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## ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film.

A summary of the script is as follows:

Annette, Adam and Josh take up residence in a small country community. It's their first time all living together as a whanau, in a where they're all just getting use to. But little do they know the house and the land has a dark and tragic history. A history that triggers each whanau member either to relive a past filled with guilt and sorrow or drive them to near self-destruction. As they begin to explore their home and its surroundings, they uncover a secret that's been a long time hidden. An angry Wairua! As it emerges slowly, secretly at first giving nothing away. Its very presence begins to threaten to up end this whanau and destroy their happiness. It's Annette who must discover this tragedy and unravel the trauma of, Wairua trapped in the land for the past 500 years. She has to unlock the key to release them. Her only hope is Adam and Josh, with them, together they must face their fears to discover their true strength as a whanau, if they wish to survive.

The script is framed by an Exegesis which is a 6000-word essay on the subject of:

- (a) the genre of the script
- (b) the development process from synopsis to second draft

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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 institution of higher learning”

Signed by Marie Thompson 2019

## **PART ONE:**

**Exegesis from Marie Thompson.**

**Film Maori Cosmic Horror.**

### **Film Horror**

The horror genre is vast, and the range diverse, as it spreads across cultures and countries, giving birth to ideas and subjects that sprout sub-genres with even more diversity and terror. Linda Aronson writes. “There are many things that a writer cannot control in the film industry. What we can control are the ideas we choose for our scripts”. (Aronson, 2010).

For that reason, I decided to explore the variety of the horror genre and to seek to answer two questions: What horrors are people watching? and Why do people enjoy Horror films? I based my findings on what was streaming on Netflix, what was showing at cinemas, and on reviews I read on the Facebook fan page Horror Fans and YouTube.

According to a post from the Facebook page, “Horror fans” that asked followers to name the most disturbing film they’d ever seen? It was discovered that the results i.e. the likes and dislikes of horror films are varied and that there was no real way to track and or survey what types of films from Slasher movies to Supernatural movies, were the most popular with Horror Fans. It seemed that the only way to track people’s preferences was to observe how many times a film was named such as, the Human Centipede (2010) which kept coming up regularly.

A Serbian Film (2010) was the next best runner up for 1<sup>st</sup> place, it drew a lot of comments about the unique story and graphic content. Thus, showing me there is no hard and fast science to calculating peoples tastes and flavours for Horror films on Facebook fan pages.

From another fan website, Infamous Horror Scares and Screams who reviewed the film “IT” (2019) and “Thing” (1982) both films scoring low in the ratings and reviews, yet “Thing” found success much later on, again this surprised me in that fans and reviews can change their minds about a horror film, but still there’s no concrete way to tell how that process happened.

“It” a cult clown movie that has a rotten tomato score of 68% with terrible reviews for a cult clown movie. Surprised me with these results because fear of the clown almost reached mania status in 2016, just before the US election. I thought “It” would have done better in the ratings because of the mania.

However, “Thing” scoring 84% from rotten tomato on the film release, became a cult film years later when it came out on video, gaining recognition as one of the best horror movies ever made.

Moving across to other social media platforms, the YouTube channels I turned to, to understand the psychology behind our fascination with watching horror films, contained astute reviews showing that fans do not want to be fooled. They liked gritty well written scripts with stories that didn’t hack from other well produced horror films. Crypt TV with 2.6M followers and Dead Meat with 3M followers; both channels being good examples of informed hosts with willing audiences who want to be fed the latest gore, had interesting conversations with mixed purposes of part examination and part hack the film to bits, popped corned with insightful knowledge into the idea of the story and the characters.

After viewing and reading through many of the videos and comments on both these channels, I was left with a very clear insight into the hardcore fans. I felt I was touching the surface of another spectrum of the deep web. Connecting to people who are stimulated by such darkness, did chill me. It was unexpected but an important learning for me, if I was going to be a serious practitioner of Horror I'd need to know about audiences' tastes.

In my research of watching Korean and Japanese films, I found quite by accident, that they did an excellent job of combining cultural beliefs and spirituality within their films and television dramas. But that Koreans are the masters of Horror films and have one of the best horror film industries, globally with a massive following worldwide.

