dome. As Gareth refuses to open the Dome, Katherine turns on Ali and threatens to kill her if he does not tell her how to open it. Ali's world comes crashing down, now losing what she thought was a mother figure to her. Being the only one who can open the Dome, Ali must overcome the challenges in the Dome, learn the truth about what happened to her and move on from the past to overcome the real enemy, Katherine and the corporations.

After Katherine is defeated, and her lies are exposed, Ali forgives Gareth and reunites with her best friend, Eva. By the end, Ali is more confident, braver and living out her purpose. She also learns that there is more value and worth in relationships than in her image, security and money.

Out of the three films I analysed, Tris from *Divergent* (2014) is the one protagonist who has the strongest character arc. Thomas and Katniss have what is considered a 'flat character arc.' K.M. Weiland describes a flat character arc as protagonists who have "no personal inner change." Both Thomas and Katniss already begin the film as strong, competent heroes with little character change by the end of the story. Whereas Tris begins the film as weak, afraid and unsure of herself ending up stronger, braver and slightly more sure of herself and her purpose.

Compared to the other films, the majority of my story focuses on Ali's loss of identity and where she places her identity. After finding out she is adopted, Ali looks for other places to fill the gap of losing her father figure. Ali does this by putting her values in The Academy and changing the way she looks. Ali is desperate for approval from Katherine and Seb, and to be the best Elite Fighter they have had.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Guides to Scriptwriting

During the process of writing my screenplay I studied and researched many books on how to improve as a writer. Three books that were particularly helpful were Linda Seger's *Making a Good Script Great* (3rd Edition, 2010), Julie Selbo's *Screenplay:*

Building Story Through Character and Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat* (2005). These books helped to improve my understanding of conflict, character arc and story structure.

Seeger's chapter on conflict in *Making a Good Script Great* helped me to understand further what my script was missing during the various draft stages, especially when Seeger spoke of the six different types of conflict found in stories: inner, relational, social, situational, cosmic and 'us versus them' (p.187). This helped to create Ali's inner conflict of battling with her fear of water, believing in herself and learning to forgive. Ali's relational conflict is in resisting her feelings of jealousy, comparing herself to her best friend Eva, desiring to have a mother-figure through Katherine (antagonist), learning to forgive her surrogate father (Gareth) and accepting her feelings towards Val (the love interest). The 'Rebels' in my screenplay represent the social conflict. And in the 'us vs. them' conflict, Ali joins the Elite Fighters believing that she is joining the right side to take down the enemy.

Julie Selbo's point on conflict also helped me put things into perspective while writing:

Conflict is built up emotionally as well as physically. Conflict comes from facing antagonists and obstacles that seem insurmountable. The antagonist can be an overprotective mother or a sadistic killer; they can come in all shapes and sizes. Build your story's world with people who, for whatever reason, have opposite beliefs, morals, codes of ethics and, most importantly, different desires. (p.60)

When I struggled with not knowing where my story was going or how it should end, Selbo's book on 'character' informed me of what I needed to do to solve the problems I was consistently facing. She posed the question "Where do you want your protagonist to be emotionally at the end of the film?" (p.74). This question caused me to focus more on Ali's emotional journey and what I wanted her to be like (emotionally) at the end of the story. As I tried to work out the plot, relationships and events that would best serve what Ali was going through, I mapped out her emotional journey. This journey helped me understand what the story needed and to fill in some creative gaps that still needed to be solved.

Snyder's book, *Save the Cat* was a great tool that helped me make sure I was staying on

track with my story, structurally speaking. This tool is what he called 'The Blake Snyder Beat Sheet' (p.70). Though like with any tool or structure format when it comes to the writing, you do not always have to follow strictly to it. However, when I found myself lost or unsure of where to take the story, I often referred to Snyder's tool to help anchor myself back in the story and figure out what needed to happen next. "After coming up with the idea, and identifying the "who" in your movie - and who it's for - the structure is the single most important element in writing." (p.68 *Save the Cat*)

Drafts and Revisions

My story changed considerably from its first draft to its second. In my first draft, I initially wrote in the fantasy/adventure genre having the same characters but setting them in a mystical world. They also had mystical names - Ali was Calissa, Katherine was Kyrelle, Val was Valerian, and Gareth was Gyreld. In the first draft, Calissa was a hunter, trying to sneak into the Tyranians (the antagonist army) to be a part of the rich military club. She needed to go in hope that she will become rich and find a cure that would save her brother Jasper. As she joins the Tyranian army, Kyrelle soon discovers Calissa is of royal blood and that she would be able to help them open up the underground kingdom (Emberdeen) where they would have access to riches and a particular formula that would restore your health and your youth. Calissa was the only one who would be able to enter the underground kingdom because she was the only one who could unlock the Labyrinth that Emberdeen created.

Though I felt this would potentially make a great story, something was not sitting right with me with the story I was creating. As I journeyed through it, I found myself recoiling at some of the content and would quickly become bored and grow tired of it. My lecturer challenged me on taking the characters, story concept, and themes and put them in a modern day context. As I was setting these characters in a modern day context, I was able to relate and care about them more, instead of seeing them as imaginary people in another world that did not exist. I realised that the themes and messages were strong, but needed to be put in a different story context to work more effectively.

