

Pitches for “Flight”

Summary 1 (40 words)

1992. In an intense triangle of love and death, a Bosnian refugee, an air-traffic controller suspended following a fatal crash, and the mother of one of the victims, struggle to find truth, reconciliation and redemption in a wild northern landscape.

Summary 2 (80 words)

While the Bosnia war rages far away, an traffic controller in northern England is suspended following a fatal crash.

Overwhelmed by the guilt of putting her daughter on the doomed aircraft, the mother of one of the victims seeks him out. Their unwitting go-between is a young refugee from Sarajevo confronting her own guilt of Serbian ethnicity.

In a tense ensemble triangle of love and death, played out against wild landscapes of coasts and moors, they struggle to find truth, reconciliation and ultimately redemption.

Unique selling point

Flight is a powerful emotional roller coaster in which very ordinary people become entangled in extraordinary personal journeys. The choreography of this unique triangular ensemble is kept taut and full of suspense from start to finish - an emotional thriller with characters an audience can identify with.

Pitch (500 words)

“Flight” is inspired by Wildcat’s film-making experience in countries where very ordinary individuals often have to overcome very extraordinary challenges of faith to move on from the trauma and guilt of civil war.

We once filmed the meeting between an Argentinean mother whose young activist daughter had been abducted by the military junta in the 80’s, and the military officer who killed her. The experience highlighted the gruelling emotional journeys made by both victims and oppressors in facing up to truth, achieving justice, and eventually moving towards reconciliation.

Even though this process underpins resolution to conflict throughout the world, the personal dimension is rarely explored through drama. By constructing a narrative propelled by similar emotional quests in a more familiar setting, we have created a powerful and challenging, yet ultimately uplifting romantic drama.

Our three central characters have intense and real reasons for guilt, based on real or imagined responsibility in causing death.

Natasa Ivic, 20’s, is a young Bosnian Serb ecologist, wracked with remorse at deserting her Bosnian Muslim friend, injured by a Serbian shell. We briefly see her in the context of those forces in Bosnia, but her real emotional journey takes place whilst a refugee in the UK, far from the gritty intrusiveness of Sarajevo but where the taunts of the Bosnian Muslim majority are just as savage.



Neil Peart, 40's, is an air traffic controller suspended after the fatal crash of a small commuter plane under his control. Unlike Natasa he seeks initial sanctuary through denial. But the luxury is short lived as he is tracked down by the single mother of one of the crash victims is seeking him out.

The mother, Ellen Armstrong, is tormented not only by the death of her only daughter, Lisa, but by the knowledge that she had persuaded her to board the flight home to visit against Lisa wishes. Her quest is fuelled by the search for the truth which is denied to her by the official crash inquiry.

Through tense and suspenseful choreography, Natasa becomes the unwitting go between between Neil and Ellen, while Neil and Ellen separately ignite a mutual spark of attraction unaware of their deeper and tragic connection. For Natasa the reality of the Bosnian conflict is brought home by her fraught attraction to the Bosnian Muslim leader of the refugee community.

These powerful interactions are played out against the wild landscapes of the Solway Estuary and the Northern Pennines where each protagonist separately seeks solace or truth. The marshland of the Solway estuary is also the setting for one of the largest migrations of wild birds anywhere in the world. As Natasa studies the ornithology we are able to weave powerful metaphors of flight and migration into her own refugee experience.

Eventually the constructed and accidental barriers between their awareness of each other collapse, and in a dramatic and emotionally draining conclusion each find both truth, reconciliation, love and redemption.

Director's visualisation *(David Baillie)*

The narrative and setting for Migration were initially inspired by my personal experiences as a documentary cameraman working in areas of the world where very ordinary individuals often have to overcome very extraordinary challenges of faith and reconciliation to move on from the trauma of war, genocide and torture.

My experience, particularly with the mothers of young activists who "disappeared" in the military regimes of South America in the 80s, as well as amongst refugees from the Bosnian war in the 90s, highlighted the extraordinary emotional journeys made by both victims and oppressors in facing up to the truth, achieving justice, and moving towards reconciliation.

Even though this process essentially underpins all progress to a more stable world, these emotions and evolutions have rarely been explored in cinema. By constructing a narrative that is propelled by these intensely personal quests I hope to create a powerful and challenging, yet ultimately uplifting romantic drama. I also wish to avoid the central human drama being overshadowed by any wider political context and ensure the narrative involves a search for redemption in an entirely personal context.

I have always seen the visualisation as enhancing the sense of ordinary individuals thrust into extraordinary situations where they are essentially alone and cut off from the certainties and familiarities of their previous lives. Since I also believe landscape to be one of the most powerful tools available to a director and cinematographer I am determined to make the location and composition central to achieving this sense of being suddenly very alone.

In particular I am keen to also extract our central characters from the wider context of their individual quests so that we can experience their emotions free from the distracting imagery of the events that have set them on their new course. For example one of the interwoven ensemble narratives concerns a Bosnian Serb wracked with a proxy guilt at the barbarism of her own community. Although we briefly see her in the context of those forces in Bosnia,



we see her real emotional journey take place whilst a refugee in the UK, far from the gritty intrusiveness of Sarajevo. By placing her in the wide open landscapes of the Solway estuary the power of her human story can take centre stage, undistracted by the noise of guns and the action of war.

Apart from it's extraordinary solitude and beauty, the marshland of the Solway estuary is also the setting for one of the largest migrations of wild birds anywhere in the world. As our Bosnian Serb studies the ornithology of the Solway we are able to weave powerful metaphors of flight and migration into her own refugee experience, yet at the same time retain her individual emotional story in clear focus.

Another of the ensemble narratives follows the process of forgiveness and redemption after a fatal plane crash. Again I am determined to ensure the action of the crash does not distract from the human story and indeed we do not even see the crash. More importantly we are able to locate the suspended air traffic controller both alone on the Solway (where his story entangles with that of the Serb student and the metaphors of flight), as well as in the wild uplands of the North Pennines where stands the lone radar dome that was his eyes on the night of the crash. This contrasts poignantly with the cosy interior warmth of the air traffic control centre of his life before the tragedy.

However when we do need to see the confrontation between our characters and the forces that have changed their lives we intend to do so with secondary images that still convey the horrors of their trauma, but again do not overshadow their personal presence on the screen. For instance the continuing ethnic divide in Bosnia is revealed by the unarmed but still hostile environment of the refugee centre where our Serb student is ostracised by her fellow Muslim (Bosniak) refugees. And although we avoid images of the actual plane crash, we intend setting a crucial scene in the vast hangar Air Accident Investigation Branch where all crashed planes are painstaking pieced together. No fast cutting of exploding metal; just a lone bereaved parent in a cavernous hangar of silent static debris.

To summarise this is a film driven by intensely human emotions of bereavement, anger, guilt and love we intend to bring the journeys of the individual characters to the fore by creative use of landscape, imagery and composition.

Diversity *(200 words)*

Flight is a drama full of opportunities to break on screen stereotypes and conventions. Two of the three ensemble lead characters are women, and one is middle aged. The role of Ellen is an opportunity often highlighted as being in short supply in UK film and drama.

A major part of the narrative is set in an asylum seekers hostel and is based on one of the writers own experience working in support of Bosnian asylum seekers in the the UK in the 90's. As such it avoids stereotypes and enables a more realistic portrayal of the asylum seeking experience.

Rights

The script is an original work by David Baillie & Peter Dillon, co-directors of Wildcat Films.