Another source of enquiry was film festivals. The Women in Horror Film Festival, held in Georgia, USA, is a popular event with great entries. According to their website they encourage viewers to watch the films and support them with promotional photos of filmmakers and the attendees.

Listchallenges.com has an A to Z list of virtually every horror film ever made. They've designed the site to allow individuals to vote on the films. This helped me to count up the scores on the different subgenres and discover which horrors got the most hits.

Scene360 was a good source of reviews for Cosmic horror and the Cult of HP Lovecraft. They examined this subgenre with a forthright examination of the horrors of inner and outer space.

Introducing readers to the monster/creature, inspiring a greater terror of the unknown. I thoroughly enjoyed their reviews on this fascinating subgenre of despair.

I discovered that Cosmic horror has a universality about it. I watched many Asian dramas such as A Chinese Odyssey (1995) Part 1 and 2, A Korean Odyssey (2017-2018) TV drama series,

Legend of The White Snake (2019) TV drama series, and Love Ashes (2018), TV drama that, although not strictly cosmic horror, contained the themes of gods, dimensions, monsters and horror. All dramas featured a strong spiritual element and are currently being streamed on Netflix.

My script peeps through this cosmic horror doorway and gives a Matakite's point of view on forces in the afterlife. According to my research into other Māori horror films written and directed by Māori, I only uncovered a handful: Fresh Meat (2012), written by Briar Grace Smith, and the TV drama Mataku (2001-2005). While the Dead Lands (2014) Action, Adventure bordering on horror, written by Glenn Standring and directed by Toa Fraser and The Lost Tribe (1985) written and directed by John Liang all with Maori themes/stories, could not be fully recognized by myself as counting as Maori Horror. Nevertheless, all films have racked up viewing time, so they are getting watched. But it was clear to my research that Maori are not participating in the genre of horror as complete film makers and are not showing up on the world stage as horror practitioners.

My next purpose is to attempt to answer the question of why people enjoy watching horror films, for that I listened to TED Talks given by fans of the genre.

Dr. Margee Kerr details her experiences of fear, overcoming it, and learning about herself as a result of watching horror films. She encourages viewers to get to know their own fears, play with them and experience their physical response to those fears. Dr Kerr advocates that doing scary things with your loved ones creates enriching memories. (Kerr, 2018).

Mathias Clasen says, “Of all the strange things humans do, watching horror films is the strangest.” He talks about how lucrative the horror genre is and explains how horror works by triggering an ancient defensive response in us. (Clasen, 2017).

Whereas Dr Steven Schlozman was astounding research in that he said, speakers and presenters were watching horror movies to have a positive personal growth experience. (Schlozman, 2017).

I consulted Rotten Tomatoes Top 100 Horror Movies list to gather statistics on the most popular horror films. According to their records seven of the top 10 films in this genre were produced between 1931 and 1965. Top of the list was the film *Get Out* (2017) at 98% and with 350 reviews. *A Quiet Place* (2018) scored 100% and placed third. I was heartened that *Frankenstein* (1931), a great supernatural story, also made the top 10.

Den of Geek and Ranker (2019) websites provide great reviews for Korean horror films. The reviews are quite detailed and as previously said about Korean Horror film makers, they provide a wonderful insight into how Korean horror (K-horror) does an excellent job of combining cultural beliefs and spirituality within their film and television dramas.

Whilst the Guardian (Billson, 2019) and Screen Rant (Le, 2019) rate the top Scariest Japanese movies, to never watch alone. In all I found them to be a formidable source for understanding why we like to watch horror films and even to be scared out of our wits by them.

My guides for this research were:

- 1) The book *Bright Darkness* by Jeremy Dyson, in which he examines how Supernatural films are made and how they then fit into this genre.

- 2) *Mana Tuturu: Māori Treasures and Intellectual Property Rights* by Barry Barclay.

3) The 2018 documentary by Merata Mita, How Mum Decolonised the Screen.

4) The horror films themselves.

## **Māori Horror**

Māori horror films – that is, those written, directed and produced by Māori – do not exist. Maori horror films are combinations of either the story has a Maori context with Tauiwi (non-Maori) writer director or the writer with Tauiwi directing. However, I was looking for a fully cultural Maori experience of our Spiritual customs and beliefs in a film, and as I said in previous my essay, I couldn't find any.