The process of shifting into the action/adventure/sci-fi genre consisted of transitioning the already existing themes, character arc, relationships, the function of the antagonist and setting. The themes I kept were independence vs. dependence, bravery vs. fear and truth vs. lies. Ali steps out in the big world and must become brave and discover the truth. I borrowed Calissa's identity issues (with being adopted) and gave them to Ali when she finds out that her 'father' had lied to her all these years. The relationships stayed the same; the only difference was that I added Eva, Ali's best friend. I did this because I have not seen this type of relationship explored much in movies, and it intrigued me as I was writing. The closest I have seen to this type of female relationship dynamic (and only briefly) is Katniss and Johanna in *The Hunger Games: Mocking Jay Part 2* (2015). The function of the antagonist remained the same where the protagonist was to join the military group, but the new theme that arose was a need and a desire for a motherly figure in Ali's life. I was intrigued about what might happen if the enemy you had to fight at the end was the only mother figure you have had in life. In future drafts I hope to explore this relationship line in more detail. And lastly, I set the world in a dystopian future and that the Labyrinth Calissa had to work out turned into the mind maze that Ali has to unlock in the Dome.

D. CHALLENGES:

There were numerous challenges I faced with the research question while writing my screenplay. These challenges included the dangers of copying ideas from films, making logical sense with the plot, and integrating the action line with the relationship line.

The advantage of analysing the films in my genre was that I was able to create a clear guideline of what to include in my screenplay. However, the danger of that was also not being tempted to copy or mimic what other films have already done. This mimicry became evident with story structure, and the journey my main character Ali went on. There was a distinct moment when I was writing and I realised my story structure was too similar to *Divergent's*. I originally had Ali realising just around midpoint that The Academy is bad and was up to something. She escaped with the love interest, met some

mentors along the way, and they planned to take down The Academy together. Unfortunately, this was *Divergent's* story structure. So I went back, studied what my screenplay was about and tried a different route. The route I embarked on was Ali being convinced that The Academy is good until the Act 3 break. I went down this path because refusing to face the truth and run away from your fears was a reoccurring theme throughout the screenplay.

Another challenge I faced was making logical sense of the plot. It was easy enough to come up with ideas (especially around the Dome), but because something like the Dome does not exist, it was hard to know what the boundaries were with it and how it would work. When Ali was trialing to become an Elite Fighter, I initially made some of the challenges inside the Dome as well as Ali unlocking the Dome at the end. However, this made the function of the Dome confusing without putting restrictions in place. In the second draft, I decided to have the Dome completely locked, waiting for it to be opened by the only person who could, Ali. From this experience, I learnt that when I did get caught up in the plot and I was not sure how to make sense of it, I went back to the character's journey to see if the plot was serving her journey.

And lastly, another challenge I encountered was integrating the action line with relationship lines, especially around Eva (Ali's best friend), and Val (Ali's love interest). I struggled for various reasons, but mostly because I underestimated how long working out the plotline and character arc took. And when I finally got to the relationship lines between the best friend and the love interest, I was not sure what their function or purpose was and what they added to the story. This uncertainty caused me to go back and study what value each character had in the story, how they affect the protagonist and detail their personal journey within the story. Linder Seger summarises it best in her book *Making a Good Script Great* (3rd Edition, 2010):

[A] writer must pay attention to what each character contributes to a story. To keep us involved with a story, a writer must orient us fairly quickly to what it's about, who's important in it, and why they're important. (p.226)

E. CONCLUSION

In my own assessment of my screenplay and what I have achieved so far, I believe I have been able to sustain a strong story concept, an interesting theme/message, complex characters with detailed backstories and character motivations.

I built my story around themes that interested me, and at the beginning these were: identity, fear and being independent. From there, I created a story concept that would best facilitate these themes and a concept that I would not mind spending many hours writing on. To create the detailed backstories for the plot, character and relationship lines, our MCW lecturer, filmmaker Andrew Bancroft, assigned me the task of creating 'short docs.' These short documents forced me to ask more questions about who these characters were and their motivations, why this world exists, what story I was telling and how these characters bring out the best and the worst in each other. Making these short documents helped me create a more detailed story, instead of it being surface and superficial.

Future Drafts

If I am given the chance to work on this script in the future, the things I would like to focus on would be the relationship lines, themes/messages and backstory, action sequences and the protagonist's journey.

As mentioned earlier, I would like to expand on the relationship lines and be clearer on who these supporting characters are, what their purpose is and the function they hold in the story. I would also like to focus on finding ways where I could show more of the themes and backstory instead of the characters just talking about them, I would like to invest in finding creative ways in doing this. I would also like to advance my skills in writing action sequences, especially around pacing and building the tension right up until the very end. Learning the musicality behind action sequences is next on the agenda. And lastly, I would like to fine-tune the protagonist's journey where it is both physically and emotionally satisfying for the reader/viewer. I would like to do this by creating harder choices for the characters, make the world she is in more dangerous, make the stakes

much higher, add more conflict in the relationships and create constant pressure and tensions from the antagonist(s).

To further build the relationship to this research question for the future, I would like to continue analysing films in these genres, study more in the craft of screenwriting, and research more into the Young Adult fascination with these films and novels. I am also aware of my flaws as a writer; these include dialogue, relationship dynamics and character. I would like to invest and build on these skills, even branching out in different genres to better and advance these skills.

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