

CHAINSAW FAIRYTALE

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TWO VOLUMES (VOLUME ONE)

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ABSTRACT

CHAINSAW FAIRYTALE is a horror/fairytale hybrid screenplay with strong comedic elements written by Pat Higgins. Higgins has worked within the horror/comedy genre for twenty years and the screenplay sits comfortably within the audience expectations of his previously produced work.

CHAINSAW FAIRYTALE follows Cinderella, a soon-to-be princess in the land of Eldenir, on the verge of marrying her own Prince Charming. The ceremony is interrupted by the arrival of a monster from the sky, who has been banished from a completely different narrative taking place in a different genre (specifically, horror) and acts as a pollutant to the genre conventions of Eldenir. As the fairytale world darkens and becomes less forgiving, Cinderella must travel the land and reunite the other estranged princesses of the kingdom in order to restore positivity and hope. They unite not only against the brutal monster from the horror world but also against Diana, a wicked stepmother to all of the princesses of the kingdom, who craves liberation from a genre which forbids her from acting on her darkest impulses.

Cinderella must overcome her lack of assertiveness and unwillingness to face conflict in order to stop Diana changing the genre of the story and ensuring that nobody lives happily ever after. Accompanied by Rapunzel (who embraces sexuality and independence as the strict rules of fairytales begin to loosen) she reunites with Beauty, an enigmatic and often terrifying figure who is both 'Beauty' and 'Beast' at once. It's only once Cinderella embraces the idea that happy endings only have meaning because tragic ones also exist that she finds the inner strength to fight back, killing Diana with her glass slipper and returning an element of balance to the fairytale world.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION: I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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INT. ELDENIR STONE CHAMBER - MORNING

Sunlight glints into the room through a gap in heavy red curtains, catching upon the GENRE STONE in a place setting in the middle of an ornate stone chamber.

It is impossibly beautiful, with a shiny pink heart at the centre. It almost seems to beat with love, optimism and positivity.

CINDERELLA (VO)
"Happily Ever After"

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC swells and sets the tone.

CINDERELLA (VO) (CONT'D)
That's the rule with stories, isn't it? I've always known that stories have rules.

INT. CINDERELLA'S BASEMENT - DAY

First shot in a flashback montage: humbly dressed Cinders sweeping the basement, smiling weakly as she goes about her boring duties. Her sweeping brush has worn down to stubby bristles and her clothes are grubby and a little battered.

A mouse scuttles along the mantelpiece. She smiles at it, as if it's the most beautiful thing she's ever seen.

INT. CINDERELLA'S BASEMENT - EVENING

Starting at the evil looking black boots and tracking up to the disapproving scowl on the face of DIANA DARKHEART.

Context should clue us in that this is Cinders' wicked stepmother. She exudes authority, wielded with extreme malice. She runs a finger along the mantelpiece and checks the end of it. It doesn't meet with her approval.

She shakes her head, relishing every moment. Behind her the two UGLY SISTERS laugh and point.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

A smiling FAIRY GODMOTHER (more an Emma Thompson vibe than an Angela Lansbury one) waves her magic wand. A shower of magical glittering sparks!

Cinderella's face lights up in amazement. Her tattered housedress turns into a stunning ballgown, (although probably not a blue one so as to avoid angering the Disney estate).

Cinderella beams, running her hands down the new dress in astonishment.

The fairy godmother chuckles indulgently.

INT. CINDERELLA'S BASEMENT - DAY

A dashing PRINCE CHARMING (Chris Pratt type, charismatic but not overly burdened with intellect) slips a glass shoe onto Cinderella's foot. It fits perfectly. He's clean cut, handsome and stunningly dull.

The couple gaze into one another's eyes. The perfect image of true love, without any of the messiness that true love actually brings with it.

Framed between their faces, Diana looks quietly enraged.

INT. PALACE BEDROOM - MORNING

Cinderella looks out of the stone edged window, gazing wistfully across the peaceful land. Eldenir is gorgeously sunny with lush trees and wildlife in abundance.

We soak up the mood of the beautiful fairytale landscape. Fluffy clouds pepper the gorgeous blue sky.

EXT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - MORNING

A rustic stone tower with unthreatening pink detailing. Songbirds twitter in the morning sunlight.

INT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - MORNING

RAPUNZEL gazes out at the sunrise. A gentle soul with a distinct spark of mischief bubbling just underneath. There's optimism in her eyes, which sparkle behind a pair of glasses that resemble delicate dragonfly wings.

CINDERELLA (VO)

I've always known that a faithful
heart in a terrible situation would
be rewarded for her purity of
spirit

INT. SLEEPING BEAUTY CHAMBER - NIGHT

SLEEPING BEAUTY lies asleep in an ornate room. A glass chamber encases her as she slumbers for an age.

The glass chamber catches the light, looking almost like an enormous crystal as the sunlight fractures.

A long, arched corridor leads away from her, further and further until the chamber is barely a sparkle in the distance.

CINDERELLA (VO)
and perhaps be awakened with a kiss

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE, DUNGEON - MORNING

BEAUTY remains stoic, silhouetted in the shadow of a terrible BEAST thrown onto the brick wall of the castle dungeon. She's a slightly gothic reflection of the style of some of the other princesses. There's a tiny touch more Hammer Horror about her.

Her face is one of patience and determination. The shadow of the beast fumes and rages. She does not falter or flinch.

CINDERELLA (VO)
I've always known that rage and
anger can change into deep and
everlasting love.

INT. MERMAID'S ROCK - MORNING

A pretty rock in a vast blue ocean.

A crab scuttles the surface. A young woman, who we shall call ELLEM emerges from the water and peeps over the rock.

This Little Mermaid is watching a ship in the distance. Her eyes are full of curiosity. A brightly coloured octopus whom we shall come to know as LITTLE GREGORY slithers across the rock, making the crab run away nervously. Ellem strokes his head absent-mindedly as she stares at that glorious ship in the distance.

She goes to sing, but then realises that she can't. We're clearly at the 'lost voice' part of the tale.

CINDERELLA (VO)
I've always known that your wishes
are always in reach even when they
seem impossible.

INT. PALACE BEDROOM - EVENING

CINDERELLA smiles at her reflection in an ornate mirror. She's wearing a huge WEDDING DRESS, her face full of happy, nervous anticipation.

CINDERELLA (VO)
And most of all, that all stories
end with a wedding and a hopeful
future.

EXT. ELDENIR ZOOM-OUT - DAY

Our POV tracks backwards, zooming out through the beautiful, peaceful lands of Eldenir.

Birds swoop and play through the gorgeous pink skies. Light plays over dew drops on perfect plants.

But there's a slight darkening to the atmosphere. Almost imperceptible. A shift of tone, like a lightbulb just out of shot has blown.

CINDERELLA (VO)
But now I know there are other
types of stories.

INT. MURDER HOUSE - NIGHT

CRUNCHING bands of visual and auditory noise, like VHS interference, crash through the pin-sharp fairytale image. This aesthetic makes what follows feel like a video nasty that someone has taped over.

Glimpsed through the static noise: close-ups of splashy gore and screaming pain. Blood and teeth.

This is a dark, unhygienic chamber in the basement of a house built just for murder.

MELVIN (30, ENORMOUS) is chopping a MALE VICTIM (20, already dying) in half vertically. Blood splashes the lens. Melvin is using a chainsaw that appears to be a part of his forearm. Great hulking glowing power cords feed it the energy it needs to spin.

Melvin is a mixture of every movie psycho going. He's a big bulky bastard with a rubber Dracula mask (torn to reveal his actual filthy, bloody mouth) and a decimated, filthy bondage suit.

The Victim SCREAMS and SCREAMS.

The static noise bursts over the screen intermittently and the image flicks BACK AND FORTH between Eldenir and this splatter aesthetic.

CINDERELLA (VO)
Horrible stories with very
different rules.

INT. PALACE BEDROOM - EVENING

A pensive look crosses Cinderella's face, like a momentary memory of a forgotten bad dream.

CINDERELLA (VO)
Stories I would never want to hear
when tucked up warm on a stormy
night, let alone be a character in.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MURDER HOUSE - NIGHT

Through another burst of swiftly clearing VHS static, the survivors in the final act of a slasher movie huddle in a corner whilst MELVIN hurls the corpse of that unfortunate VICTIM to the floor with a wet thud. Some guts spill out.

Our survivors are LUCY (retro), NICOLE (fiercely capable) and ROSEBROOK (very damaged survivor of previous rampages). Rosebrook appears to be bleeding to death.

Melvin throws his head back and roars with horrible laughter.

Everyone else SCREAMS

SLAM CUT TO
CREDITS:

INT. CINDERELLA'S DRESSING CHAMBER - MORNING

Cinderella beams at the camera and begins to sing.

CINDERELLA
(Singing)
When your heart is pure and your
eyes are bright, and the happiest
of endings is so nearly in your
sight--

SLAM CUT TO:

INT. MURDER HOUSE - NIGHT

Another jarring burst of horrible static and we're back into the fray. This whole setup should feel exactly like the closing act of an 80s horror movie. As the group of survivors huddled together, Rosebrook fights to get words out.

ROSEBROOK

The amulet! You need to finish the spell!

He's apparently dying. Closes his eyes, maybe for the last time.

Lucy stammers a little. Tentatively holds the trinket aloft. Opens her mouth to speak but can't make the words happen.

LUCY

I.. I ca...

NICOLE

I cast you elsewhere! Say I cast you elsewhere!

LUCY

I cast you...

Melvin THROWS A MACHETE! It spins over and over and SLICES OFF LUCY'S HEAD!

Nicole SCREAMS as both amulet and Lucy's head hit the floor.

Melvin stoops and picks up the amulet. He holds it up in front of his face, examining it with curiosity.

He SMILES a horrible smile.

All seems lost. Melvin attaches the amulet to his belt.

Suddenly, Rosebrook's eyes snap open.

ROSEBROOK

No! You put that down. It's bad luck. Like stepping on cracks.

Melvin tilts his head, confused. Rosebrook has another go.

ROSEBROOK (CONT'D)

The superstitions you worry about are true. All true.

Melvin looks a little uncertain. Not buying it, but certainly a little distracted. His voice, when he speaks, is HORRIBLE.

MELVIN
Trying to trick me.

And he picks up his oversized machete and BURIES IT IN ROSEBROOK. Blood everywhere.

But the distraction has been enough.

Nicole has crept behind him and LEAPS ON HIS BACK with a BATTLE CRY. Melvin shakes her loose and she hits the floor with a bone-breaking THUD.

He towers over her, his shadow plunging her into darkness.

He raises the oversized machete. Nicole is winded. Gasping. She fumbles with something.

She holds up the AMULET.

Melvin pats for it on his belt. Gone.

Blood trickles from Nicole's mouth as it breaks into a snarl.

NICOLE
I cast you elsewhere, you monster.

A wind picks up out of nowhere.

Melvin scowls in rage as a PORTAL opens behind him. A twisting purple vortex to another place, sucking him relentlessly towards it.

His fingers scrabble for a hold, tearing his horrible fingernails to pieces on the stone --

-- but to no avail. His damaged, bloodshot eyes widen.

He loses his grip.

He TUMBLES INTO THE PORTAL

Nicole drags herself to her feet, and starts to walk towards the exit.

Pulling back for a wide shot as the closing music starts to swell...

INT. PORTAL - NIGHT

Melvin howls in rage as he hurtles through a brightly coloured time-tunnel (if we can pull off such a thing without it looking like the opening credits of Doctor Who).

A close-up of his blood stained teeth. His face gurns horribly. Flash-frames of this horrific sight are intercut with:

INT. CINDERELLA'S DRESSING CHAMBER - DAY

Cinderella is approaching the end of her song.

CINDERELLA
--it's not the end of your journey,
but the the beginning of your love.

Her arms are wide, belting these last lines. We've clearly missed a real showstopper of a song whilst we were watching all the blood and gore.

Cinderella screws up her face, pondering the vital question. Song over, she resumes chatting to her Fairy Godmother.

CINDERELLA (OS) (CONT'D)
But, do you think it's maybe, just
one too many bows?

Fairy Godmother blinks. She's clearly rattled by something and trying to front it out.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
If you can't have one too many bows
on your wedding dress where's the
fun of being a beautiful br--

But she stumbles on the word 'bride' and winces horribly, as if beset by a sudden sharp pain

A sudden, visceral interruption--

INT. PORTAL - NIGHT

Melvin's screaming, horrific face as he plummets.

MELVIN
Kill! Kill! Kill!

INT. CINDERELLA'S DRESSING CHAMBER - DAY

Fairy Godmother recoils, trying to withhold her terror.

Cinderella places concerned hands on her shoulders.

CINDERELLA

You had one of your visions didn't you, fairy godmother?

FAIRY GODMOTHER

No, no. Just a spot of indigestion. Too many sweetmeats.

CINDERELLA

You can't fool me. What did you see? Did you see my wedding day? Oh no. I didn't fumble on the words, did I? I've been so worried about doing that. I just want everything to be perfect. I don't want to be spoiling things.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

No dear, it wasn't about your wedding day.

CINDERELLA

I spill something, don't I? I can be such a clumsy goose when I'm excited. Do I spill something and embarrass my sweet prince?

Fairy Godmother gets up from her chair and stumbles a little. Trying to process what she's seen. Cinderella jumps forward to steady her.

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

I don't tread on my veil do I?

The fairy godmother covers her irritation very well. Almost perfectly. Almost.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Please, please my dear, go back to worrying about your bows. I'm going to talk to your stepmother. Will you be wearing those glass slippers to your wedding?

CINDERELLA

Yes, but they're not slippers. Do give my stepmother all the best. She's so very, very good.

INT. DIANA DARKHEART'S CHAMBER - DAY

Diana crows with delight. A proper throw-your-head-back evil villain laugh.

DIANA
Evil! Evil! Evil!

This is a large, opulent chamber in which Diana Darkheart stares at herself in the mirror. She has evolved a little since the early flashback and she's now 100% rocking the fairytale villain look.

The Fairy Godmother stands awkwardly in the back of the chamber.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Yes, I'd say so. Definitely evil

Suddenly, Diana switches to a concerned parent mode. It's almost plausible.

DIANA
Well, that's just horrible. We don't want any terrifying visions of encroaching evil on Cinderella's wedding day. Not that we ever want terrifying visions of encroaching evil but particularly not then.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
He was covered in blood.

DIANA
You mean red symbolic lighting that looked like blood?

FAIRY GODMOTHER
No, actual blood.

DIANA
Like a single drop when you prick your finger on a cursed spindle?

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Well, a bit like that. But lots of it.

Diana ponders this impossibility. Her interest has been thoroughly piqued.

DIANA
Lots of it? I've never seen lots of it.

The Fairy Godmother tiptoes out, and Diana returns her attention to the mirror. She seems a little nervous of it, but irresistibly drawn;

like standing on a cliff edge and edging one step closer to the precipice than is really sensible.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Mirror?

A beat.

Suddenly, her reflection jerks into terrible life. Not so much a reflection, after all, but a dark parallel. If Diana is a pantomime villain her reflection is a genuine, wicked threat.

The reflection is very much Diana Darkheart, but an even worse version. Lets call it DIANA II

DIANA II

Are you ready to do the deed Diana?

DIANA

Yes, shadow self. I'm ready to embrace my destiny.

The Diana in the mirror sneers, unimpressed and unconvinced.

DIANA II

Do you have it in you to finally overthrow the princess and take over the kingdom?

DIANA

Yes. This is my time. This is my moment.

DIANA II

Haven't you thought that a few times previously?

Diana is determined to keep her sense of authority in the face of this upstart reflection, although the occasional flash of worry across her face suggests that she knows that, deep down, the reflection has a point.

DIANA

Shadow self, this time will be different.

The reflection arches a cruel eyebrow. Yes, even her eyebrows are cruel.

DIANA II
 This one doesn't involve
 manipulating and betraying a
 stepdaughter who happens to have
 become a princess?

Busted. Diana looks both angry and ashamed.

DIANA
 Just because a plan involves
 manipulating and betraying a
 stepdaughter who happens--

The reflection is bored.