Instead the only place it was present was in the television series of Matakū (2001-2005). This production successfully bridged the gap for a Māori Twilight Night Gallery style of the genre and was made up of Maori writers, directors and producers.

Despite the lack of Māori horror films, there is a mountain of fiction written material and oral ghost stories.

The most well-known ghost story told by many in the Far North is The Hitch Hiker of Mangamuka Gorge. I first heard this story when I was 13 – more than 40 years ago. Today, the story has become a part of the local folklore.

According to the tale, a young man hitchhikes over the Mangamuka Gorge late at night. He wears a long dark coat with a hood hiding his face. When he gets into your car, he says very little. Drivers ask where he lives, and he simply points ahead. Once on the other side of the gorge, he asks to get out. When he exits your car, his coat reveals his feet – they are skeletons. That's when you discover that he is a wairua (a spirit). Legend has it that he once lived in a house on the gorge. It was burnt down many years ago. He perished in the fire.

Another well-known story of wairua is the match of Nga Kuri. According to Waihou in the Hokianga, there's an ancient trail that is said to lead to a now-closed and long-forgotten Urupa

(burial site). It's said that a very long line of dogs can be seen weaving their way up the hill. Those who have seen them claim that when the dogs appear it is a message that this was the pathway that a Tangi (Funeral) took to the Urupai.

According to Matakite, they say that when you see dogs in this formation it's best that you don't live in the area, because of that pathway. Wairua are still walking it.

Many Māori myths and legends are filled with tales that sit on the darker side of the moon.

According to one story about Maui, who transformed himself into a lizard in an attempt to trick Hine-Nui-Te-Po, so that he could enter her vagina to discover the mystery of immortality.

However, her vagina was lined with teeth, and she woke and crushed him. Although this is cosmology and a far cry from Berenice (Poe, 1835), the 'vagina dentata', I believe both have an element of fear about the power of creation and its hidden secrets, akin to the Cosmic Horror of HP Lovecraft.

Maui is one of our greatest heroes. He was brave and compassionate towards humans, giving us a great deal: fire, wisdom and finally, his life. I especially love the story of his journey to bring back fire for our people. He tricked Mahuika into giving him one of her fire fingers. But Mahuika was a fearsome Mana Wahine, not angelic, not at all pleasant. She was the crone and could have easily killed Maui. According to legend she was said to also be his Grandmother who lived in the underworld.

In another arena of Māori cosmology, the Taniwha is a magical creature. Their lives are made up of the best legends that our people have. As Taniwha are a supernatural being, capable of reading your thoughts and actions, they could tell when you were near their territory, and that's when

they posed the biggest danger to humans. Many Taniwha are said to live in our water ways and in each bend of some of our greatest rivers.

Verbal stories tell of Hongi Hika's Toa parties, who had to carry their waka over land to avoid the Taniwha in the rivers. They were known to devour men, whole.

As a child I was told about Kupe's journey and the Taniwha Tuhirangi who had followed him around the Cook Strait. It was said to be a profound creature and afraid of nothing.

I have been inspired by Kupe's journeys since my childhood. Mum told me about Kupe chasing the Wheke, one of my favourite tales to listen to. It was exciting and I was terrified of the supernatural elements and in love with them. The Wheke was the pet of Maturangi's and extremely intelligent. I remember having dreams of being the hero in the story. The Wheke had been eating all the bait from the men folks fishing lines. And no one could catch any fish. No amount of Kupe's talking to Maturangi worked on him. Finally, Kupe gave himself the task of stopping the Wheke. He had his waka prepared and took the long voyage over the Moana to put an end to the Wheke. In the process Kupe had discovered Aotearoa.

Another source of inspiration where the hero faces great challenges are the journeys of Tawhaki through the cosmic realm. He and his brother travelled through incredible landscapes filled with dangers and threats. Vine branches snap at them both, before Tawhaki's brother fails and falls back to earth. The story can be found in Taawhaki Nui A Hema (Mead, 1996). Eventually through many trials and revelations in his life the story told to me by my mum was that Taawhaki ascended into the heavens to become a star. At certain times of the year during spring we can see his star rising over the North.

Moving away from the cosmic, to something earthlier, I found books written by a New Zealand author David Hair. His books known as Māori Gothic horror, six books in the series, featured a modern whanau with a similar kaupapa as my own – The parents, Māori tane and Pākehā wahine marry and have children together. However, their marriage doesn't last, and they go their separate ways. Their children are all gifted and live in a Gothic supernatural world where they fight against the evil dark powers of Māori mystery and fear, with frightening challenges that they must overcome.

In a similar world, the comic story Meariki, The Quest for Truth, The Matawehi Fables (Otene-Pearse, 2015) is a supernatural Gothic horror/drama about a gifted young girl. She is tasked with recovering her Rangatira, who was abducted. On the way, she discovers her true identity, a being of a fierce dark nature, whose role is to protect.

The infinite one IO, fables, demigods, gods and goddesses, Māori myths and legends, the moon and stars, ghosts, demons, entities, spiritual beings, supernatural Beings, the Underworld, Te Po, The World of Light and the Children of God – have all inspired my imagination and continue to provide insights into the inner and outer dimensions of Te Ao Maori universe.

## **History of Horror films**

I have always been fascinated by early horror films, especially those made before 1950. The subjects and topics of the stories were so relatable. They involve demons and ghosts, long before the invention of Aliens and full-on Entities. I took an interest in the very early horror films because I was fascinated by the stories, and my Mum was an absolute horror fan. We had a library that was filled with Alfred Hitchcock books and other cult horror novels of the same time period. Mum loved to go to all the horror films in her younger days, so I like to believe this behavior followed through to myself.

However, getting back on track, I took note of the research the writers and directors had done on earlier horror and whether the stories had come from their own personal backgrounds. It was a difficult question to answer because there wasn't sufficient searchable information about the subjects and the films. Especially with the earliest made films. Though I found their special effects entertaining and watchable.

It is interesting to note that the early stories were about demons, hell, ghosts, monsters and blood suckers. It made me think that religion and folklore tales had an impact and I wondered if the creators of the early horror films knew what fears played on their audiences and what would disgust and move them to be scared.

In 1895, brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière filmed a skeleton that kept falling apart and putting itself back together. The moving picture had no real name, it was a silent black-and-white and the very first moving picture made, as classified in the horror genre. Though it is not a horror, the use of a skeleton was supposedly shocking for audiences.

In 1896, *Le Manoir du Diable* (1896), translated as *The House of the Devil*, *Manor of the Devil*, *The Haunted Castle*, *The Devil's Manor*, and *The Devil's Castle*, was a silent black and white film, directed by Georges Méliès. The story was about Mephistopheles, a demon from Hell, who used the form of bat to bring himself into being. Mephistopheles received help from his assistant to conjure up demons. They all play pranks on two men who visit the castle where Mephistopheles and the demons live. But it all ends when one of the men uses a crucifix to make Mephistopheles disappear.

The film's story reminded me of my childhood fears of the devil and his team of demons living amongst us. It's an eerie film, using shadow and theatre set backgrounds. It was very early special effects, making things appear and disappear, showing the magical powers of the demon. A repetitive musical score with creepy sound, makes this a must watch.

There was debate about whether the film *Une Nuit Terrible* (1896) translated as *A Terrible Night* and again directed by Georges Méliès, was a comedy or a horror. A man staying the night at an inn tries to get a good night sleep but instead is plagued by a giant spider. He kills the spider and dumps it in the chamber pot. However, he can't get the spider out his mind, and keeps hitting his bed and his surroundings with his shoe. I can relate to this movie. The film reminded of the first night staying in our old bach up north. It was always the hardest. As the bach being vacant for long periods would have insects and small rodents take up residence in our absence. Even after completing our ritual noises and banging with brooms, to scare off them all off, I was still plagued by fears of the spiders creeping all over me. And they probably did while I was unconsciencous.

The *X-Ray Fiend* (1897) was made and directed by George Albert Smith. Made around the time x-rays were invented, it played on audiences' darker imaginations. And probably disturbed their

psyche while they were still getting used to the idea of this profound piece of technology. A great use of the horror genre in my opinion. In the story two people are flirting with each other. When the professor turns the x-ray machine on them, they are seen as skeletons disrupting their raptures. The director used full glowing bodysuits on the actors for the special effects.