DIANA II
 You've got something stuck between
 your teeth. It looks like parsley.

Diana goes to speak, then pauses and runs a tongue quickly
 over her teeth. Dislodges something, swallows it, continues
 to protest.

DIANA
 Just because a plan involves--

DIANA II
 Was it parsley?

Diana deflates.

DIANA
 Basil.

DIANA II
 Yum.

Diana eyes her reflection with distrust.

DIANA
 I find this all quite undermining
 to be honest.

DIANA II
 Tell me the scheme this time,
 Diana.

Diana clears her throat. Adjusts her posture. Another attempt
 to retain or regain her authority.

DIANA
 At the exact moment that Cinderella--

-

DIANA II
 (interrupting)
 That's the name of this one, is it?
 Dear God, what is it with you and
 stepdaughters?

DIANA
 I don't--

DIANA II
 And this one's going to work out
 better than the one with the
 mermaid, is it? Or the girl up the
 tower, or the--

DIANA
 Will you keep your voice down? None
 of them realise--

DIANA II
 And yet, no matter how dizzyingly
 unobservant they all seem to be,
 somehow you STILL keep failing?

Ouch. This one sticks in her heart. She stammers to respond
 but it dries up in her throat.

A footstep behind her, and Diana turns with a little
 surprised SHRIEK! What did they hear? Who are they? Anyone
 important?

It's just a FOOTMAN. Diana struggles to keep her composure.

DIANA
 Yes? How can I help?

The footman shifts awkwardly from foot to foot, embarrassed
 to even exist at this point.

FOOTMAN
 The princess is looking for
 reassurance about the number of
 bows on her dress, my lady.

DIANA
 (pure acid)
 Is she, now?

The footman nods, coughs again and exits. Diana stands,
 mortified.

DIANA II
Well, don't let me keep you, evil
genius. Important stuff to do.

SLOW DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. DRESSING CHAMBER - DAY

Cinderella is still examining the dress. She looks up at a
SQUIRREL as it trots across the rafters on the room.

CINDERELLA
Sequins? Few more?

The squirrel shakes its head.

Suddenly there are 3 sharp raps on the chamber door.

Knock knock knock.

Cinderella clasps her hands to her chest.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)
Who is it?

PRINCE CHARMING (O.S.)
It is I, my love.

The door tentatively begins to open until Cinderella throws
her full body weight against it to stop it.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE DRESSING CHAMBER - DAY

The Prince smiles warmly as the door slams decisively shut.
His hand remains on the door handle.

PRINCE CHARMING
Do not be so keen to shut me out.

He notices roses in a vase by the door, and yanks them out,
dripping.

PRINCE CHARMING (CONT) (CONT'D)
I bring you fresh cut roses.

CINDERELLA (OS)
My sweet prince, you cannot come
in. I'm wearing the dress.

PRINCE CHARMING
It would surely be more
inappropriate for me to enter if
you were NOT wearing a dress.

INT. DRESSING CHAMBER - DAY

Cinderella rolls her eyes, utterly charmed.

CINDERELLA
No, my love, I mean...

PRINCE CHARMING (OS)
I know what you mean. And indeed
it's best I do not see it.
Superstition aside, I fear I might
be blinded by your beauty, stumble
and fall. I do not wish to injure
myself before the big day. I'll
leave the roses and my fondest
wishes.

INT. FAIRY GODMOTHER'S CHAMBER - DAY

Fairy Godmother holds her head in pain and screams. This is
another of her visions and its rocking her socks off. She's a
babbling mess.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
He's coming. He's coming here.

She staggers to the crystal ball mounted in the centre of the
room and clasps it in both hands.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT) (CONT'D)
Flip Dippit bippit and Lomey
Donster, teach me how to stop this
monster.

And instantly, like a phone suddenly connecting, Rosebrook's
confused face is staring out of the crystal ball. He's still
covered in blood, and apparently still in the Murder House,
and apparently still dying.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT'D)
Hello?

Rosebrook's eyes widen. He can hear her voice! A miracle!

ROSEBROOK
Is that.. God? Does God wear a
bonnet?

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Oh hello dear. You'll have to excuse me if I look flustered, I'm Cinderella's Fairy Godmother. Who are you, please?

ROSEBROOK

I'm just a guy dying on the floor, and you're just a hallucination.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

No, I'm Cinderella's Fairy Godmother. I was wondering if you could help me. An enormous monster is about to fall out of the sky. I asked my crystal ball to get someone to help me resolve this horrible mess.

Rosebrook coughs blood and smiles thinly.

ROSEBROOK

We had a monster. Got rid of ours.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

I rather think it might be about to turn up here.

ROSEBROOK

Look, if I haven't been clear about this, I'm dying. Can you let me do it in peace?

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Terribly sorry. Can you give me any help at all?

ROSEBROOK

Sex makes him angry. Superstitions make him nervous.

Fair Godmother rummages around for a pen and paper.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Hang on, I'm just getting a pen.

ROSEBROOK

Oh, no hurry.

She bites the top off an Elendir-style biro and starts to write.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Can you say those again...?

EXT. PALACE - DAY

Well-dressed GUESTS bustle towards the castle in pairs. Flitting in and out of the crowd is a man we shall come to know as RAX. He's the Fairytale version of Han Solo. You know the archetype. Rascal with a heart of gold. He's trying to start conversations, without much luck.

RAX

Excuse me good lady-- No? Ok. Sir?
May I trouble you for-- Nope, ok,
coming through. Sir?

This particular guest STOPS DEAD and GLOWERS. He's a massive dude who we shall call BARNEY, accompanied by his girlfriend PENELOPE who is massively out of his league.

Penelope catches Rax's eye, which clearly aggravates Barney still further.

BARNEY

Why are you bothering people? You
don't look like a guest for the
wedding. You look like a
rapscallion.

RAX

My dear, dear sir and radiant lady,
I assure you that I'm not a
rapscallion. Nor a knave, vagabond
or ne'er-do-well. I'm a fine,
upstanding gentleman who happens to
have mislaid his invitation for the
wedding.

BARNEY

Well, we haven't mislaid ours. So
get out of the way. We've nuptials
to attend.

RAX

I understand, I understand. You
must consider your tickets
valuable.

BARNEY

Indeed.

Barney and Penelope walk past Rax.

RAX (TO HIMSELF)

Even more valuable than the solid
diamond anklet I might offer in
exchange.

Rax is fondling a piece of jewellery. It sparkles and shines. It's impossibly beautiful. Solid diamond? Apparently.

Barney stops walking, turns his head and eyes the jewellery.

BARNEY

You aren't seriously offering that
for our tickets?

Rax goes to speak further but is distracted by a distant rumble of thunder. The skies are darkening. It's looking oddly sinister for a fairytale sky.

Rax pulls himself together and refocuses on Barney and Penelope.

RAX

A chance for it, certainly,
certainly. What brave gentleman
could refuse such a chance? A
chance to win such a trophy for his
lady fair?

Penelope eyes the anklet with curiosity. It catches the light beautifully even under the overcast sky.

PENELOPE

It's very beautiful, Barney. It
would look good around my ankle.

RAX

My dear lady, I imagine that your
ankle would have the ability to
make even the drabest trinket look
beautiful. What this would do is
compliment your ankle.

BARNEY

(warning)
Steady.

Rax pauses, assessing whether he has overstepped the flirting mark. He seems to concede that he might have done.

RAX

Yeah, that's fair. So, what do you
say? A wager? You win, you get the
anklet.

BARNEY

And if you win?

RAX

Surely that would never happen. You could outwit me any day of the week. Maybe, just to make the wager official, we could say, your wedding ticket?

BARNEY

(Outraged)

Both tickets?

Rax looks slyly at Penelope.

RAX

I only need yours. Maybe we could leave it to the lady to decide what happens to hers. I propose a game. A fair, balanced, honest game of luck and skill that will be in no way whatsoever rigged.

WHIP PAN TO:

EXT. PALACE GATES - DAY

Rax breezes in through the palace gates with Penelope on his arm, holding out the two tickets to the GUARD who takes them and nods them both through.

In the background, an irate BARNEY is struggling to get to Rax, but being held back easily by security. Penelope regards Rax with curiosity.

PENELOPE

Was that truly a fair, balanced, honest game of luck and skill?

RAX

My dear, I'm a man of uncommon luck.

He kisses her hand with a flourish and they're immediately lost amongst the crowd.

EXT. ELDENIR PALACE - DAY

The palace from the outside. It looks serene enough, with crowds in the surrounding areas gathering for the nuptials, but something is changing in the atmosphere.

Wind whips a few leaves around. Storm clouds start to build.

A FURRY CREATURE strains against the growing wind.

INT. CINDERELLA'S ROOM - DAY

Fairy Godmother glances out of the window at the gathering clouds. She's clearly wanting to get the wedding out of the way as soon as possible.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Ok, Cinders, let's go.

Cinders looks up a little nervously. Flushed and happy.

CINDERELLA
Are you still worried about
something going wrong?

FAIRY GODMOTHER
All we can do is our best.

And, behind her back, she's clasping extensive handwritten notes from her conversation with Rosebrook.

Visible is the heading "Advice about the Bad Thing"

Through the window, we see lightning crackle in the rainless sky.

INT. WEDDING VOWS

And the ceremony is under way.

Prince Charming gasps in a slightly pre-prepared way as he sees his bride being led down the aisle by Diana. He gives the thumbs up.

Cinderella does indeed look lovely, in a ridiculous meringue kind of way.

She takes her place by his side, and the priest looks at the couple.

PRIEST
Good people of Eldenir, today we
celebrate the joining of two young
people in love. Today we--

EXT. MID-AIR - DAY

Free of the portal and screeching into the atmosphere, Melvin plummets towards the earth.

INT. WEDDING VOWS

PRIEST
--remind you of the serious,
binding and ever-after nature of
the vows you are exchanging--

EXT. MID-AIR - DAY

As Melvin's descent continues, the palace is in sight.

Right in the line of descent.

The glass panels in the ceiling glint a little in the Eldenir
sunshine, even despite the thunderclouds.

INT. WEDDING VOWS

Prince C is holding the expensive-looking wedding rings on a
small piece of velvet in the palm of his outstretched hand.

PRIEST
--of any just reason why this man
and this woman should not be joined
in holy matrimony let them speak
now or forever hold their peace

The traditional awkward silence. Cinders and Prince C look
lovingly at one another. The moment holds.

Is that a faint whistling? Perhaps getting louder?

And suddenly the glass ceiling SMASHES and not in a good,
Hillary-gets-elected kind of way. This glass ceiling SMASHES
because Melvin has fallen through it.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Here it comes--

Melvin whistles through the air at impossible speed and SLAMS
INTO THE PRIEST

The Priest is winded and knocked off his feet but seems oddly
unhurt.

Someone SCREAMS, bless her.

Melvin stands up and revs the 'saw.

MELVIN
Bleed!

Prince Charming is offended. He juts out his chin.

PRINCE CHARMING

Beast! Vile beast! I challenge you
to a duel.

Prince unsheathes his ceremonial sword that hangs from his belt. He swishes it back and forth.

PRINCE CHARMING (CONT) (CONT'D)

Very few villains would be
foolhardy enough to gatecrash my
wedding day. I'm not sure what that
weapon your carrying is but it's
certainly doesn't look like a sword
fit for duelling.

Melvin reaches out and grabs the prince's arm and snaps it like a twig. The bone protrudes horribly.

Melvin follows up this move by SMASHING him with the handle of the chainsaw, breaking his nose and knocking him out cold.

Prince Charming falls to the ground, utterly limp. His knees hit the ground first, his face hits second.

Our foul intruder LAUGHS. A horrible laugh. He WHIPS the prone Prince with the spluttering chainsaw, making a horrible crunching sound upon impact.

The wedding rings go rolling out of Prince Charming's hand--

--and are whisked up from the floor by a furtive, opportunist Rax. He looks around to check nobody noticed and then joins the rest of the congregation in running for their goddamn lives..

Cinderella clamps her palms on either side of her face and SCREAMS

CINDERELLA

Someone get a doctor!

INT. RECOVERY ROOM - DAY

Pulling back from a close-up to reveal Prince Charming lying unconscious on the table. His broken arm is at an ALARMING ANGLE. A DOCTOR sees to the Prince, manipulating the arm a little and wincing as they try and get it back into a reasonable-looking position.

Cinderella is at the door. A GUARD is stopping her from entering.

GUARD

It's not a thing for a princess to see.

CINDERELLA

I must insist you let me pass.

She bursts into the room, then backs up a few paces.

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

That is quite upsetting.

GUARD

I tried to warn you.

She waves the guard away and makes her way over to the prince. She waves her hand over his open eyes. No response at all.

CINDERELLA

His eyes are open yet he sleeps?

The attendant nods sadly.

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

Is it witchcraft? Devilry?

DOCTOR

A friend of mine from another land once told me of a condition like this. They called it a coma.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RECOVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Cinderella is sitting in the chair by the Prince's side. Her cat Gurgle sits gloomily at her feet.

CINDERELLA

He'll be fine, Gurgle. Even if he has to dig deep to overcome the...

She loses the unfamiliar word. Gurgle steps in and says it for her.

GURGLE

Coma.

CINDERELLA

Yes. Dig deep to overcome the challenges of the coma.

Diana sweeps into the room.

Cinderella runs to Diana distraught, her eyes pleading and looking for reassurance.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)
Diana? He's going to wake up and
take care of me, isn't he? If I
keep praying?

DIANA
Absolutely. As long as you're
praying, that's all you need do. No
need to take any sort of positive
action.

CINDERELLA
Do I not need to...

DIANA
Cinderella, you know as well as I
do that when you try and DO things
it doesn't go well. Just sit there
and let your radiant beauty nurse
him through his coma.

INT. FAIRY GODMOTHER'S CHAMBER

Fairy Godmother stares into her ornate and cheerful crystal
ball, a look of concern upon her face.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Show me the genre stone.

The mists in the ball begin to clear.

An image of the beautiful crystal we saw at the beginning,
glowing pink. Except there's a tendril of green under the
surface. Like the beginnings of a disease.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT'D)
Oh deary no. Oh no, that won't do.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CINDERELLA'S ROOM - DAY

FG is in a panic. She bursts into Cinderella's room, eyes
wide.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

The genre stone is darkening. It should be beautiful pink, but it looks sort of infected. We need to take action.

CINDERELLA

Is this because of that horrible monsters who hurt my prince?

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Yes. I got some advice from a man in another place. Someone who faced that monster before. His land has different rules to ours, it seems.

CINDERELLA

This man is a warrior?

FAIRY GODMOTHER

More of a survivor. Well, he was while I started speaking to him. If the monster remains at large, the genre stone will darken and our lovely world will become harsher and less forgiving. Much more like the land of the monster.

CINDERELLA

How can we stop this?

FAIRY GODMOTHER

If we could reunite the princesses of Eldenir. Bring them together to touch the genre stone. That much goodness and light. Balance might be restored.

Cinders eyes her Fairy Godmother nervously.

CINDERELLA

Diana says that I get into trouble when I try to do things. I'm much better off sitting and thinking happy thoughts and helping others that way.

Fairy Godmother looks a little frustrated. Clearly the penny should have dropped on this by now.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Yes, well, Diana is clearly--

She stops herself talking. Cinderella looks at her, all curiosity and big eyes.

CINDERELLA
Diana is clearly what?

Fairy Godmother sighs.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Many other people might have come to the conclusion by this point that Diana isn't always looking out for the best for you.

CINDERELLA
(Outraged)
She is my stepmother! Of course she's looking out for the best for me! And I simply cannot do this, Fairy Godmother, you know that. I simply, simply can't.

Fairy Godmother thinks for a moment.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
You won't have to do it alone. He told me of something else. The greatest warrior in their land, the one who defeated the monster in the first place. They got sucked through into our world too.

Cinderella brightens immediately.

CINDERELLA
Oh, how wonderful. A warrior to save the day.

INT. MURDER HOUSE - NIGHT

A flashback to just after we last saw the Murder House. Melvin has just disappeared through the portal. We can see his legs disappearing.