Photographing the Ghost (1898) directed by George Albert Smith is about three men who try to capture a ghost on film but find it to be impossible and give up. This movie is said to be a precursor to the investigative paranormal.

La Caverne Maudite (The Cave of the Demons) (1898) features a woman who comes across a haunted cave and into contact with the people who died there. Directed by George Méliès. When I discovered this film after I had written my script, I was surprised to find that my idea had already been a part of film history.

In the same year, two Japanese films were made, both written by Eijiro Hatta. Shinin No Sosei (Resurrection of a Corpse) (1898) is about a man who comes back to life after falling out of a coffin. Bake Jizo (Jizo the Spook) (1898) has no surviving plot or filmography information. But according to iamcinema a film website, they speculate that the movie could have been about protection from a ghost. Bake Jizo or Jizo the spook could have meant “haunted statue”.

All of these stories really inspired me and were not unlike my own cultural beliefs and ghost stories. At a tangi, it is normal to be around a tupapaku (dead body) and, from time to time, unusual stories and occurrences surrounding the behaviours of tupapaku can come out. However, the motivation is to bring knowledge and dissipate ignorance about the death and dying process of a body. Which is really fascinating, and the body is said to still be alive with electromagnetic

energy. So, it's not that hard to understand how a natural process of dying can be turned into a story of the mysterious and supernatural.

As my own story is a cosmic horror, a subgenre that originated with Howard Phillips Lovecraft, and lead to a further subgenre, the Lovecraftian horror. The Lovecraftzine website is a great source of news and information for cosmic horror film buffs. The first known stories to come from Lovecraftian are *The Dunwich Horror* (Lovecraft, 1928) a story set in a dilapidated village, with foul body odour, sorcerers, terrified people and animals. A monster that wreaks havoc on the village is eventually killed thanks to crafty humans who find its weak spots.

*The Whisperer in Darkness* (Lovecraft, 1930) is a story with an extraterrestrial twist, gruesome findings and inhuman endings.

*At the Mountains of Madness* (Lovecraft, 1931) is a science fiction horror with a terrifying monster and a disastrous expedition to the Antarctic. Also, from the same time, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (Lovecraft, 1931) is a real horror about a creepy town with a deep dark secret, those that investigate it mysteriously disappear.

Cosmic horror is meant to instill a sense of hopeless smallness. Where humans, people, are not able to escape the horror that terrorises and finally engulfs them. HP Lovecraft was an expert at creating the environments and monsters that have done that to us for decades. Film makers have been inspired by his work and his creations have driven a whole generation of cosmic horror films that to date continue the tradition.

According to IMDB who says, "Cosmic horror is not of earth and though inspired by HP Lovecraft, was certainly not created by him, nor did it end with him".

## **Key Signifiers of Horror films**

Great horror movies scare us all the way to our core, while they deliver a satisfying journey where only a few characters survive an unbelievable gauntlet of terror.

Today producers are looking for ‘Smart Horror’ that’s low budget and an easy turn-over. Smart Horror is a high concept, with a unique monster/villain, unique terror, a horror journey that exists mainly because characters make stupid mistakes.

Smart horror is not perfect, it isn’t a horror that only works for the critics or obsessive horror fans, and it isn’t full of high-budget special effects.

With that said what’s the difference between a Horror and a Thriller? Side by side the two genres look similar, but when we pull back the covers, we can see there are fundamental differences, and these show up in the emotional experiences. In a horror, the audience is there to be filled with fear, horrified, and to share an emotional experience with the people they are with.

In a thriller movie, the audience is there to be thrilled, on the edge of their seats with intrigue, suspense and mystery, whereas horror’s main emotions are panic, terror and hysteria.

### **Who dies?**

In the strictest of conventions, those that die in a horror are the main characters. In a thriller, it’s the supporting characters.

### **What’s the reality?**

Horror isn’t about reality – it departs from it. It has monsters/villains who kill without human reason. Thrillers take place within normal life and have villains who destroy for a reason.

### **What are the conventions of a horror?**

The following conventions come from a ScreenWritingU class (Screenwriting U) 'How to Write a Horror':

**TERRORIZE THE CHARACTERS:** (Create the experience of horror for your audience by taking your characters to the edge of hysteria)

Example from Matakau The Lost Tribe. The Characters are struck and killed by an unseen force that subjects them firstly to a brutal terrifying experience before they lose their lives. The last thing they see is someone they are connected to die horribly. An elderly couple driving in the dead of night meet a bloody end. A platoon doing jungle combat training are stalked one by one by a deadly killer.

**ISOLATION:** (Setting and situation where the characters are alone and powerless against the monster)

Example from Matakau The Blue Line. The main characters undergo a frightening spiritual awakening that seeks revenge on one and transforms the other. Each facing the moment alone and isolated.

**DEATH:** (Threaten your characters with awful, violent, and torturous deaths. Create the fear of death or insanity)

Example from Matakau The Fishing Trip. Each of the characters is killed one by one by a demon that turns out to be Luke. Ron witness his friend's deaths. They die in fear and horror. When Ron finally dies, he's the one who gets to see Luke as his true demon self.

**MONSTER/VILLAIN:** A person or entity that will inflict endless terror and violence.

Example from Matakū Sands of Time. A vengeful grief-stricken spirit stalks a whānau member. Jona is the one it contacts and draws its energy from, but Nicki is one who can channel the energy. If she doesn't, they'll lose Jona.

**HIGH TENSION:** Put your characters in sinister situations that are out of their control, then turn up the heat to the point of hysteria.

Example from Matakū The Lost Tribe. The shoulders in the bush, losing communications with each. Impending doom.

**DEPARTURE FROM REALITY:** These are extreme locations, situations, outside of daily life. Thrillers are part of our normal life. Horror movies are a departure.

All of the examples from Matakū are not what people would experience in normal life.

Having a Supernatural Being terrorise a military team of hard trained soldiers. The remains of dead person in sand finally coming back to life so they claim their loved one by using energy of children. A bunch of men being killed by a demon who was a long lost and forgotten friend they had bullied in their childhood. A person killing themselves at the behest of vengeful spirit in Blue Line.

**MORAL STATEMENT:** Under all of this horror is social commentary about issues that affect our daily life (violating values, issues like STDs and discrimination, etc.),

indicating what the writer sees as acceptable values and what lines not to cross.

People who were unaware of the interconnectedness of everything would find themselves at the mercy of the natural world and its spiritual elements. They were put to the test to

find out how they could reembrace this true part of themselves and discover how much they mattered.

### **Contemporary Horror films (Where are they now?)**

Horror films today are said to have become formulaic and have a set process for when the shock and screams should arrive in the story, for the audience.

According to the Guardian (Baggetto, 2016) the cheap horror, low-budget slasher films today are formula driven. There are exceptions, but the argument is that the industry today has devolved.

However, the Den of Geeks list is full of admiration for the modern-day horror film. They range from the possession variety with post-apocalyptic, jump and scream, creature horror, zombie thriller and creepy horrors.

Jon Towlson, author of *Subversive Horror Cinema: Countercultural Messages of Films from Frankenstein to the Present* suggests on pg13 that “horror film makers were drawn to the genre because of its subversive potential, its shock value and its formulaic nature, which facilitates social commentary of a radical nature”. (Towlson, 2014).

Drawing on the writings of the New Left thinker Herbert Marcuse, Robin Wood described the modern horror film as depicting in its monsters “a return of the repressed: a violent eruption of those aspects of the self that each of us represses (and that are repressed by society as a whole) in order that we function as bourgeois monogamous heterosexual capitalists.” The conflict, therefore, between the monster and the bourgeois capitalist “normality” in a horror film, and, crucially, how this conflict is resolved, reveals its ideological orientation. Wood detected in the modern horror film a tendency towards apocalypse, an un-restorability of normality, which, by virtue, gave the modern horror film a subversive orientation. (Wood, 1985), (Nichols, 1985)

In the words of George A. Romero, the whole idea of films such as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), is to “upset the apple cart”.

My biggest complaint about upsetting the apple cart and going through that whole process is that we still have to restore to upset the ways of the world. And then in the end, you still put it all back together again. Well, why did we go through all that in the first place? So, I thought better to leave the world in a mess.