The portal begins to close. Nicole stands up, bloodstained but triumphant. She looks suspiciously more heroic and less beaten in this flashback, almost as if the situation is being viewed through a more optimistic filter.

She turns to tend to her friends--

--and a tendril of light whips out of the closing portal, like that pesky Balrog whip that dragged Gandalf into the chasm--

--and PULLS NICOLE STRAIGHT INTO THE PORTAL as it closes!

INT. CINDERELLA'S ROOM - DAY

Cinderella gasps, shocked and excited.

CINDERELLA

So this mighty warrior! Where has he landed, so he can lead us to victory? I so want everything to be nice and gentle and pretty again.

Fairy Godmother initially seems about to correct Cinderella about the hero's gender, then clearly thinks better of it.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

She-- I mean he is out at the Twilight Forest. I saw it in a vision. There are limits to my magical ability past the edges of this kingdom, but sometimes I get flashes.

CINDERELLA

So, if we can find a brave man to take me out to the other brave man, then I'll be able to do it I think. To save my own brave man.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

And reality.

CINDERELLA

Yes, and reality. We'll reunite the lovely princesses and bring them back here to revert the changes to the genre stone. And we'll all live happily ever after again. But what man would know the path out to the Twilight Forest to retrieve the warrior?

INT. PALACE DUNGEON - MORNING

Cinderella makes her way into the dungeon, gingerly stepping down the stairs. Her ballgown wasn't really built for this.

DUNGEON MASTER

This is the rascalion, princess.
We caught him picking pockets at
the ceremony.

RAX (OS)

Why does everyone assume I'm a
rascalion?

Cinderella gingerly approaches Rax's cell.

CINDERELLA

Why on earth does he smell like
that?

Rax steps into the light and approaches the bars. Handsome,
charming and kind of filthy.

RAX

This is what a lifetime of hard
work smells like, princess. Hard,
honest work in the sunshine.

Cinders wrinkles her nose, unconvinced. Rax smells his shirt,
a little self-conscious.

RAX (TO HIMSELF) (CONT'D)

Plus maybe a little bit of horse
urine.

Cinders winces, unable to process the idea of actually
engaging with this fellow.

CINDERELLA

My Fairy Godmother informs me that
you know the remote lands of
Eldenir. The far shores where the
mermaids dwell. The castles of
Baneford. Is this true?

RAX

I've been around a bit, sure.

CINDERELLA

Could you draw me a map? So the
guards can accompany me on my
journey?

Rax holds out his hands in apology.

RAX

I have no artistic ability.

CINDERELLA
Give me advice to follow?

RAX
Sorry princess. My memory fails me so often. I have to actually see places to remember the details.

CINDERELLA
I aim to retrieve a mighty warrior who can help me reunite the princesses of the realm and bring them home to Eldenir castle.

Rax suddenly looks edgy.

RAX
All the princesses? Including Rapunzel?

CINDERELLA
Of course including Rapunzel.

Rax blinks, thinking. His cogs are whirring.

RAX
To what end?

CINDERELLA
That's none of your business.

RAX
I'll take you. But we need to go as just the two of us.

CINDERELLA
No. That's madness.

RAX
I have a natural aversion to guards. They will destroy our ability to move quietly and undetected. If there's a warrior waiting for us, I can take you to them. For a pardon.

CINDERELLA
Nobody else in the kingdom knows the lands like you do. But I am absolutely not travelling with a thief.

RAX
If you pardon me, I'm not a thief
anymore.

Cinderella goes to complain, but decides this logic fits
after all.

CINDERELLA
Oh, I suppose that's fine then.

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. ELDENIR CASTLE - SUNRISE

Cinderella and Rax prepare to leave on horseback, silhouetted
against the beautiful rising Eldenir sun.

Fairy Godmother appears in a cloud of sparkles, holding a
stack of parchment.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
One more thing, sweet Cinders. This
parchment contains everything I
learnt from the man I spoke to.
Everything about the warrior. And
everything about dark stories.

CINDERELLA
Why would I wish to know about dark
stories?

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Because, without wishing to worry
you dear, if we can't make things
right we might end up living in
one.

Cinderella looks momentarily concerned but then brightens up.

CINDERELLA
No we won't! I'll find the warrior
and the warrior will save the
kingdom reunite the princesses to
fix the damage to the genre stone
and we can all have a happy ending.

Music swells and swoops. Fairytaletastic.

EXT. BROKERSTOWN VILLAGE - DAY

Rax and Cinderella tie up their horses and approach a quaint
little village.

RAX

I love Brokerstown. It's one of the nicest, most inviting places this side of the Warren Line. Kind hearted folk, beautiful women, delicious food...

Cinderella is looking around in concern, while Rax holds his arms out and continues to wax rhapsodical.

RAX (CONT'D)

Oh, the fruit pies. Wonderful, warm crust over--

CINDERELLA

Rax, there's nobody here.

Rax's grin barely falters.

RAX

Nonsense. Right here is Perry the Hair, the greatest barber this side of the--

CINDERELLA

Yes, yes, this side of the Warren Line. I get the point. Introduce me, then.

Rax scoffs and thumps amiably on the little thatched door of the nearest building.

RAX

Perry the hair! I'm here to have my gorgeous locks cut! Perry the hair!

The door swings open, but not in a reassuring way.

Darkness inside. The odd shaft of light through the thatch of the building. Rax is finally less confident. He pokes his head in.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Perry?

CINDERELLA (OS)

Same here...

Rax turns and sees Cinders throwing open the door of a little building across the way. Nobody there. After a cursory glance, she trots down the path to the next building. That door's already open.

INT. DESERTED COTTAGE - DAY

Cinderella pokes her head into the building, illuminated in the doorway like a ghost. The atmosphere is a little spooky.

CINDERELLA
Hello? Anyone?

Rax appears behind her. Peers into the deserted cottage.

There's food on the table, as if the family have bailed with no notice at all.

RAX
Food on the table.

He walks over to the platter and touches it cautiously.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
The plate's still slightly warm.
They haven't been gone long.

He picks a buttered carrot from the plate. Sniffs it. Eats it.

CINDERELLA
Rax! We cannot steal these people's
food! It's not how things are done!

Rax looks hurt. He rummages in his pocket, producing lint and buttons before finding a shiny coin. He puts it onto the table defiantly, and sits down to eat.

RAX
We came to this village with the
intention of paying for our food.
That's exactly what we're going to
do. Would you rather our stomachs
stay empty AND the food rots to
waste on the plate?

Cinders looks a little torn.

CINDERELLA
No, of course not. I just..

Rax gestures to the other chair, and the plate of food in front of it. Grudgingly, she sits and starts to pick at the food.

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)
I haven't seen that type of coin
before. How much is it worth?

RAX

More than these dinners. Dive in.
I'm sure this is a blip. Everything
will be well in the rest of
Eldenir.

CINDERELLA

Yes, everything will be well.

And we pull away from the two travellers sitting at their
table. The sounds get a little less reassuring as we rereat.

They clearly haven't noticed the BLOOD STREAKS across the
floor of the cottage, so we'll refrain from commenting on
them, too.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

Where do you think that brute's got
to?

RAX

He won't be anywhere we're going,
that's for good and certain.
Rapunzel's tower will be the safest
place in all of Eldenir.

INT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER, MAIN AREA- DAY

RAPUNZEL (Dragonfly sunglasses, rat-a-tat speech patterns,
definitely NO purple in the colour palette to keep Disney
lawyers at bay; let's make yellow her signature) giggles to
herself as she hides behind a pillar. She's holding her
breath and trying not to draw attention to herself.

Across the other side of the tower, DROPS OF SALIVA hit the
ground.

Melvin is salivating uncontrollably. Dragging his chainsaw
across the stone floor behind him. Through his broken mouth,
he wetly barks.

MELVIN

Marco.

In a fit of adorable giggles, Rapunzel bursts out a response.

RAPUNZEL

Polo!

She stuffs her hands to her mouth to stifle her happy
laughter.

Melvin grunts animalistically. He's panting under his breath. The contrast between the two is quite horrible.

Rapunzel can't resist blurting.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
I've missed games. Games and parties. Games and parties and dances and-- People. I've missed people. Ever since I did that thing I did when Dad died, and I'm never going to do that again. And hiding behind pillars and trying not to giggle and I'm probably talking too loud and you're gonna find me now eh? Huh?

He's really not so far away now. Creeping down the corridor. Rapunzel sneaks a peek around the wrong side of the pillar and doesn't see how close Melvin is.

And he's really very close.

More saliva hits the floor.

MELVIN
Marco

She shivers with glee that the game is nearly over.

RAPUNZEL
Po--

The rest of the her response is cut off by the TERRIFYINGLY LOUD REVVING of Melvin's chainsaw. He raises it above his head...

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - DAY

The CHAINSAW SOUND echoes through the area. Cinderella and Rax looks up at the tower.

As an aside, the land around Rapunzel's tower looks like springtime. Perfect, beautiful springtime. Each princess on our journey seems to represent a different season, and their environments match this.

CINDERELLA
How do we get up the tower?

RAX
I think the point of the tower is
that we don't.

INT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER, MAIN AREA- MORNING

The chainsaw SLAMS INTO THE STONE FLOOR, spitting sparks.

Rapunzel looks at Melvin. Melvin leers at Rapunzel. The good cheer is evaporating.

RAPUNZEL
That loud revving thing seems like
a really negative thing to
introduce into a party game, like
just incredibly loud and unpleasant
and-- I think you could've hurt me.

MELVIN
Still time.

Rapunzel holds up her hands and starts to back away. Her first real inklings that something seems to be wrong.

Melvin follows, walking steadily and menacingly towards her with every step she takes in retreat.

EXT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - MORNING

Rapunzel appears at the window, clearly understanding that she's under threat but not quite believing it.

RAPUNZEL
Hello? There's a great big guy up
here who seems to be throwing out a
really horrible energy. Hello? Is
there some brave dashing soul out
there who can, like, give me a
hand?

RAX (OS)
Good morning, princess!

Her eyes follow the sound of his voice. Rax is standing at the bottom of the tower.

A hero shot. He'll surely save the day.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
I'm right here, Zel. I've missed
you baby.

Rapunzel blinks in disbelief and horror. She can't believe her eyes.

She stops looking at Rax and addresses the world at large once again.

RAPUNZEL

Is there some different brave
dashing soul out there who can give
me a hand?

RAX

Hey! That's a cheap shot. Tie your
hair to something and jump!

RAPUNZEL

Jump?

RAX

Yes, jump--

Rapunzel JUMPS OUT OF THE WINDOW as Melvin swings his
chainsaw..

RAX (CONT'D)

..after you've tied you'd hair to
something!

Rapunzel falls--

--Rax catches her!

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Zel, you can't do stuff like that
anymore!

RAPUNZEL

I think your days of telling what I
can and can't do are very much over
my young jack-the-lad, you can't
press your agenda of macho can-do
nonsense onto me--

Rax looks down in horror.

RAX

No, not because of my agenda of
macho can-do nonsense. Instead,
it's because the rules of our land
are changing, Zel, and the impact
of catching you has shattered both
of my legs.

And so it is. Rax's legs are broken at some fairly horrifying angles, jutting out shards of broken bone splattered with blood and gobbets of knee meat.

Up in the tower, Melvin spins away like a frustrated Leatherface.

The girls brace Rax between them and exit as fast as possible.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Rapunzel dabs some kind of ointment onto Rax's broken legs. She seems to be doing it deliberately harshly, smiling a little thinly whenever he yelps in pain.

RAX
It's good to see you Zel.

RAPUNZEL
I suppose it's good to see you,
too, Rax.

Rax smiles. Maybe there's a little hope--

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
Y'know, like this. With your legs
broken and in considerable pain.
It's good to see you like this.

Cinderella watches them from a distance, then closes her eyes and wishes.

CINDERELLA
Fairy Godmother! Fairy Godmother!

Poof! Fairy Godmother appears!

Then, weirdly, DISAPPEARS!

Then APPEARS again!

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Ouch, we're right at the limits of
my poofing range. And I'm going to
be poofed out for days after going
this far. Now, how can I help y--

And FG notices Rax's legs and recoils in horror.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT) (CONT'D)
Good Godmother! What on Earth
happened here?

RAPUNZEL

Unfortunately, Rax has very puny legs. Weak legs, like the legs of a toddler or a baby giraffe. Not manly legs at all.

RAX

Hey. My legs are plenty manly.

RAPUNZEL

So manly they break apart like shortcrust pastry after the slightest plummet from a tower--

Rax ignores Rapunzel and focuses his attention on FG.

RAX

Can you fix them?

FG rolls her eyes and cracks her knuckles in preparation.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

I feel more comfortable summoning beautiful dresses and stagecoaches than conducting field surgery but, I suppose--

RAPUNZEL

(Icy sarcasm)

Oh please, he's in so much pain...

And she manhandles his injuries again, causing Rax to YELP in anguish. FG rolls her eyes.

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Herbety durberty debbity dingery, heal this ruffian's horrible injury.

Sparkles and magic! Rax's legs straighten out, much to his obvious relief.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT) (CONT'D)

I'm going to be out of wish reach from here on out, though. Radio silence from here on. So try not to break any more limbs.

RAPUNZEL

That's going to be very difficult indeed for Rax. It's like he's made out of sugar icing, poor little lamb. I'll protect him as best I can.

And Rax SNAPS a little uncharacteristically.

RAX
Oh, piss off, Rapunzel!

And there's that moment again. Like a shift in lighting and mood. FG looks a little worried.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Is that language you'd usually use?
Or a sentiment you'd usually
express?

Rax looks thoughtful and a little guilty.

RAX
Probably not.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
That's a bit worrying.

EXT. TRIBLIN VILLAGE. DUSK.

As dusk falls, Cinderella, Rax and Rapunzel approach a small village of tiny mud huts. The buildings are only at about waist height; these guys are clearly pretty tiny.

RAX
This village belongs to the
Triblin. They're sure to make us
welcome for the night. We'll be
able to camp here.

CINDERELLA
Wonderful! I love the Triblin. Just
adorable little things.

She's barely finished speaking when three brightly-coloured, TRIBLIN waddle into view. Each one about the size of a toddler, they are ridiculously furry and soft-looking, with big beaming smiles and sing-song voices.

TRIBLIN #1
Visitors! Lovely visitors!

TRIBLIN #2
Hello! Hello welcome pretty
visitors!

RAX
Why thankyou. We shan't impinge on
your hospitality for long.

TRIBLIN #1
Do you wish to camp? Tether your
horses and camp for the night?

CINDERELLA
That sounds delightful.

TRIBLIN #3
Yes, tether your horses. Tether the
lovely horses so they can't-

Triblin #1 appears to shoot Triblin #3 a hostile look. It's
kind of hard to tell when they've got no eyes, but it
certainly seems to do the job and Triblin #3 shuts up.

TRIBLIN #3 (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Have a lovely stay.

TRIBLIN #1
Camp wherever you wish.

And the Triblins disappear into the village.

RAX
Let's get unpacking.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRIBLIN VILLAGE. NIGHT.

The three of them sit around a dying campfire. The village is
quiet except for the occasional passing Triblin or whinny
from the out-of-sight horses.

CINDERELLA
Have we made as much progress as
you hoped today?

RAPUNZEL
See, the Triblins are bugging me
like I don't fully trust them and I
try to make the thought go away but
it's like a splinter on a spinning
wheel or a hair clip that simply
can't cope with the huge amounts of
hair that I have to deal with every
day, I mean, I know its NICE to
have nice hair.
(MORE)

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

But they simply don't make hair clips that can cope with the WEIGHT, y'know, so I've taken to making my own because there's really very little else to do up a tower on your own except make sure really sturdy hairclips as, like, a hobby. You have nice hair too, Cinders--

Cinderella holds up a hand to gently stop Rapunzel's mile-a-minute monologue.

CINDERELLA

Right at the beginning of that monologue about hair, you said something about the Triblins?

Rapunzel holds up a 'let me just make my point' finger, and gets up and walks away from the camp fire.

RAPUNZEL

I don't trust them. They are bad beans.

Rax guffaws incredulously.

RAX

The Triblins are the sweetest, most accommodating species in all the Greenworld. They have never lied, never hurt so much as someone's feelings. The Triblins are...

RAPUNZEL (O.S.)

The Triblins are eating our horses.

Whip-pan to the other side of the mud-hut. FIVE TRIBLINS are slathered in blood and chunks of horse.

All three tethered horses have been spectacularly dismantled.

The Triblins freeze guiltily in mid-chew.

CINDERELLA

Oh my God! They've eaten Cedric!

RAX

It must be the genre stone. It must have--

CINDERELLA

(Cold as ice)

Give me your goddamn sword.

Rax just blinks at her.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
NOW.

With a deep breath, Rax tosses his sword to Cinderella.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Hope you enjoyed dinner. Here's
dessert.

She hoists the sword over her head and charges at the Triblins.

She slices the one who was eating Cedric CLEAN IN TWO, spraying green blood in fountains.

The other Triblins turn to her. The ridiculous happy smiles split open..

BARING ROWS OF RAZOR SHARP TEETH.

Cinderella is not impressed.

CINDERELLA (CONT.)
Teeth. Terrifying.

She cleaves another of them in half, splattering green all over herself.

Triblin #3 makes an ULULATING SOUND, clearly sounding the ALARM.

A dozen more TRIBLINS emerge from the mud huts and begin advancing on Cinderella. Sharp talons emerge from blunt furry paws. She's waaaay beyond caring.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
That horse was my friend. Bring it
on, you fuzzy bastards. BRING IT
ON!

With a BATTLE CRY, she runs at them... Sword raised.

WHIP-PAN/CUT TO:

EXT. TRIBLIN VILLAGE. DUSK.

Green stuff everywhere. No visible Triblin survivors, but, sweet Christ, there are chunks of the buggers absolutely everywhere.

Cinderella stands drenched in slime, sword held defiantly over her head.

Rapunzel and Rax are absolutely jaw-drop gobsmacked.

RAX

It seems you have taken your
vengeance.

CINDERELLA

Yes. Yes I have.

RAX

There may be consequences for the
genre stone.

CINDERELLA

They killed my horse.

RAPUNZEL

Cinders! I'm impressed by the whole
warrior queen thing, I mean, I'm
IMPRESSED. Like I was when I saw a
race between a unicorn and a badger
and the badger was all like 'Thank
you for the race, gentle unicorn'
but underneath he wasn't, like,
saying 'Thank you for the race', he
was saying, like really bad stuff,
like he was a REALLY salty badger--

RAX

Your violence will have darkened
the stone. Even further.

CINDERELLA

The stone has already darkened to
the point that the Triblin could
kill. I don't really see how much
worse I could make things by
fighting back.

RAX

(irritated)

Don't you? Don't you really,
princess?

He holds out a small dagger, not dissimilar from a letter
opener, at arm's length.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
If I were to drop this, paying
absolutely no mind to where it
fell, what would the likely result
have been last week?

CINDERELLA
It would probably have been
harmlessly caught by a passing
talking rodent, who would adorably
handed it back to you.

RAX
And last night? With the stone
beginning to darken?

CINDERELLA
It would probably have fallen
without incident to the ground,
hurting nobody.

RAX
And now?

Rax looks back and forth between the two princesses.
Cinderella looks a little uncertain.

CINDERELLA
I'm sure it'll be the same.

RAX
You sure? You sure that you haven't
just tipped the scales? You sure
that this isn't now the sort of
land where the falling knife would
glance off an object and bury
itself in flesh regardless? Where a
passing bird might fly past as it
fell, and knock it into your pretty
eye?

The moment builds. Tension. With an almost imperceptable
shrug, Rax drops the knife.

A GUST OF WIND takes it, and it plunges into the earth mere
inches from Cinderella's feet.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Not yet.

RAPUNZEL
But if we're good? If we're all
nice to each other?
(MORE)

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

If we're all nice and sweet and good and don't slaughter, like loads of Triblin and I don't do the thing I did when my Dad died or use bad swears like that badger would've done about the unicorn, I mean, I think he was going to say something bad about his horn, like, the more I think about it--

RAX

We're dots. We're dust on the breeze. It's not enough. We need to find the other princesses, and fast.

The words hang angrily in the air. Rapunzel can't help but finish her train of thought, albeit under her breath so that the others can't hear.

RAPUNZEL

(Whispers)

--an exceptionally salty badger.

SLOW DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Cinderella's ballgown hangs from the branches of a tree, having been hung out for the night. It sparkles in the moonlight. Next to it hangs a small purse.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

The sun breaks through the clouds.

In the branch, the dress and the purse have both gone.

Cinderella stretches in the morning light. Her undergarments are more modest than most dresses. She rubs the sleep from her eyes. Reaches for the dress, where she expects it to be in the branch.

CINDERELLA

Oh.

EXT. ELDENIR PLAINS - DAY

The group make their way across the plains. Rax's voice bubbles with anger and frustration.

RAX

So we have absolutely no money?

CINDERELLA

No, my little purse got stolen along with my fabulous ballgown. It must be the genre stone. People never used to steal things in Eldenir.

Rax is absolutely speechless at this. He's almost vibrating with frustration.

RAX

Yes they did! Yes, they absolutely did! Why on Earth do you think I was hanging out in your dungeon?

A little shame-facedly, Cinderella attempts to change the subject.

CINDERELLA

How far to the Beast's castle?

RAPUNZEL

Its not far now. If I was to tell a story in my head I'd get up to the bit where everyone is sad and it looks like the baddies are going to win, but not up to the bit where the goodies triumph and it's happily ever after.

Cinderella does some mental arithmetic.

CINDERELLA

So somewhere between an hour and an hour and a half?

RAPUNZEL

That'd be about right, depending on the type of tale. What type of tale is it? An epic tale with a happy ending or a short tale with a happy ending that you'd read to a littl'un to get them to sleep? What type of tale is it, Cinders?

Cinderella blinks at Rapunzel, absolutely lost.

CINDERELLA

I have absolutely no idea, Rapunzel. It's your metaphor.

Rapunzel looks a little taken aback. She's lost her thread, insomuch as there ever was a thread in the first place. She shrugs and tries a different tack.

RAPUNZEL

But the walk will do us good.
Probably uncomfortable if you're
wearing glass slippers, I suppose.

CINDERELLA

No, I'm not wearing them. They
would hardly be practical for cross-
country travel. And they're not
slippers.

RAPUNZEL

I see. I'm sorry, I looked for them
when we set out, but couldn't see
your footwear under your massive
ballgown.

She pauses a moment, lost in thought.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

I suppose a massive ballgown wasn't
entirely practical for cross-
country travel either. Probably
just as well some helpful soul
stole it.

Cinderella looks down at herf clothing, a little cross but
also a little forlorn.

CINDERELLA

Somehow that didn't occur to me.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Rapunzel returns to the campsite from outside the comforting
reach of the fire. She's snapping some long twigs.

CINDERELLA

Where have you been?

RAPUNZEL

Setting little traps. Just in case
there are wild animals or
something. Holes covered in sticks,
that kind of thing. Help us sleep
safer.

CINDERELLA

Where did you learn to set little traps?

RAPUNZEL

My Dad was a huntsman. Before he remarried and tragically died.

Nearby, Rax tends to his horse. Rapunzel notices him. She clearly has problems NOT noticing him. She glances at him coyly, and hisses to Cinderella.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

I really hate that guy. I hate him in a way that feels like its just growing and growing until there's not enough room for it in the hate bit of my mind and it's started, y'know--

Cinderella just blinks at her, a smile playing around her lips. Intrigued.

RAPUNZEL (CONT.) (CONT'D)

--started encroaching on other bits of my mind that aren't even about hate at all.

CINDERELLA

I sense that you have history.

RAPUNZEL

If I were to describe him in one word, it'd be one of those words we're not meant to say because they make the stone go darker.

And here comes the awkward bit that she can't quite bring herself to say.

RAPUNZEL (CONT.) (CONT'D)

But there's an itch.

Cinderella looks a little taken aback.

CINDERELLA

An... Itch?

RAPUNZEL

Well, you know how you wouldn't have been able to kill all the Triblin before things started to change around here? That there was like a--

She wiggles her fingers as she searches for the word.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
--safety catch in place. To stop it happening. Well, the violence safety catch is loosening. And it feels like other ones are too. The one about bad words. And the one about the itch.

Cinderella blinks, looking chaste and noble and like someone who's very, very eager to never acknowledge an itch of any kind.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
You know the itch. The one about what happens beyond Happily Ever After? That's what I want to scratch.

Cinderella blinks again, absolutely determined not to understand under any circumstances.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
I want to hold him down and Happily Ever After him until he can't walk. Even though I hate him. Because I hate him. That's what I want to do and it doesn't feel like there's anything stopping me from doing it anymore.

CINDERELLA
Let me make this absolutely clear. You are utterly, UTTERLY forbidden from Happily Ever Aftering anybody. The parchment that Fairy Godmother wrote for me suggests that-- hang on, where have you gone?

And, yup, Rapunzel appears to have vanished into a tent. The tent appears to be moving around quite a lot.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)
No, no, no. Not good.

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPFIRE - MORNING

The beautiful morning sun rises over the campsite.

Rapunzel and Rax emerge from a tent, looking flushed and suspiciously post-coital.

RAX

I can't believe I'd never thought
of doing that before. It seems so
obvious.

RAPUNZEL

It's the changes in the land. Along
with the perils, it has given us
gifts! Wonderous, fulfilling gifts!

Cinderella views them with some suspicion as she washes her
hair in a pretty stream.

CINDERELLA

What sort of fulfilling gifts?

Rapunzel rushes over and whispers something in Cinderella's
ear.

Cinders whips her head back in horror, spraying water.

RAPUNZEL

I know it sounds like a big step
but it just felt very natural and
right.

CINDERELLA

If we've tipped from our laws,
which would stop you doing that in
the first place, we may have
changed to the laws of the beast's
country.

RAX

Meaning what?

Cinders flicks frantically through the parchment. She
gestures at a paragraph in grim triumph.

CINDERELLA

Meaning you'll be marked.

RAX

For what?

CINDERELLA

For death, you ridiculous horny
fools.

Rapunzel thinks for a moment. Shrugs.

RAPUNZEL

Still worth it. Unbunch your
ballgown, princess. Maybe we can
find a dude to shake that tiara
loose a little bit...

Cinderella reflexively touches her tiara in horror. The
equivalent of clutching pearls.

CINDERELLA

My true love lies unconscious and
you talk of... wait, what did you
say?

RAPUNZEL

Still worth it. Unbunch your
ballgown, princess. Maybe we can
find a dude to shake that tiara
loose a little bit, leave the glass
slippers on someone's floor...

CINDERELLA

And do you think that's something
you would have said yesterday?

Rapunzel looks at her, puzzled. Cinderella flicks frantically
through the guide the Fairy Godmother gave her, which seems
to have a remarkable amount of detail for a parchment. It
even has an appendix. She gasps in horror when she finds what
she's looking for.

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

You're becoming a sarcastic best
friend.

RAPUNZEL

What do you mean?

CINDERELLA

Just yesterday, you were all sweet
and gentle and good and polite. I
mean, you talked a million miles a
minute but the words were kind. But
you're becoming the salty badger!
And you've done things that usually
only happen AFTER the happily ever
after, and even then only by
implication. Rapunzel, I think
you're going to die a truly
terrible death.

Rapunzel blows out her cheeks, considering. She looks hurt,
but defiant. Another shrug.

RAPUNZEL
Guess I'll live first, then.

She holds Cinderella's gaze, angry and disappointed at being judged. She takes Rax by the hand and leads him back into the tent.

RAPUNZEL (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Looks like it's your lucky day,
bent dick.

RAX
(Embarrassed)
Please don't call me bent dick.

And they disappear into the tent.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MORNING

Melvin pulls the corpse of something furry from his chainsaw and cocks his head as if he hears something...

EXT. CAMPFIRE - MORNING

The exterior of Rapunzel and Rax's tent. There's GIGGLING.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MORNING

Melvin shakes his chainsaw in rage.

Spins in an ANGRY DANCE.

MELVIN
Fucking! People are fucking!

He's incandescent with fury. He can smell the sin on the air and he's not happy about it.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - MORNING

The tent is shaking a bit.

Cinderella is having a minor meltdown. She's talking to herself and pacing.

CINDERELLA
None of this is good. Oh my.

And in a PUFF OF SMOKE, a reflection of her Fairy Godmother appears in the water of the stream. She's not there physically, just a reflection. And a faint one.

Seeing as Cinderella was already in the middle of a panic attack, the timing couldn't be worse. First she SCREAMS, then she raises her fists, then she clocks who it is...

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)
Fairy Godmother! You scared the
shit out of me!

Then she clasps her hand to her mouth, horrified by what she's said

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Well. That's not a phrase that I
ever thought I'd hear you say.

There is a rumble of distant thunder.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT) (CONT'D)
Hear that? That's because of your
effing and jeffing. You're making
God cry with your horrible
swearing.

And this is rather too much for poor Cinders. She breaks down a little.

CINDERELLA
I am not making God cry! I'm trying
my best. I'm trying my very very
best and I'd appreciate a little
more--

FAIRY GODMOTHER
I'm completely tapped out of magic,
this is the last thing I have in
the tank for at least another
couple of days. But Cinders, I had
to speak to you. What's going on?
The stone's getting darker and
darker and darker. At this rate
it'll be midnight black before you
even get to the mermaid village--

Fairy Godmother tails off. She's staring at the SHAKING TENT in horror.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT.) (CONT'D)
--and what, pray tell, is happening
in there?

Cinderella takes a deep breath, all ready to lie. She can't find the strength, though. Instead she shrugs.

CINDERELLA
Rapunzel's humping someone.

Fairy Godmother blinks once. Twice.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
You know we're all doomed?

CINDERELLA
Pretty much.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
Well, I hope things go better at the Beast's castle.

CINDERELLA
I should get to the warrior first. Everything's going wrong because I'm having to lead. When we get a strong man to help--

FAIRY GODMOTHER
No, go to the Beast's castle first. It's less than an hour's travel by horse.

CINDERELLA
We haven't got any horses any more. I need you to give me answers.

Fairy Godmother looks somewhat taken aback.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
I'm sorry, you need what--

Desperation is making Cinderella angry and she's losing perspective.

CINDERELLA
I need you to help me! It's your job! You exist to help me--

Ooh, and that's a step too far. FG's face crinkles with distaste. She doesn't push back often but this looks like it might be one of the times she does. A certain steeliness cuts through the avuncular demeanour.

FAIRY GODMOTHER
What's my name?

CINDERELLA
You're my Fairy Godmother!

FAIRY GODMOTHER
(carefully)
No, that's who I am in relation to
you. Who am I as a person? God, I'm
so sick of doing things for other
people. I want to do things for
myself. I want to learn kung-fu.

Cinderella is stumped and stammering. Fairy Godmother repeats
herself slowly and carefully.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (CONT.) (CONT'D)
My magic's almost out. Before the
connection breaks; what is my n--

And the reflection of FG fades and is gone. Cinderella throws
her hands up in exasperation.

CINDERELLA
It's not fair! You never told me!
How am I supposed to know if you
never told me? What should I have
done? Ask?

And she hears the words come out of her mouth and claps her
hand over her traitorous lips. Then, quietly to herself;

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
I should have asked.

Angry with herself, she looks at her own reflection in the
ripples where the Fairy Godmother was visible until moments
ago.

EXT. BEAST'S CASTLE - MORNING

A dim fog hangs in the air as the travelling party of
Cinderella, Rapunzel and Rax approach the Beast's Castle.

Cinderella gingerly opens the gate.

A CROW takes flight, squawking and making her jump.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE, HALL AND CORRIDOR - MORNING

Rapunzel sticks her head around the corner of the hall and
grimaces. She retreats.

RAPUNZEL
We need to have a conversation
about blood.

She bundles the others backwards to stop them entering the room.

CINDERELLA
Tiny delicate droplets of crimson.
I know what to expect.

RAPUNZEL
This is not tiny delicate droplets.

Rax is frustrated.

RAX
Zel, you just walked in and saw
whatever you saw. If you can take
it, I can take it.