**My Script**, positioned as a Māori cosmic horror, follows in the footsteps of other horrors that look into the internal lives of families, watching them unravel, with what barely seems like a small slither of a chance at surviving. It's focus is on an Iwi that went to war – one iwi lost and the other won. The reasons for this conflict are not discussed in the script. In, *The Coming of the Māori*, Sir Peter Buck says “Wars had occurred during the second settlement period and continued with increasing ferocity during the third settlement period. The causes were many, one of the earliest being for the acquisition of territory” (Buck, 1987).

Though never stated, it is implied that this could be one of the reasons the two Iwi in the story went to war.

The script is written in English, interspersed with Te Reo Māori. However, what is unique about this film is its direct spiritual address to Wairua. The main characters are Annette, who is Māori, and Adam, Pākehā, who are in an intimate personal relationship and love each other deeply.

However, over the course of the story, meaning the journey of the characters, we realise, even with their differences, they survive the trauma, they survive the spiritual experience and remain together as a whanau unit. Whereas in the horror films discussed in this exegesis many main characters do not survive.

That's where my script deviates from conventions. It could be argued that it's more of a thriller. Its villain/monster has a reason to kill. However, its nature is very creepy, and the monster's manner of stalking is scary. The main characters are terrorised and they are in danger.

In my script where my paradigm is to save the family and keep them intact as a blended family of mixed cultures, and after I re-wrote the scene where Adam had died to where he not only lives

but also experiences a deep spiritual Maori awakening, the story became filled with hope. Adam is a likeable character.

Reflecting further on the cultural aspect for the Māori/Pākehā bilingual connection, it makes perfect sense not to kill the main characters. The movie is suspenseful, but it has a monster that is terrifying and bent on destruction, which makes the ending very unexpected. It is an inter-dimensional cosmic closure, and even the place the characters inhabit until their release is in the cosmic underworld. The connection that Annette makes to join her forces together is cosmic. Annette connects to Matariki, the seven-star system in our heavens. The Chief and his warriors are the Children of God, triggered back to life. So, when they are returned to Te Po, a dimension of intergalactic proportions, we enter the cosmic realm of Maori cosmology.

I have been grateful in being able to watch films, tv dramas and read books in the horror genre. I've gained a wealth of experience in how they are written and viewed by the audience. But the benefits were specifically to understand monsters, terror, drama, love, action lines, history, the present, the past, horror and the cultural depth that shows how traditions and cultural norms are integrated into films and stories. Secondly, I have been inspired by how horror movies continue to be popular. In this, I've been given a pathway to both adhere to a horror formula and create the possibility of a sequel. Just knowing it has a succession order and enduring is very truthful for me.

**PART TWO:****My Personal Journey on the way to writing my script**

I started this journey on the MCW, in 2016 with a story that, although it had been in development for 20 years, was still very new as I hadn't put it into a script format. Nevertheless, I was excited to be undertaking this process – at long last my vision of a screenplay was coming true. Unfortunately, in November 2016, due to personal family reasons, I had to withdraw before completing the final body of work. But the nature of the story had given rise to some suspicions by family and friends, who wondered if there was some kind wairua hanging over the script affecting me and my son. However, all I could feel was a determination to return to the course once the family situation was resolved. And I did in 2018, but promptly got injured and was out of action for more than six months. Yet I put that setback aside and continued to read screenplays, watch horror movies, read horror stories, myths, legends, comics, action movies, Kungfu movies, cultural Asian movies, practically anything that was creative imaginative work. Through it all I came away appreciating the Korean, Chinese and Japanese film makers who have it down to a fine art.

When I started out on this journey, I'll be honest, I was both excited and scared all at once. That didn't relate to the experience of writing, or the story. It was to do with the desire to present a film that was real horror and at the same time didn't show our people in the worst possible light, because Aotearoa is so racist, and little is really known about the cosmological aspect of our culture within the mainstream. I didn't want to portray another *Once Were Warriors* (1994); to have people who don't normally watch horror movies, watch it for the spectacle alone.