Rax turns the corner and looks into the hall.

He PROJECTILE VOMITS.

Rapunzel shakes her head sadly.

RAPUNZEL
You can't take it, Rax.

Rax blinks in disbelief. Composes himself. Looks into the hall again.

Some impressionistic glimpses of CARNAGE in the hall.

He PROJECTILE VOMITS AGAIN.

BEAUTY (O.S.)
Hello?

Cinderella jerks her head towards the sound.

CINDERELLA
She's in the basement.

RAX
Dungeon.

Cinderella looks at him, confused.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Sinister castles don't have
basements, they have dungeons.
(MORE)

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Just like torture chambers don't
have breakfast bars.

RAPUNZEL
What do you call a breakfast bar in
a torture chamber?

RAX
I don't know, Zel, what do you call
a breakfast bar in a torture
chamber?

They stare at one another for a long beat.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Oh sorry, I thought you were
setting up a joke.

BEAUTY (O.S.)
Hello?

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE, DUNGEON - MORNING

The team tiptoe down the stone steps into the dungeon. They
are looking around, terrified that something will leap out of
the darkness...

A SCREAM--

--and BEAUTY emerges from the darkness. Just for a split
second she looks terrifying, just long enough to foreshadow
and give the audience a shiver.

There are tiny droplets of crimson splattered across her
pale, startled face.

BEAUTY
Everyone's dead, aren't they?

Rax looks down at himself, confused.

RAX
I'm not dead.

RAPUNZEL
I think she meant--

BEAUTY
Everyone here. That's what I meant.
Everyone here is dead. He killed
them. The beast killed them.

Cinderella looks around nervously.

CINDERELLA
Where is he?

BEAUTY
He's asleep.

CINDERELLA
Ok, well, let's get out of here
before he wakes up.

INT. DIANA DARKHEART'S CHAMBER - DAY

Diana is deep in meditation, eyes glassy. She's looking in the mirror.

DIANA
Show me.

Her reflection suddenly bucks and changes. That horrible snarl crosses the face of the reflection whilst Diana's own expression remains impassive.

DIANA II
First tell me why.

DIANA
I'm concerned for my stepdaughter.

DIANA II
Which one? Honesty, now.

Despite the trance, Diana bristles. How dare this reflection cross-examine her?

DIANA
Both.

DIANA II
Both?

Even more irritation.

DIANA
All.

The reflection smiles a horrible, crooked smile. We see flashes of ALL THE PRINCESSES - momentary, fleeting.

DIANA II
Good. It's good to care about
family.

And the mirror shows flashes of--

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE, CORRIDOR - MORNING

The travelling party make their way down the corridor.

Every time Beauty glimpses blood or carnage, she reacts very strongly. Eyes wide in horror. The reality of the new world rules are still clearly very fresh for her.

BEAUTY

Oh god, they're all dead.

RAPUNZEL

Cover your eyes. There's no need to look.

But Beauty is pointing at a corpse in horror.

BEAUTY

That was Mr Bunty. He was the head chef. He was always kind to me. But the Beast's terrible rages, just-- Oh god, poor dear Mr Bunty.

RAPUNZEL

Please. Cover your eyes. Seeing this won't help.

Rapunzel takes Beauty's arm. The travelling party are all tip-toeing, jumping at every noise in the castle.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE, HALL - MORNING

As the group step out into the hall, Beauty pauses. A hand across her eyes, an arm extended delicately to steady herself.

BEAUTY

Who are dead in this room?

Cinderella looks around. It's hard to tell. Mostly just blood and bits.

She picks up a SEVERED HEAD in a helmet.

CINDERELLA

Soldiers.

BEAUTY

What army? Whose crest is on the helmet?

Cinderella wipes the blood off the helmet. There's an etching of an animal beneath.

CINDERELLA

There's a picture of a bear on the helmet.

BEAUTY

A bear? Oh no. How many helmets like that are in the room?

Cinderella counts as she looks around the room, pointing at out-of-sight bodies as she counts. It looks like she's going to stop at about six...

...but no. She speeds up.

CINDERELLA

Twenty-three.

BEAUTY

Oh dear.

RAX

Oh dear what?

BEAUTY

Those are Hayden the Bold's men. The beast has slaughtered twenty-three of Hayden the Bold's men. Which means there'll be reinforcements any minute.

HAYDEN THE BOLD (O.S.)

Or they're already here!

There he stands, in the doorway of the great hall! Eldenir's most accomplished soldier HAYDEN THE BOLD! All armour and cheekbones.

A small ARMY of men stand behind him, just waiting to charge into the room.

Hayden looks to the left. Gasps. Looks to the right. Gasps.

Looks up. A gobbet of GORE lands right in his eye.

HAYDEN THE BOLD (CONT'D)

There are bits of my men everywhere! I didn't even know they could come apart like that. I demand satisfaction. I demand vengeance!

Rax strides forward, ready to blather and bluff.

Beauty has literally curled into a ball.

BEAUTY
It's waking up.

Rapunzel looks around, terrified but hopeful.

RAPUNZEL
It is? Will it save us?

Beauty looks her straight in the eye. Her face is contorting.
TRANSFORMING. Her voice, suddenly, is an animalistic roar.

BEAUTY
If you stay out of its way.

And she stands, contorting.

Rapunzel blinks in disbelief.

Beauty twists, almost SNAPPING herself. Her transformation isn't into a loveable lion-creature. It's more like one of the demons in The Evil Dead.

Rapunzel whispers in dumbstruck horror.

RAPUNZEL
I'll stay out of its way. I'll properly be elsewhere.

And with a chilling SCREECH, Beauty takes to the air. As she levitates, her face splits open into an impossibly wide smile.

Impossibly wide and impossibly toothy.

It is now BEAUTY BEAST, and it screams a challenge.

BEAUTY BEAST
Hayden! Are you so very bold?

HAYDEN THE BOLD
Yes, foul creature, I am.

BEAUTY BEAST
And where, pray tell, does such boldness come from?

HAYDEN THE BOLD
My heart.

And Beauty Beast FLIES across the room and wraps her legs around Hayden.

He falls-

-and she unleashes furiously upon him! Screeching and screaming as her impossibly sharp talons scratch relentlessly at the metal of his chestplate.

Impossibly, BURROWING THROUGH LIKE A DRILL--

--and PUNCTURING into the soft body beneath.

Hayden's jaw drops in horror as, with a sickening CRUNCH:

Beauty Beast rips out his HEART and holds it aloft.

Her jaw distends and she eats it in a single gulp while Hayden, his light fading, watches.

He dies. She burps.

The soldiers crowding the entrance watch in disbelief. For a moment, it looks like they might just turn and run. A visible SNOTTY SOLDIER steps into the power vacuum and grips his halberd tightly.

BEAUTY BEAST

Yum. More.

SNOTTY SOLDIER

Charge!

And the soldiers POUR INTO THE ROOM. Beauty Beast cricks her neck, meaning business.

She SCREECHES and flies into the fray!

Huge SHOWERS OF BLOOD as Beauty Beast dismembers the oncoming masses. She moves with impossible speed.

A GURNING SOLDIER swings a heavy, battle-stained ax at her. His aim is good, but--

--by the time the ax reaches where she WAS, she's round the back of him. Just impossibly quick.

She pulls his head from his shoulders, straight off. Rapunzel watches dumbstruck, unsure of how to even respond.

RAPUNZEL

I can't process that at all.

CINDERELLA

Just cover your eyes and sing a song.

RAPUNZEL
Yes, sing a song. What a lovely
idea.

Rapunzel, Rax and Cinderella all close their eyes, affix
false smiles and sing a cheerful melody.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
(Singing)
Every day is different here, but
every day is nice--

CINDERELLA
(Singing)
The day is simply what you make it--

A geyzer of blood hits Cinderella. A whole bunch of it goes
in her mouth. Somehow she reaffixes her fake smile

RAX
(Singing)
And if you have a happy heart--

RAPUNZEL
(Singing)
Even tricky challenges can't break
it--

Flashes of Beauty Beast punching a hole through a SMELLY
GUARD's face. Some of the FLYING DETRITUS hits Rapunzel. She
instinctively wipes it from her dress and gags.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)
Brain. I think that's brain on my
dress. I think it's thinky gunge. I
think its thinky gunge.

RAX
(Hissing)
Just keep singing

But Rapunzel's rather past that point. It's turning into
hysterical shouting.

RAPUNZEL
(Shouting)
There's thinky gunge on my dress!
There's thinky gunge on my dress!

CINDERELLA
(Singing)
The sun rises every morning and
says hello to my sleepy face--

RAPUNZEL

Brains! It's brains! It's brains!
It's brains!

RAX

(Singing)

The day is simply what you make it--

BEAUTY (O.S.)

It's alright.

The music stops instantly. Cautiously, the other trio open their eyes.

My God, that's a lot of blood and entrails.

Beauty is Beauty again. Soaked in blood but otherwise her usual self. She beams.

BEAUTY (CONT'D)

All finished.

RAX

Many thanks.

RAPUNZEL

(Muttering sing-song)

Every day's a lovely gift of fun

SLOW DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. TWILIGHT FOREST - AFTERNOON

The little travelling party are entering a stretch of forest. It looks stunning; kaleidoscopic light dances through the branches of the trees and gentle birdsong fills the air.

CINDERELLA

We're here! At last, we can meet
the warrior from another land and
he can take us to victory! Just
past Humming Rock and on towards
the--

Rapunzel looks worried, and reluctant to impart the reason as to why. She points gently ahead.

RAPUNZEL

Cinders, I think--

Cinderella follows her gaze. She's pointing at a figure lying slumped by what is presumably Humming Rock. There's an awful lot of blood. The figure is moving, but not much.

It's Nicole.

CINDERELLA

Oh no no no...

She runs to Nicole and takes hold of her hand.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Do you know where the warrior from
another land is, sweet maid? I'm so
sorry to ask when you're--

Nicole coughs blood. It splatters against Cinderella's face. It clearly hurts Nicole to speak. She fights to get the words out through a terribly broken body.

NICOLE

I fought a monster. Beat it. Ended
up here anyway.

CINDERELLA

Then it's you! You're the warrior--

And Nicole starts crying. Sobs at the injustice of it all.

NICOLE

I beat him. It's so unfair. Why am
I here? Dying here where nobody
cares--

Her eyes start to lose focus. Cinderella fights against growing emotion.

CINDERELLA

I care. You're an incredible
fighter. A powerful warrior. A
powerful woman.

Nicole is clearly dying. She reaches up a bloodstained hand and strokes Cinderella's cheek.

NICOLE

You look like a princess. I used to
have princess parties as a kid.
Tell me a story.

CINDERELLA

I don't know--

NICOLE

Please.

Cinderella cradles dying Nicole, and starts to tell a story.

CINDERELLA

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who would grow up to be the bravest warrior in all the land. She was beautiful and wise, and she liked to have princess parties, and she beat the terrible monster that invaded her land. And everyone clapped and cheered--

Rax places a gentle hand on her shoulder. She looks up to Rax and down to Nicole.

Nicole is dead.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)

(Whispers)

And she lived happily ever after.

And gently she places Nicole on the ground. Kisses her forehead and sits in quiet heartbreak.

After a long, long beat, she turns to the others.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)

I can't do this.

RAPUNZEL

(Firmly)

You can.

CINDERELLA

Not all on my own.

BEAUTY

You're not.

SLOW DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. MERMAID LANDS - EVENING

Rax holds up a map and squints at it. He tries holding it the other way up. It's possible that he isn't the greatest map reader in the world.

Cinderella consults the Fairy Godmother's notes with a fair amount of concern.

RAX

We're nearly at the aquatic kingdom. It's underwater but the entrance is in that village. There's a magical lake. It's meant to be quite beautiful.

SLOW DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. MERMAID CAVE - NIGHT

Rapunzel walks to the shore of the lake and looks out wistfully across it. It's spooky, sure, but it's still beautiful.

Beauty heads towards a body lying face down on the ground. She turns it over.

The NOT-CORPSE's face is ripped and covered in sucker marks.

The not-corpse starts SCREAMING.

When he screams, blood SQUIRTS COPIOUSLY out of the centres of the sucker marks. Beauty recoils.

BEAUTY

Who did this to you? It looks really unpleasant.

NOT-CORPSE

Little Gregory!

And the not-corpse shudders, judders and drops face-first back onto the ground. A corpse now, finally.

BEAUTY

Who is Little Gregory?

Cinderella glances nervously at the LAKE. It glitters in the moonlight.

CINDERELLA

(Whispers)

It couldn't be.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MERMAID VILLAGE - DAY

Flashback time!

Ellem frolics in the water with an adorable animated OCTOPUS. They're dancing and singing while Cinderella stands on the shore, clapping and twirling to the beat.

ELLEM

(Lip movement + subs)

Good friends who stick together

LITTLE GREGORY

(Singing)

Arm in arm through all kinds of
weather

Little Gregory rubs himself affectionately against Ellem's face. She laughs. It clearly tickles.

ELLEM

(Lip movement + subs)

Oh, Little Gregory, you're the
cutest.

Little Gregory blushes.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. MERMAID CAVE - NIGHT

Rapunzel has waded out into the waist-deep water, reaching for a beautiful, rainbow-hued shell.

The water starting to ripple. Something is stirring.

Cinderella is panicking.

CINDERELLA

Get away from the water, Rapunzel!

Rapunzel spins, baffled.

RAPUNZEL

What should I be scared of?

CINDERELLA

Little Gregory...

Her eyes go wide, watching something that the camera stubbornly refuses to show us for a moment. Her jaw drops and her face pales.

CINDERELLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

...got big.

Finally the camera relents and shows us what Cinders is freaking about.

Rapunzel is framed by massive, towering tentacles emerging from the lake. LITTLE GREGORY's eyes stare at her from the lake. He could easily reach her and snatch her up.

He DOES. One tentacle whips around her feet and drags her into the air.

Cinderella runs forward to help--

--but a GRUFF VILLAGER grabs her and pulls her away to stop her intervening.

Beauty grabs a sword from the not-corpse and SCREAMS a battle-cry.

EXT. MERMAID VILLAGE - NIGHT

Little Gregory is scattered sushi. Huge blubbery chunks of ex-octopus.

Beauty stands in the middle of the torn up cephalopod wreckage, so absolutely soaked in blood that she's entirely red except for her sad, mad eyes.

BEAUTY
(whispered)
Giant sushi.

And then comes the SCREAM

--and a quivering, accusing finger. It's ELLEM, with her long hair mad and tangled, pointing accusingly at Gregory's slayer. She is silent, seething RAGE personified.

Beauty looks at the chunks of octopus and the penny drops.

BEAUTY (CONT'D)
Don't they just turn into two if
you cut them in half?

She looks momentarily concerned. Something stuck in her mouth. She spits out a chunk of octopus and corrects herself.

BEAUTY (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Oh no, my mistake. That's worms.

Cinderella approaches the scene with no small amount of horror. She turns her attention from the bloodbath--

--to the mermaid surveying the carnage from the shadows.

CINDERELLA

Ellem? That's your name isn't it?
Do you remember me?

Ellem eyes her with suspicion. She emerges from the water and her TAIL MORPHS INTO HUMAN LEGS.

She gestures to her mouth and shakes her head. Her eyes are burning with rage.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

You can't speak?

RAPUNZEL

She wapped her voice for those legs, I think. A seagull flew up to the tower and told me the story. I wasn't sure about whether it was true, though, because seagulls lie a lot. Not as much as pigeons, though, pigeons are absolute lying sacks of--

Cinderella does her best to ignore Rapunzel's rambling and keeps her focus on Ellem.

CINDERELLA

You're one of the princesses of the kingdom though?

Ellem looks disgusted.

BEAUTY

One of the stepdaughters of Diana Darkheart? Like us?

Ellem nods cautiously. This is clearly news to Cinderella.

CINDERELLA

What do you mean one of the stepdaughters? I mean she's my stepmother but--

Cinderella looks back and forth between the other princesses.

She's staggered. Utter disbelief.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

She's your stepmother too? Zel?

Rapunzel nods.

RAPUNZEL

We're pretty estranged at this point but on paper I guess, yeah, Dad married her and stuff.

The moment hangs in the air.

RAX

If its any consolation, she isn't my stepmother.

CINDERELLA

None whatsoever.

RAX

Worth a shot.

Cinders spins to Ellem and throws out a hand.

CINDERELLA

Join us? The broken stepdaughters of Elendir? We can join together and fix things? Make things right?

Ellem DIVES INTO THE WATER...

...surfaces once more holding LITTLE GREGORY'S HEART.

She points at the heart as it oozes blood down her arm.

Points at her own heart.

Turns that hand around and GIVES CINDERELLA THE FINGER.

RAPUNZEL

Awesome. Cheers sis. See you next Tuesday.

And Ellem DIVES BACK under the surface and is GONE.

Cinderella sighs.

CINDERELLA

Let's go make camp and bask in our glorious successes.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The team sit around a flickering campfire. Cinderella stares moodily into the flames, her face showing a mixture of desperation and utter defeat.

CINDERELLA

What is it with our dads? All our mothers are impossibly perfect paragons of virtue and they're all dead, ok, fair enough, but why do our dads all fall in love with these evil, corrupt women--

RAPUNZEL

Actually, they were all the same evil, corrupt woman.

Rapunzel gets up and starts walking to the edge of the circle of light provided by the campfire.

CINDERELLA

Oh yeah. She was busy. Busy with widowers, that woman.

As Cinderella muses to herself, Rapunzel suddenly freezes. She's stock-still, peering into the darkness outside of the circle of the firelight. Trying not to even breathe. She hisses a warning.

RAPUNZEL

Shut up.

CINDERELLA

I beg your pardon? Just because you've got cool hair and--

RAPUNZEL

(hissing, urgent)
He's here.

Cinderella blinks, taking a moment to take it in. She panics, freezes, starts breathing heavily, then tries to regulate it.

As her loud breathing subsides, we hear DIFFERENT BREATHING building up instead.

In the darkness by the edge of the campfire, we can see a familiar figure. It's Melvin, looking more dangerous and insane than ever. He SMILES, teeth glistening in the flickering firelight.

RAX

We need to run.

MELVIN

Too late.

And Melvin lunges out of the darkness, his blade WHISTLING DOWN THROUGH THE AIR.

There's a sickening SLICING NOISE and RAX'S LEFT HAND HITS THE FLOOR, twitching.

Rax screams and the Princesses SCATTER.

Melvin looks down at Rax, who is on his knees and losing blood at considerable speed.

RAX
Finish me off.

MELVIN
No.

Melvin just blinks impassively, watching Rax begin to bleed out. He calls out into the darkness.

MELVIN (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Come and save him! Or let him die!

He laughs his horrible gurgling laugh, illuminated by the flickering fire. Like a demon from hell.

Blood continues to pour out across the scrappy ground.

Suddenly, a SHOUT.

RAPUNZEL
You're nothing! You're a disgusting dribbling wreck. You can't even kill a defenceless girl.

She steps into the circle of light, goading Melvin.

RAPUNZEL (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Think you're so scary? Come and get me!

RAX
Zel, no!

A moment's indecision between chasing Rapunzel and watching Rax bleed out. Melvin suddenly decides and LUNGES after her.

He pursues her out of the circle of firelight.

Cinders and Beauty rush forward to tend to Rax's wounds.

EXT. WOODLANDS - NIGHT

A pursuit through the woods. Rapunzel running in her impractical dress. Melvin in pursuit, wielding his chainsaw.

MELVIN
You will DIE!

RAPUNZEL
Yeah maybe, but I got you away from
Rax.

Rapunzel ducks under a tree branch and stands on the opposite side of it, holding up a middle finger on each hand.

Melvin runs RIGHT INTO IT, knocking him off his feet.

Taking advantage of the moment, Rapunzel GRABS the chainsaw off the floor.

She holds it out. Pulls the cable to try and start it.
Melvin's eyes absolutely light up with delight.

MELVIN
Do it! Do it! Kill me with it!

He stands up and strides towards her. Presses himself against the blade.

Rapunzel digs deep --

-- gives a little shriek and drops the weapon. She is so not ready for that. Not yet.

Melvin lets out a horrifying peal of LAUGHTER and delightedly picks his weapon back up again.

He rushes forward--

--and his foot PLUNGES INTO ONE OF RAPUNZEL'S LITTLE TRAPS.

There's a horrible SNAP and he falls to the ground.

Rapunzel smiles, plan complete.

RAPUNZEL
Not today.

Melvin howls with fury, and Rapunzel RUNS.

SLOW DISSOLVE:

EXT. ELDENIR PLAINS - DAY

Cinderella, Rapunzel, Beauty and Rax make their way across the plains once more.

CINDERELLA

There's another lost princess. The sleeping princess. She's a day's travel from here, but if we could wake her with the kiss of fellowship, our numbers may yet be enough.

INT. SLEEPING BEAUTY'S CASTLE - DAY

A huge ornate corridor, sparkling with gems in the sunlight. Our tribe of battered heroes drag themselves up the corridor towards some steps.

Atop the steps is a single immaculately crafted bed, upon which sleeps the beautiful princess we saw in the prologue.

It takes a long while to traverse the corridor.

The music swells and dies, wrongfooting the audience is to how close to completion the journey is.

On it drags. The music dies away again.

The four trudge onwards.

RAX

Fucking hell.

RAPUNZEL

That's one of the words that makes the genre stone all cloudy and you know it. How could you be so thoughtless?

RAX

Does it matter at this point?

RAPUNZEL

Suppose not. Fucking hell.

They climb the steps towards the single ornate bed.

Light dapples across the face of SLEEPING BEAUTY as the strings soar.

Cinderella kisses her stepsister's forehead.

A moment frozen in time. Will the princess wake?

Cinderella checks Sleeping Beauty's pulse and shrugs.

CINDERELLA
She's just dead.

The party stare at the dead princess for a long beat, before beginning the long walk back down the corridor.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Another night's camping. Everyone is incredibly depressed.

CINDERELLA
We have no horses, no money and
we're several days travel outside
the Fairy Godmother's teleportation
limitations.

Rax look over to Cinderella, resigned and sad that there's something he needs to address. He moves closer to her around the campfire.

RAX
I was waiting for a moment when
everyone was happy because I need
to tell you something.

CINDERELLA
Everyone is not happy.

RAX
Yeah, I know. I figured that the
moment of everyone being happy
isn't likely to happen in the near
future, so if everyone's sad anyway
I might as well just blurt it out.
Because its sort of good, but to
get to the good bit we need to go
through a bit where you get really
angry with me.

CINDERELLA
And what is it you need to blurt?

RAX
I've got your wedding rings. Well,
I'll have them soon.

Cinderella's face lights up, just briefly.

CINDERELLA
I thought they were lost forever!
But how did you--

And then it drops as she realises.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
You stole them. You stole my
wedding rings. On my wedding day.
And you kept them in your filthy
pocket all this time even though we
desperately need coin--

RAX
They're not in my pocket, I'm
afraid. When I got arrested at your
wedding I took rash action so I
could hang onto them during my time
in the jail cell.

Cinderella's processing. She's beginning to understand but
can't bring herself to do so. She mimes swallowing something,
dumbstruck.

Rax nods.

CINDERELLA
And now...

She tails off, miming an object passing through the body with
a sweeping motion. Rax nods. She's horrified.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Still? It's been five nights!

RAX
I eat a lot of dairy products and
high fat meats. My guts are at a
standstill most of the time. It
could have been up to a couple of
weeks, to be honest.

CINDERELLA
But the rings will be arriving
tonight?

Rax contemplates what his stomach is telling him. There's a
gentle gurgling sound.

RAX
I suspect so. At least one of them.

Cinderella nods angrily. She's all business from here on in.

CINDERELLA
Ok, Rax. I'll make this as clear as
I can. I want you to rummage
through your shit and find my
wedding rings that you stole.
(MORE)

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

I want you to wipe them off as best
you can and trade them for horses
for the three of us.

RAX

The three--

CINDERELLA

Yes, the three of us. Myself, Zel
and Beauty will ride for the castle
and you can stay right here and
burn in whatever passes for the
hell of your own retched
conscience. And if I ever see you
again, I swear to God, I'll take
whatever the consequences are for
the genre stone and I will kill
you. Are we clear?

Rax opens his mouth to protest, then closes it again and
nods.

CINDERELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Good. Promise me you'll leave us
alone forever.

RAX

(Heartbroken whisper)

I promise

CINDERELLA

Now get the hell out of my sight.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LATRINE - MORNING

Dirty fingers pulling apart a chunk of shit. There's a
glittering wedding ring within.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

Rax turns up in the breaking morning sunlight.

He has four horses with him. Cinderella looks up from the
spent fire and gives him a withering look.

CINDERELLA

A horse for you too? Where are you
going with it?

RAX
I still want to--

CINDERELLA
Get out of here before Rapunzel
sees you.

RAX
What will you tell her?

CINDERELLA
You really think she'll have a hard
time believing that you just let us
down and split to save yourself?

Rax opens his mouth to protest, but reality dawns.

RAX
No, I don't think she'll have
trouble believing that at all.

CINDERELLA
Goodbye.

RAX
Goodbye.

With one last glance at Rapunzel's tent, he spurs his own
horse and is GONE.

Cinders reaches out to one of the horses, and strokes its
face.

Rapunzel emerges from her tent. She catches Cinderella's
look.

RAPUNZEL
(Resigned)
Lay it on me.

INT. ELDENIR STONE CHAMBER - SUNRISE

Diana stares at the stone.

Tendrils of black creep across the remaining pale areas. The
stone is almost completely darkened. She smiles, contented.

DIANA
The rules were always wrong. Those
old rules. The game was fixed.
(MORE)

DIANA (CONT'D)

The idea that a person with a flexible moral centre and a desire to achieve change in the kingdom, real change, would be stymied by a reality pre-disposed towards moral purity. But now the stone is nearly black, and my time is fast appoa--

GUARD

Ma'am. Princesses are approaching.

DIANA

Princesses?

GUARD

Yes ma'am. Your stepdaughters.

DIANA

All of them?

GUARD

(Stammering)

Some. Some of them. I'm not sure. I lose track. You've just been so very busy with widowers.

Diana scowls a little--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DIANA DARKHEART'S CHAMBER - DAY

--Diana staring into the mirror.

DIANA

My stepdaughters have returned. I'm not sure as to the best--

The reflection animates with wicked life; twisting and gurning with excitement.

DIANA II

Kill them.

DIANA

Just like that? I usually prefer a convoluted plan, or a spell, or something with a woodsman or an apple--

Diana II shrieks with ecstasy and fury.

DIANA II
You have an army at your disposal.
Kill them! Kill them!

A beat. Diana's eyes are like mirrors. Suddenly, she twists her own frame in response to her mirror self.

DIANA
Yes!!!

EXT. ELDENIR CASTLE - SUNRISE

The princesses get a hero shot moment.

Cinderella leads the way. All three on horses, lit by the beautiful sunrise.

They pause at the outskirts of the castle grounds.

CINDERELLA
That's odd, the castle doors are
locked. I've never seen them locked
before.

Beauty glances around nervously.

BEAUTY
Maybe the neighbourhood isn't what
it used to be.

CINDERELLA
No matter.

Cinderella takes a couple of steps back from the huge oak doors. She clears her voice and calls out.

She tries to summon a cheerful, triumphant demeanour.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)
People of Eldenir castle! Your
princesses have returned! We're
here to bring joy and love and
laughter to every boy and girl in
the land. We will turn the genre
stone back to joyous pink and
we'll...

There's a rumble. Cinderella shields her eyes from the glare of the rising sun. The sky is darkening.

Because its full of ARROWS, heading in the general direction of the princesses.

Beauty yells, with authority but no fear.

BEAUTY

Incoming!

The princesses SCATTER. Well, Cinderella and Rapunzel run in opposite directions. Beauty stands stock still, as if listening to the wind.

The castle doors open, and a number of GUARDS pour out and start running towards the princesses.

Beauty doesn't move.

Another moment. Two more. She positions her body just so to avoid the rain of arrows around her.

THUD THUD THUD they hit the ground, not even grazing her.

She cracks her knuckles and flexes her neck.

BEAUTY (CONT'D)

Time for a makeover.

She smiles at her own joke and the smile just keeps going, ripping at her face as she becomes Beauty Beast.

Two arrows are heading for her at horrifying speed.

She grabs the two arrows out of the air and propels herself towards the GUARDS that are now streaming out of the castle.

She wraps her legs around an approaching UNFORTUNATE GUARD and drives the arrows DEEP INTO HIS EYES in one fluid movement.

Another guard looks on in horror; he doesn't like the look of that at all.

SWEARY GUARD

Fuck that.

He turns and RUNS. Beauty pulls one of the arrows out of the Unfortunate Guard's eyes and flings it like a dart.

It goes straight through Sweary Guard's neck, and he falls to the ground twitching and spraying blood.

DIANA (O.S.)

Hey, beautiful!

Beauty Beast spins and sees Diana standing in front of the castle. She's holding her arms open, palms upwards.

DIANA (CONT'D)
Let your friends run in fear.
You're cut from different cloth,
aren't you? Torn out one too many
livers to play the helpless
princess.

Beauty Beast stops her rampage and stares at Diana. The guards around her hang back, waiting to see which way the tide will turn.

Diana looks at her with fascination.

DIANA (CONT'D)
You can hear it, can't you? The
genre stone as it blisters and
darkens? You can hear it singing
out to you.

She extends an arm, offering alliance.

DIANA (CONT'D)
Would you like to join me? I think
you're more my side than theirs.

Beauty Beast blinks once. Twice.

Then CHARGES IN DEFIANCE towards Diana.

But the pause has bought the soldiers time. They throw a WEIGHTED NET over Beauty Beast, which brings her struggling to the ground.

Trapped under the weight, she hisses like a trapped tiger.

DIANA (CONT'D)
Oh well, never mind. Take her to
the dungeon.

She casts a distracted eye around as the GUARDS drag Beauty away. Diana sees Rapunzel hiding behind a wall some distance away. But then she sees something else, and a smile plays around her lips.

DIANA (CONT'D)
I don't think I'll have to worry
about that one for long.

Rapunzel follows Diana's gaze and freezes in horror.

Standing across the field, staring right at her, is MELVIN. He holds his chainsaw aloft and SHRIEKS in delight at seeing his prey.

Rapunzel freezes. Fight or flight. Flight wins and she RUNS, with Melvin in hot pursuit.

Diana yells out across the battlefield.

DIANA (CONT'D)

You can't win, Cinderella. I have no idea why you ever thought that you could.

Cinderella is hunched behind a wall on the other side of the battlefield, crying. Her defiance has cracked.

CINDERELLA

She's right. She's right.

Diana smiles, knowing that Cinderella has crumbled. She swirls her cape in villain-style as she heads back into the castle.

INT. PALACE DUNGEON - DAY

Beauty has been manacled to the brick wall of the dungeon. Her Beast side has subsided, except for occasional flashes of monstrousness across her face.

Diana strides into the room. Looks at Beauty, and walks over to the ornate mirror hanging on the opposing wall.

BEAUTY

Why does a torture dungeon have a mirror?

DIANA

Sometimes I need time to reflect.

Diana walks over to the mirror. Diana II is a raging monster; corrupted and demonic.

DIANA II

Let me out. It's time. Become me.

DIANA

I can't. That's not how it works.

Beauty eyes the interaction suspiciously.

BEAUTY

Who are you talking to?

Diana can barely control her glee.

DIANA

My better half. I brought you down here to see if a reflection can kill someone.

BEAUTY

Did you kill my mother? I always had suspicions.

Diana can barely hide her glee to be asked this question at a point where she finally feels free to answer truthfully.

DIANA

Why my beautiful stepdaughter, I have never been so offended in my- Yes, guilty as charged.

Beauty nods stoically.

BEAUTY

The vengeance of the princesses will fall upon you.

DIANA

The vengeance of.. Haha.. Oh, excuse me.