I was filled with doubts about what I was doing. I was still having Pākehā approach me, saying they'd watched *Once Were Warriors* as if they had nothing else to talk to me about. Clearly the film had an impact on them. Interestingly, I've never had a Māori tell me they had just watched the Movie. I worried that would I provide more negative stereotypes of my people.

So, I was heartened by including cultural elements within the story and relationships that were genuine with characters who really loved each other.

This was a story of a people who had lost their way, both the wairua trapped in the whenua and the little whanau trapped in the whare, Annette, Adam and Josh. All of them might have thought they were doing OK, but really, they were all conflicted and having to deal with their own shadow. From that perspective it was easy to write, and surprisingly enough the horror tracks came easily to me. I just made them difficult cause I was carrying my shadow of whakama as well. The script had so many rewrites, turnarounds and turnovers that today, it barely resembles the original script.

I started out with the attitude of "just write it" and then as I did, I noticed myself examining myself as a writer, a Māori writer, and checking that I wasn't writing a colonised piece of work. Was my language colonized, for example? Did I perpetuate any of the negative stereotypes about our people, in particular 'angry Māori men doing carnage to wāhine and tamariki'? Did I remember my Mātauranga and tikanga (Māori knowledge and way of doing things)? Was I telling a horror that's true to the genre or simply sensationalism?

I'm aware that many of our mana wāhine are doing their best to overcome the false stereotypes and, unlike *Once Were Warriors*, which I felt didn't undergo a thorough enough process of development, to ensure that Maori were not forever stamped as Jake Heke but seen as carrying

the same burdens of undoing that happens to any people and race that's dispossessed of its culture. I wanted to avoid once were warriors bench marking my own.

So, I'm glad to acknowledge that towering above all these doubts, questions and soul searching was a truth I couldn't deny. If it weren't for the MCW, I would never have had the courage to write this script on my own. It really deserved this platform, because although the timeframes were short, the support and encouragement were solid. I was able to map out a process and it guided me from the synopsis, treatment, beat sheet and script along with the foundation of research in films, screenplays, books and other reading materials (essays). Having this platform with a supervisor who had an indelible strength in this genre, unity with Māori and strong handhold on the culture of horror, really made a difference to me.

I started this story from my own personal experience and that's what gave it the clear light of day. I've reached a place with it now that feels in alignment with our three central values: Tika, Pono me Te Aroha. And I wanted people to be moved by the story. In the hope that they'll take a look at Māori mythology and the creation stories. The journeys of Kupe, Tawhaki and Maui have certainly been my favourites from my childhood to the present day. They inspired points of guidance in my story. However, the Māori goddesses Hine-nui-te-po has been my absolute favourite. Her gothic act of crushing Maui in her teeth-filled vagina made quite an impact on my teenage imagination.

The very act of wanting immortality isn't just confined to Māori. It's a desire in just about every culture on earth – to live forever. But the message is clear, any attempts to uncover the secrets will have devastating consequences. These consequences are represented in my story by the simple act of the dead not wanting to be dead.

I pondered on this aspect with many of the horror movies that I watched, where the living, are forever tied to those who have passed over. How the relationship between them is never easy, where there's the sense of envy from the dead, who long for life and the connection. There was nothing more powerful for me than the story of Mama, a woman who had lost her child and then, having died, she searched for years as a spirit for her long-lost child. It was an element I couldn't resist adding into my story. But also, to be honest, the stereotype of angry Māori men raised its head again and again so adding in wahine warriors I feel gave my film warmth and sympathy.

When I faced many despairing obstacles, I would take them to the gym and work out until I got a decent sweat. At one point during the development of my exegesis I was so depressed, having been told that I would never be able to make my script into a film. I was too old and it's harder for a Māori woman like myself to get funding, let alone be taken seriously. I believed it. I'd had a hard-enough time getting anywhere with a short film script, so how true would it be for my feature film script?

The turning point came when I watched Merata's film. I was really delighted by her courage. Then I remembered her movies, right out of the square and upsetting the apple cart. She said we needed to get more of ourselves on the screen, and I saw content of ancient warriors in a clash, and they looked beautifully furious.

Overall, I reflect on two things that kept me going to get across the finish line: 1) the gym, where I could work out any discouragement and let go of false dreams; and 2) my own Wairua.

END.

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