BEAUTY

I've killed a whole bunch of people. Blamed the Beast. I'll take responsibility gladly, now. Even for Mr Bunt. So, as one killer to another, you'll show me the respect of listening to my last words.

DIANA

Make them profound and well-considered. Make your stepmother proud.

BEAUTY

Happily. Ever. After.

Something bristles in Diana.

DIANA

What?

BEAUTY

(quietly and steadily)
I think you heard me. Happily ever after. It's the thing they used to say in Eldenor in the years before the queen died.

(MORE)

BEAUTY (CONT'D)

It's the way they used to finish
stories. You're not as powerful as
Happily Ever After.

Diana brandishes a wicked looking knife at Beauty. She runs
it down her face, hovering it over her eyeball.

DIANA

Anything else?

BEAUTY

Your shoes don't go with the rest
of your outfit and everyone thinks
you're a wanker.

Diana raises the knife, incandescent with rage --

She's ready to administer the killing blow. Brings the blade
closer to her stepdaughter...

--but can't do it. She slumps.

DIANA

I talk a good game, but I just
can't do it.

Beauty breathes a sigh of relief. Maybe this will work out
after all.

Apparently demoralised, Diana stalks over to the mirror.
Looks at her reflection. The reflection smiles horribly.

DIANA (CONT'D)

But I know someone who can.

And she HEADBUTTS THE MIRROR, smashing it and releasing the
dark magic of DIANA II. Glittering DARK MAGIC pours from the
mirror. Some of it disperses, but most of it runs straight
into Diana's mouth. She braces herself against the mirror
frame.

Blood runs down Diana's forehead. Her fingers knot and twist
as she absorbs the power of her shadow self.

Diana twists--

--and merges with the spirit of Diana II. She has her gait.
Her terrifying expression.

She holds up the knife, watching it glint in the shaft of
sunlight in the chamber.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Yes. Much better. Much better.

In one movement, she stalks across the chamber without missing a beat.

Beauty goes to speak--

--and Diana II SLITS HER THROAT with the knife in one quick movement.

Beauty's eyes widen in disbelief. A moment's spluttering and it's all over.

DIANA (CONT'D)
What can't I do now? Tell me,
little dead princess, what can't I
do? Now I'm truly queen. The queen
this world deserves.

And she throws back her head in a terrifying CACKLE.

EXT. ELDENIR PLAINS - DAY/NIGHT

Lightning flashes across the landscape. The fairytale is over. We're fully into a horror aesthetic now.

Day turns to night, as the bright new morning is crushed out by inky darkness across the sky.

We follow a streak of purple MAGIC from the mirror as it flies through the landscape...

EXT. MERMAID CAVE - NIGHT

...the purple strand of magic moves at dizzying speed and crashes into ELLEM as she emerges from the water.

Enters her mouth and disappears down her throat.

Ellem SCREAMS

She's clearly just gotten her voice back.

EXT. ELDENIR PLAINS - NIGHT

Cinderella wanders across the plain, a lost nomad with a thousand-yard stare.

CINDERELLA
Not every tale...

A massive CRASH OF THUNDER interrupts her. She grimaces and starts again.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

(singing)

Not every tale can have a happy
 ending
 It means naught if everybody gets
 the prize
 And so in order to give happy
 endings meaning
 We need another tale where
 everybody dies

She stops and looks at the SECRET HATCH we saw at the
 beginning. She tilts her head, lost in thought.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

A story where the pure end dead and
 buried
 A tale where evil wins then wins
 once more
 A myth where those that die are
 never carried
 And nobody even knows what they
 died for

She makes her mind up. Pulls the dried branches away from the
 hatch and throws the door open. She climbs inside.

EXT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - NIGHT

Rapunzel runs at a sprint with Melvin behind her.

This is open land and there aren't many places to hide.

She runs, clearly at breaking point. We see Melvin chugging
 along behind her, (mirroring a shot from Hooper's Texas
 Chainsaw)

And of course she trips and falls.

She's scrabbling backwards across the ground as Melvin
 advances.

CINDERELLA (V.O.)

(singing)

Not every tale can have a happy
 ending
 It means naught if everybody gets
 the prize
 And so in order to give happy
 endings meaning
 We need another tale where
 everybody dies

Dress torn and shredded, face a mixture of fear and bright, burning anger. She's fucking livid to be going out like this.

Her cool dragonfly glasses lie shattered on the floor where she fell.

Her tower looms in the background. A sanctuary it looks like she'll never reach

Melvin approaches, clearly relishing the kill.

MELVIN

Girl die.

RAPUNZEL

Yeah, girl die. Like always in your world, huh? You know what, I don't even care anymore. And you broke my glasses. My cool glasses. You're not even worth my spit.

Melvin leans down, gloating.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

Oh, maybe just the one.

She spits in his face, then pauses and watches it drip down his horrible features.

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

Kill me quickly so I don't have to smell you any more.

MELVIN

Pleasure.

He raises the saw over his head, screeches with horrible laughter and plunges the spinning blade downwards--

--only for it to be smashed away at the last second by the impact of a SWORD--

--Melvin whips his head around to see Rax standing defiantly behind him.

RAX

I guess I've broken another promise.

Melvin looks at Rax in disgust. Sniffs the air. He recognises the scent.

MELVIN

Rapscallion.

RAX
So they say.

Rax and Melvin face off against one another, stalking around each other in a circle.

Rax thrusts his sword. CLANG! Melvin deflects it with his chainsaw. SPARKS FLY as metal hits metal and Melvin grins like the world's most fucked up Cheshire Cat.

Melvin LUNGES and Rax steps aside like a matador.

Melvin TUMBLES TO THE GROUND, chainsaw hitting concrete. And suddenly Rax is standing over him.

Rapunzel punches the air with joy, letting out a little CRY.

Rax cricks his neck.

RAX (CONT'D)
Hello, handsome. Under the old
rules, I wouldn't be able to just
flat-out murder you.

Melvin looks her in the eye. There's something pathetic in his demeanour. He's almost pleading.

RAX (CONT.) (CONT'D)
I guess things have changed.

And he DRIVES THE SWORD into Melvin's FACE.

Pulls it back, releasing a torrent of gore. Drives it down again.

And again.

And again.

Melvin is now just making horrible wet noises from his ruined face. He slumps and is still. Presumably dead.

Exhausted and soaked in gore, Rax smiles and turns to Rapunzel. Starts towards her, arms outstretched in reconciliation. The smile on Rapunzel's face...

..drops. She goes to shout out in horror.

Everything is in slow motion.

Melvin RISES FROM THE FLOOR behind Rax and SWINGS HIS CHAINSAW--

RAX (CONT'D)
(Resigned whisper)
Goodnight princess

And the swing completes, severing Rax's HEAD.

Rapunzel face distorts into a SCREAM.

More blood. So much blood.

INT. PALACE DUNGEON - NIGHT

Cinderella creeps into the dungeon in full ninja mode. She calls out, softly but hopefully.

CINDERELLA
Beauty?

She peeks around the corner and sees BEAUTY'S CORPSE HANGING ON THE WALL.

DIANA
Hello Cinders.

Diana's face is smeared in blood. No longer the fairytale villain, more the horror icon.

Cinderella screams as Diana smiles horribly.

Cinderella runs...

Tries the door at the end of the corridor but Diana GESTURES WITH HER OUTSTRETCHED HAND and the door SLAMS SHUT.

Darkheart advances.

DIANA (CONT'D)
You're not a final survivor. You're just the last to die.

Cinders blinks back defiant tears. She's run out of road.

DIANA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Here's your fucking happy ever after.

And Diana sinks the BLADE into Cinderella's stomach.

INT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - DAY

Rapunzel RUNS up the stairs of the tower, with Melvin in pursuit behind her. She throws the huge door shut behind her, but Melvin catches it just before it closes.

Pries it open once again with filthy fingers and continues his pursuit. More leisurely now. She has nowhere to go.

He drags his chainsaw across the stone walls, showering sparks.

He throws his head back and laughs horrifically. He loves this stuff.

Rapunzel is screaming all the way. At her wits' end.

INT. CASTLE LABYRINTH - DAY

Blood pours down Cinderella's dress. Diana shrieks with glee as she twists the knife.

Cinderella crashes to the floor, eyes wide with shock. The light behind those beautiful eyes goes out. Diana watches her collapse with fascination.

DIANA

I can't think why I didn't do that
ages ago.

INT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - DAY

Rapunzel has reached the top of the tower.

Open air behind her. The view over the once-beautiful Eldenir now a landscape of lightning and chaos.

Melvin advances once more. It's hard for him to speak out of his trident-ruined face but he gives it a good go.

MELVIN

Can't hurt me. Can't win. Just a
stupid fairytale.

Rapunzel glances backwards. It's a hell of a drop. Impossible to survive.

RAPUNZEL

You won't make me do the thing I
did when Dad died. I'll NEVER do
that thing again.

And he revs his chainsaw. Inching forwards. Curiosity gets the better of him.

MELVIN

What did you do?

Something in her expression shifts. A steeliness we haven't seen before glints in her eyes.

RAPUNZEL

I gave up.

And she GRABS HIM fully around the torso. He looks bewildered. Her last words are a hiss...

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

And maybe I'm not a fairytale.

And she bodily HURLS THEM BOTH BACKWARDS--

RAPUNZEL (CONT'D)

Maybe I'm a legend.

And they both fall OVER THE TOWER WALL and tumble into empty space.

INT. CASTLE LABYRINTH - DAY

Diana looks down at prone, inert Cinderella.

She's out of the picture. Surely, just dead. Diana prods her with a foot, like a cat prodding a bird that it can't quite believe its finally killed.

Nothing, at least at first.

But then something SPARKS. Magic of some kind. It swirls and sparkles.

Diana reels backwards, horribly affronted by this development.

Cinderella is encased in the magic. Swirls of pixie dust. She stands up, and the blood on her clothes vanishes.

She stands. And, unbelievably, she smiles.

She strides towards Diana, every step becoming more powerful.

Pristine Fairytale Princess reborn as ultimate bad-ass.

CINDERELLA

Nobody cares about the genre stone.
The genre stone isn't the heart of
fairytales.

She meets Diana's gaze without blinking. Standing just a few steps away.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

I am.

Diana looks briefly concerned. This wasn't how things were supposed to go.

She grabs Cinderella and puts the wicked knife to her throat.

EXT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - DAY

Rapunzel and Melvin fall, entwined. A slow motion dance, leading only to the inevitable grave.

Rapunzel smiles, finally meeting her destiny. Her hair unravels as she falls.

INT. CASTLE LABYRINTH - DAY

Diana, seething with rage at Cinderella's impertinence. The wicked blade needling at Cinderella's throat as Diana tightens her grip.

DIANA

All you're going to be is a pretty
corpse with glass slippers and a
slit throat.

A drop of blood makes its way down the blade. Cinderella's defiance sparks anew.

CINDERELLA

They're not slippers.

Diana looks a little confused by this pedantry. Just for a moment.

Cinderella JERKS A FOOT UPWARDS and one of her glass shoes comes FLYING OFF. It flips end over end through the air in slow motion.

She SNATCHES IT OUT OF THE AIR--

--and drives the GLASS HEEL straight into Diana's EYEBALL, puncturing her brain.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)
(Quietly)
Slippers don't have heels.

Diana stands stunned for a moment SPRAYING BLOOD.

Cinderella doesn't even turn around to watch.

Diana falls SMASH to the ground, utterly dead.

On the floor, a fragment of the GENRE STONE sparks back into life. It flares pink. A spark of hope.

EXT. RAPUNZEL'S TOWER - DAY

The pink spark is mirrored in Rapunzel's rapidly unravelling hair as she plummets.

Incredibly, the rope of hair snags on a tree branch near the top of the tower.

WRAPS AROUND IT!

Impossible. The stuff of fairy tales.

The long, long braid goes TAUT as the hair takes her weight.

Rapunzel lets GO of Melvin--

--as the braid pulls FULLY TIGHT and stops her fall.

She stops in MID-AIR three feet from the ground.

Melvin DOESN'T.

He hits the floor and fully, bodily EXPLODES like a watermelon dropped from a great height. Massive CHUNKS of Melvin fly through the air.

An eruption of BLOOD drenches Rapunzel again. She dangles from her hair, eyes closed.

She lets out a breath.

Finally, impossibly, safe.

INT. CASTLE LABYRINTH - DAY

Aftermath. A moment of stillness.

Cinderella gathers herself up and wipes the blood from her face.

On the floor, the fragment of genre stone settles to a gentle pink glow.

Cinderella picks it up, looks deep into it--

--throws it away over her shoulder. She shrugs.

CINDERELLA
It's time for new magic.

EXT. ELDENIR PLAINS - MORNING

The dark clouds recede, and the sun breaks through. It's a wonderful new dawn.

Beautiful flowers start creeping up through the soil. The skies start to clear of those oppressive thunderclouds, revealing dazzling blue beneath.

Triblins frolic and play and don't kill anything.

INT. CINDERELLA'S ROOM - MORNING

Cinderella walks to the window, mirroring our first sight of her. She's different now; a lot less bows and a little more melancholy, but there's a determination to her gaze that was never there before.

INT. RECOVERY ROOM - DAY

Cinderella gently takes Prince Charming's hand. He's awake a grinning from ear to ear.

She speaks gently to him. We're not privy to the words, but she's letting him down gently.

He takes his own wedding ring, and offers it to her.

The slightest shake of her head. A gentle smile. She takes the ring and places it on the bedside table.

His smile falters. He doesn't understand. But maybe one day he will.

CINDERELLA (VO)
Nowadays, I don't think that
happily CAN be ever after.
(MORE)

CINDERELLA (VO) (CONT'D)
 Happily can be a day with a friend
 or a moment in the sunshine. It can
 be kiss or a dance or a moment of
 triumph, but the fact it ends is
 what gives it meaning in the first
 place.

Gurgle the cat hops up at Prince Charming, and curls up on his lap, offering solace.

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)
 Happy without an ending means
 nothing.

Prince Charming waits until Cinderella has left the room before his upper lip starts to wobble.

EXT. MERMAID VILLAGE - DAY

A couple of VILLAGERS smile and go about their business.

Cinderella approaches the mermaid pool. Ellem surfaces from the water. She eyes Cinderella with suspicion and contempt.

Cinderella holds out her hand. She is carrying a tiny BABY OCTOPUS. Brightly coloured and adorable. The baby octopus reaches out an arm for Ellem.

Ellem looks at the octopus. Looks at Cinderella. Her expression starts to soften and she takes the octopus and clutches it to her chest.

CINDERELLA
 I'm so sorry.

ELLEM
 I know.

There's a long moment between them, and Ellem vanishes back beneath the water with her new companion.

EXT. BROKERSTOWN VILLAGE - DAY

The village of Brokerstown is thriving and bustling. VILLAGERS smile and greet one another as they go about their day.

Suddenly, a darkness falls over the scene. Like a storm cloud across the sun.

Smiles turn to rictuses, masking outright dread.

CINDERELLA (VO)
Once a door's been opened, it's
hard to pretend its not there. And
if bad times come once, bad times
are likely to come again.

And a PORTAL rips a hole in reality in the mermaid village!

And a BEAST spills out of it. Not Melvin, but something else
dark and twisted and horrible...

EXT. DESERTED COTTAGE - DAY

In a familiar village...

ANOTHER portal rips a hole through from another place. Dark
purple and spinning, it disgorges a DEMON.

CINDERELLA (VO)
And again.

EXT. WOODLANDS - NIGHT

Another PORTAL disgorges another KILLER.

CINDERELLA (VO)
And again.

INT. CINDERELLA'S ROOM - DAY

Cinderella hardens her gaze. Narrows her eyes.

She can just SMELL that something bad is happening out there
in Eldenir.

Over her shoulder, we're aware of other figures standing
behind her. Rapunzel is the closest, but on the other side
stands Cinderella's Fairy Godmother.

CINDERELLA
Are you ready, Bernard?

FAIRY GODMOTHER
I'm ready.

CINDERELLA
Zel?

RAPUNZEL
Always.

The Fairy Godmother strikes an attack pose like a Tekken fighter, playing with a ball of magic. She has clearly learned kung-fu.

CINDERELLA (VO)
Our lives are made of stories, and
stories have rules.

Rapunzel and Cinders draw lethal looking swords from the scabbards across their backs. They stand, ready to go into action.

CINDERELLA (VO) (CONT'D)
But rules are made to be broken,
and I learned how.

A tiny smile plays across Cinderella's lips. She's ready for anything the world can throw at her.

CINDERELLA (VO) (CONT'D)
Once upon a time.

SLAM CUT TO
BLACK:

CHAINSAW FAIRYTALE

PAT HIGGINS

TWO VOLUMES (VOLUME TWO)

MA by Research

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VOLUME TWO

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Chainsaw Fairytale: Using Theory, Screenwriting Reports and Online Table Reads to Inform the Rewriting Process - Pat Higgins

In her book *The 21st Century Screenplay* (Aronson, 2010), Linda Aronson discusses the dangers of vertical thinking as opposed to the equivalent dangers of lateral thinking in the context of screenwriting. Vertical thinkers, she argues, are tied to the 'correct' ways of doing things and prone to pitching ideas that have been popular previously. This can lead to derivative and formulaic work. Lateral thinkers, conversely, have almost no interest in the accepted forms and conventions and can thus fail to learn from the lessons of the past and produce work that makes easily avoidable mistakes. Sometimes, she argues, a reliance on lateral thinking can create work where the writer is 'too visible'.

My work veers into territories where I am frequently in danger of becoming too visible as a writer. It's been that way since my first commercially released work and it's something that I've consistently fought against, whilst also trying to maintain whatever element of my creative voice has led to the modest successes of my career thus far. I tend to write my initial rough draft using unfiltered lateral thinking and very little restraint regarding my natural instincts. I leave notes for myself in the action descriptions ("She produces a gun which I'll go back and foreshadow later") and the vast majority of characters end up with dialogue that all sounds worryingly like my own voice; same vocabulary, same idiosyncrasies of structure. If I try to apply too much vertical thought during the early stages, and start to finesse away these elements whilst still building the basic skeleton of the script, I run into trouble and the whole thing grinds to a halt.

As a result, I've learned to place my trust in my rewrite process. The overwhelming self-indulgence of my initial rough draft can be stripped out and what remains can be polished with the application of a more logical, structured and vertical approach. I've been working in screenwriting for about 20 years, and my techniques for rewrites have constantly evolved during that time. In this reflective piece I'm going to focus on the use of script reports and table reads to explain and highlight the changes that I made to the script of 'Chainsaw Fairytale' between that initial rough draft ('Rough Draft'), the first stable draft ('First Draft') and the submission draft ('Second Draft').

My use of script reports grew from the necessities of low or micro-budget film production. The earliest features in my career were resolutely micro-budget, meaning that there was no option to simply 'turn on the money hose' as Robert Rodriguez would put it (Rodriguez, 1995) in order to make problems go away. I realised that script reports could highlight where the fat could be trimmed from a screenplay prior to producing the shooting script. These reports could highlight where two locations were being used when perhaps one location repeated would prove more cost-effective. They highlighted when I was unnecessarily introducing additional characters, when perhaps bringing back a small featured character and expanding their part would make the role more attractive to an actor, more satisfying and less confusing to an audience member *and* work out cheaper for the production. Often, folding two small roles in a script together into one larger one works out hugely beneficial.

So the process began as a way of saving my budget and developed into being a way of improving my screenplays.

During the production of my first rough draft, I value forward momentum above all other considerations. It is only once the screenplay is structurally complete that I begin the process of making sure that the various elements are working together in harmony. I write my initial rough draft using dictation and transcription. Having broken the story into 40 beats, I dictate each scene off the top of my head then use transcription software to turn that audio into onscreen text. I then edit that text into screenplay format within my screenwriting software.

I firmly believe that too many screenwriters underestimate the importance of jokes. There are countless jokes in terrifying movies like 'The Exorcist III' (The Exorcist III, 1990) or swash-buckling adventures like 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' (Raiders Of The Lost Ark, 1982). I recall watching a microbudget film a couple of decades ago that was a genuinely stunning achievement on a miniscule budget but was almost entirely lacking the humour of the bigger budget movies that it was attempting to emulate. The production got all the extraordinarily difficult stuff right, pulling off genuinely exciting action scenes with almost no money, but they failed to put enough wit and charm into the dialogue to make the whole thing work.

With that in mind, I like to pick through my social media history to find quick jokes that I might be able to slide into the script during the early rewrite stages. If something struck me as funny enough to write on Twitter in 2017, maybe that joke might still stand up today? In the case of 'Chainsaw Fairytale', I was generally looking for phrasing I'd previously used to express my thoughts that I still found funny or idiosyncratic. These quirky expressions of self (most of which I'd written pre-2020) were incorporated into Rapunzel's speech during a dialogue pass.

In his book 'Screenwriting is Rewriting' (Epps, 2016), Jack Epps suggests a total of 11 different passes, all focusing on different elements (including the wonderfully named 'Complications, Obstacles, Reveals and Reversals Pass'). I try to stick to around four dedicated passes. One pass for character, one pass for structure, one dedicated pass for dialogue and then an overall polish pass to ensure that the piece still works as a coherent whole. By exporting specific script reports, I can focus on individual elements of each pass. As Robert McKee states in 'Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting'; "to find their harmony, the author must study the elements of story as if they were instruments of an orchestra" (McKee, 1998)

By exporting all of Rapunzel's dialogue, for example, I can check that each line is in the clear voice of the character (which I think of as equal parts Rosalind Russell from 'His Girl Friday' (His Girl Friday, 1940) and Bruce Willis from 'Moonlighting' (Moonlighting, 1985)) without getting tangled up in the lines (and respective voice and vocabulary) of other characters. The initial export of Rapunzel's Character Report for dialogue immediately gives me another piece of 'hidden' information regarding character consistency. A quick scroll through the pdf shows that Rapunzel's blocks of extended, stream-of-consciousness dialogue which dominate the early appearances of the character dry up almost completely by the third act. As even a cursory

glance at the report shows, extended blocks of dialogue dominate the first two pages but have almost entirely disappeared by page four. The character's voice changes.

This wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing if it was part of my conscious arc for her. Characters have to change, after all. It's the thing that makes the narrative work. However, is this the thing about Rapunzel that I'm actually looking to change? From her first appearance to her last she reconnects with her sexuality and sense of autonomy, which is very much intentional, but did I really intend her to change her extremely distinct way of expressing herself and become fundamentally more conventional?

It seems more likely that I simply took my eye off the ball regarding her character traits as soon as the third act concerned itself with the bigger picture. Granted, it becomes fundamentally harder to focus on a character who tends to deliver extended monologues when the action becomes more frenzied and the eventual cutting inevitably gets quicker, but the 'unicorn and the badger' monologue, which starts on page 43 of the first draft and concludes two pages later, already makes a joke of the way that Rapunzel will carry on monologues, (both internal and external), regardless of what's happening around her. It struck me that it would be appropriate to maintain this device throughout the third act rather than suddenly abbreviating her dialogue to suspiciously manageable chunks, and I rewrote accordingly.

Elsewhere in the script reports, I used the profanity tracker in the Statistics report to keep swearing at a manageable level and ensure every expletive was 'earned' in terms of character development of to undercut/juxtapose the collision of genre expectations central to the piece. I tried to purge as many 'single use locations' as possible as well, as mentioned earlier, as they make any production less appealing from a budgetary and logistical point of view.

Final Draft's own blog acknowledges that although the reports are "traditionally used as a tool to break down scripts for production" (Final Draft, 2019) that they can also be used for creative tasks such as tracking character's emotional arcs via tagging. The nature of the character arc, as opposed to the story arc, is still an interesting point of discussion amongst screenwriters. In Michael Hauge's lecture for IFH Film School (Indie Film Hustle Podcast, 2016) he admits that he's changed his mind about the conclusions he initially reached in his book (2011, Hauge) regarding character arcs in relation to story arcs. Having initially posited that character arcs would occur "in their own sweet time" independent from the story arc, Hauge now suggests that they are indeed structured and distinct from story arcs, referring to the driver in the character arc as being "a tug of war between identity and essence".

Broadly speaking, Hauge's amended stages of character development can be framed as follows:

1. Living fully in identity
2. A glimpse of destiny of living life in essence
3. Moving towards essence without leaving identity
4. Committed to essence but fearful
5. Living one's truth with everything to lose

6. Destiny achieved

I took these stages and tagged the moments in Cinderella's arc that best represented each moment before exporting a Tags Report from Final Draft. This illuminated some minor pacing issues with regards to the character arc, which I tightened between the first two drafts. I made Cinderella's moment of 'Moving Towards Essence without Leaving Identity' at the Triblin Village a clearer character development point and rewrote the moment she passes 'Living One's Truth with Everything to Lose' (the decision to confront Diana by re-entering the castle after singing "A Tale Where Everybody Dies") a much clearer narrative moment, as it had previously been a little lost in the midst of action description.

Reports from screenwriting software can highlight the number of words of dialogue uttered by each character, of course, but they also contain subtle visual clues of other elements that might be amiss or need refinement. Grouping a single character's dialogue all in one place can throw light on a number of interesting other areas. Are their dialogue lines always prompts for others to say something more interesting? Are they reactive rather than proactive? Clearing away the clutter of other voices shines an unforgiving light on some of these kinds of character problems.

Key things highlighted by the reports were as follows:

Rapunzel's unique character voice is lost as the journey progresses

Ellem's arc certainly needs a new ending and potentially needs reworking further in later drafts

Traces remain of previous drafts

Alongside the review of the script reports, I turned to an online table read to deepen my understanding of what needed fixing in the script. During the lockdowns of 2020, I organised several online table-reads for projects that I had in development. The fact that so many talented performers were bored and confined to home suddenly presented a tremendous opportunity to tap into that resource. Although video conference calls had been technically possible for years, it took a global pandemic for them to reach mainstream acceptance and become a part of our everyday lives. I used online table reads to hone the individual narrative strands in the screenplay for 'Powertool Cheerleaders Vs The Boyband Of The Screeching Dead' (Powertool Cheerleaders vs the Boyband of the Screeching Dead, 2022), which eventually went into production when lockdown restrictions ended (and the premiere of the resultant film closed the Prince Charles Cinema strand of the Frightfest Festival in 2022).

Online table reads became an opportunity not just for networking, but also to properly check the character development for consistency (and the ensure that the characters were connecting with performers in a meaningful way). I was able to watch video playback of the online table reads and make notes, checking where interactions felt in any way 'off' and immediately deciding whether these were writing issues or whether performance choices or chemistry were also at play. The table read was particularly useful for highlighting repetitive word sounds or uses of language and dialogue leaning too hard on 'tell' rather than 'show'.

We conducted the full table read on 16.11.24, with cast members including cult favourite Dani Thompson and both members of the improv act The Electric Head (winners of the Galton & Simpson 'Godfathers of Comedy' award in 2023). The table read was conducted over TEAMS and recorded/transcribed for further analysis. A combination of this recording and the information gleaned from the screenwriting reports would provide the bedrock of my final rewrites prior to the submission of the screenplay. The table read took 1hr44, which was quicker than anticipated (although certain action directions were dropped from the read so as to better allow the flow of the dialogue exchanges, which may have accounted for some of this time difference). Initial impressions from the table read were very positive; the jokes landed, the performers enjoyed themselves. It did also soon become apparent, however, that there was still some ground to cover in addition to the elements already highlighted by the report stack. Alterations that had been made between the rough draft and the locked first draft had left more traces than I'd initially anticipated, and the reworking of the confrontation with Melvin in the third act (previously with Ellem in the rough draft, the First Draft iteration faces the character off against Rax, whom he kills) had left various elements of the previous versions (including a reference to a 'trident') in terms of both detail and theme.

Issues that I'd overlooked became highlighted by the read, particularly the ineffective conclusion of Ellem's arc in the wake of those third act changes. Sometimes even the practicalities of organising the read highlighted elements that needed fixing; I was perfectly happy to allocate Ellem as an 'extra character' to be read by a participant already reading a more significant role, and surely that in itself was telling that the character had lost her central placement in the script? By opting to give her final confrontation with Melvin to Rax instead, I'd left my mermaid character sulking in her lake for the entirety of the third act and only paid off *Cinderella's* side of the conflict over Little Gregory's death without ever really addressing Ellem's own change of feelings. Would it really be enough to have Cinderella present her with a replacement octopus? Wasn't that a rather cheap payoff? These elements might need to be addressed in future drafts, possibly by including Ellem in the climactic castle confrontation with her allegiance in question, but the late scheduling of the table read during the research period made such significant structural changes outside the scope of the alterations for the second draft.

Even the simple act of hearing the readthrough spoken aloud provided valuable insight into patterns of language; repetition of actual words or simply soundalikes can be difficult to spot visually no matter how carefully one checks through the manuscript, but hearing the lines delivered aloud shows where they sound clumsy or simply wrong. Half-rhymes or repetitive vowel sounds can be impactful when intentional but thoroughly distracting when not, and hearing the dialogue aloud makes occurrences very clear.

My TAP meeting with Simon van der Borgh on 10.10.24 was also a review of the first draft. Simon's feedback had included a suggestion to focus on Cinderella's 'need' and specifically to punch up the third act. The TAP meeting also brought up the potential issue of rewriting for rating considerations, specifically tailoring the material to potentially reach a PG-13 rather than an R with the MPAA system (roughly equivalent to a 12a or mild 15 in the UK, rather than a harder 15 or borderline 18 of the R rating). I considered this but ultimately opted to leave the

stronger material intact and keep the script tailored for the R (although keeping within the confines of the UK 15 rather than the 18).

My determination to keep the R material was partially rooted in the problems of juxtaposition without the stronger material. In order to effectively juxtapose a fairytale aesthetic with a horror one (and thus delineate the changes in Elendir that form the spine of the story) I feel it's necessary to actually *reflect* that horror aesthetic accurately, gore and all. I was mindful of the problems faced by 'The Final Girls' (The Final Girls, 2015), an extremely engaging film that was hugely hurt by being a parody and examination of the tropes of slasher movies but was, by virtue of being bound by the limitations of the PG-13 guidelines, unable to actually show any of those tropes prior to subverting them. I feel that the final film was immeasurably hurt by these limitations, with some sequences feeling incoherent and scrambled, and thus decided to keep the stronger scenes of violence intact for the second draft.

Another useful resource for the final rewrite prior to submission was referring to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943, Maslow) to check in with what level the character's concerns are operating at. Cinderella's concerns at the start of the screenplay are resolutely at the fourth level (Esteem needs, as illustrated by constant fretting about appearance and social perception of the upcoming wedding). The narrative takes her all the way back down the hierarchical scale to physiological needs (shelter, food) before allowing her to ascend back to self-actualisation needs in the third act (transcending what she was and becoming what she will be). Focusing on this hierarchy in the rewrite process served to centre myself on what her concerns would be at any given point in the script, where echoes of her previous place in the hierarchy inform the way she reacts to unfolding events such as the sale of her wedding rings. Even when this event is tied to physiological need (the sale allows her to eat and get to her destination), she's still tied to the meaning of the betrayal in terms of her esteem needs, hence her banishment of Rax.

Right at the conclusion of my research period, the distributor of my last film contacted my company advertising an AI script analysis service that would generate extensive reports based on innumerable metrics across 30 odd pages. This would allegedly help writers tailor their work against any number of different criteria. Aside from the debate about the use of AI to assist creative endeavors (and whether or not this represents intellectual copyright theft because of the way the AI database has been trained), it's clear that reports like the ones currently being offered by my distributor as a reseller for material generated by sites like [largo.ai](#) are going to make the kinds of reports generated within screenwriting software like Final Draft look extremely simplistic.

The demonstration report that I was emailed featured such metrics as a so-called 'emotion analysis' and different financial forecasts for different geographic territories. Needless to say, this was not an option that I wished to pursue. Only time will tell whether such forecasts carry any more weight than tea leaves in the bottom of a cup, but it's clear that the future of rewriting will be tied to the generation of reports. However, the days where those reports are representations of fact, for the purposes of human analysis, may be over before they've properly begun.

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