

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my parents for their unending support and prayer.

Thanks to my father Rorke for being a sounding board, a deep well of knowledge, and for offering a different opinion.

Thanks to my mother Jinni for her inspiration, her cheerleading, and her artistic guidance.

Thanks to all my teachers that pushed me to get here.

Thanks to Sean Gaffney for being a friend and mentor, for believing in me, and for not letting me off easy.

Thanks to Darren Wilson for teaching me the foundations of screenwriting.

Thanks to Michael Meek for sharing with me his passion for art and film.

Thanks to God for everything else.

Abstract

This document is a written account of the research, development, and writing of a one-hour drama television pilot. It analyzes the show's subject of con artists by way of historical figures, real-life cons, and confidence artistry as portrayed in film and television. Expected problems in developing a show of this nature and a justification for doing so are included. It explores the history of police procedural television and researches ancillary content like Magicians and Muay Thai. Finally, the particulars of the show, such as character descriptions, a five-season arc, and premise statements for the first season's episodes, are outlined.

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CHAPTER ONE: JUSTIFICATION

I have a strange admiration for con men. As Roger Ebert wrote while reviewing *House of Games* (1987), “There is in all of us a fascination for the inside dope, for the methods of the confidence game, for the secrets of a magic trick,” (Ebert). Having inside information makes people feel smart, and people like to feel smart. More accurately, “people like to appear competent,” (Vaughn). Shakespeare wrote that “all the world’s a stage, / and all the men and women merely players,” (Shakespeare 2.7.139-140). Kenneth Burke latched onto this idea when he devised Dramatism, the interpretive communication theory that views life literally as drama (Overington 142). Sociologist Erving Goffman, along similar lines, developed his popular Self Presentation theory based on dramaturgical principles (Goffman 15). Essentially, according to Goffman, we put forth the person we want to be or the person as whom we want to be seen. This is done both consciously and unconsciously. While there may be some targeted benefit for people to at times appear gullible, it isn’t a character trait most want to exhibit. Yet, it is something we are all capable of experiencing. “Intelligent and educated people, some of them naive about finance and others quite knowledgeable, have been ruined by schemes that turned out to be highly dubious and quite often fraudulent,” (Greenspan 20). People, myself included, don’t like to admit their ignorance or gullibility. This, despite the fact we are all certainly ignorant of something and gullible under the right circumstances.

It pains me to admit but I’ve been the victim of a con. I never would have thought it possible. I have a natural distrust of salesmen and money-making schemes. But in 2012 I was approached by a man named Mr. Frank. Mr. Frank was a wealthy and experienced businessman I had met years earlier through mutual friends while I was on a business trip

to Oklahoma City. Mr. Frank told me and several of my colleagues about a new business venture through which he was making substantial passive income. I mulled it over for weeks, researching continuously. Finally satisfied that all was legitimate, I bought in at \$1,100. It was all my savings plus a few hundred on credit. This was it. I was committed. I felt good. Six days later the FCC shut down the company. It was accused by the Securities and Exchange Commission of illegally selling securities. It turned out to be an \$850 million Ponzi scheme. I and a million others, including Mr. Frank, had been fooled. But how?

Dr. Stephen Greenspan has studied social intelligence for more than 35 years with a particular focus on the psychology of gullibility. He, too, is a victim of a scam. Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme, to be exact. How is it that a man who dedicated his life to understanding gullibility could himself be so gullible as to fall victim to a con? Greenspan (no relation to Alan) chalks it up to a mixture of four elements: situation, cognition, personality, and emotion (Greenspan 22). In his case, mirroring my own, he was convinced by the situation; the sight of other wealthy, more financially savvy people than him buying into the scheme. For some it is an emotional need: to belong, for security, for success, etc. For others, it is out of a lack of information or not understanding all the factors. And for the rest, their personalities make them naturally more susceptible to those looking to take advantage.

I don't blame the architects of the Ponzi scheme for the loss of my money; I blame myself for buying into it. It takes courage and daring to pull a con of that size. Of course, most con artists, also known as grifters, hustlers, flimflammers, clip artists, swindlers, scammers, and charlatans, try to stay below the radar. More often than not

when we hear about cons today they're simple: free trials with hidden fees, fake websites, or calls about cash prizes and time shares (*Exmouth Journal*). These scammers, unlike Madoff, may not be out to drain bank accounts but are still technically lawbreakers.

Another variety of con man, a more "honorable" kind, if there is such a thing, is the hustler. They're in it only to make a living; it may be on other people's money but in many cases it's not stolen. Bets, wagers, card games; these are the special domain of the hustler. Convincing people to part with their hard-earned money, and leaving them with nothing to show for it, is a talent. Apparently it is a talent people enjoy watching, considering the number of television shows and movies about con artists: *Focus* (2015), *Matchstick Men* (2003), *The Grifters* (1990), *The Sting* (1973), *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (1988), *American Hustle* (2013), *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), *The Brothers Bloom* (2008), *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), *The Con Artists* (1976), *The Flim-Flam Man* (1967), *Confidence* (2003), *Hustle* (2004-12), *Leverage* (2008-12), *Burn Notice* (2007-13), *White Collar* (2009-14), and so on.

The Con Artist subgenre of Crime is a close relative of the Heist and the Gangster subgenres and can share many similarities. Con artists can help pull heists like in *Ocean's Eleven* or work for gangsters like in *Confidence*. The history of the Crime genre is nearly as long as the history of film itself. *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), considered the first ever action film, depicts criminals robbing a train (Keim 17). Americans' love affair with Crime movies began almost immediately. From *The Black Hand* (1906) and *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912) to *Public Enemy* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932) to *The Godfather* (1972), *The Untouchables* (1987), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Donnie Brasco* (1997) and so many others, audiences

seem to relish playing the bad guy. “We are drawn into a strong bond of identification with these characters, so the shows offer the thrill of transgression in the playground of the imagination,” (M. Smith 31). It’s one part *wish-fulfillment*, one part *stickin’ it to the man*, and one part *justice*.

The Confidence Game and Christianity

As a Christian, my worldview and that of a career criminal do not and cannot align. It says in Romans that “Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished,” (*New Living Translation*, Rom. 13.1-2). I am, therefore, forced to ask myself why then do I feel the need to tell the story of a group of con artists?

I’m drawn to police procedurals; detective stories, mostly. This is because, in part, I love a good puzzle. More recently, I’ve come to realize it is out of a strong sense of justice; of *right* and *wrong*. When a con man deceives a mark and steals his or her money that is wrong according to the law. The con man, by all rights, should be apprehended and brought to justice. But what if that isn’t the whole story? How did the mark come by the money? Why did the con artist choose this particular mark? Perhaps the mark’s money was ill-gotten and the police can’t or won’t do anything about it. Perhaps the grifter is simply righting a wrong, outside the law. While still technically illegal, could it not also be just?

Most Christians would agree that lying is wrong. Christian philosopher Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed lying could be justified under the right conditions given a hierarchy

of values. He wrote that “depending on the person to whom I am speaking, the person who is questioning me, or what I am discussing, my word, if it seeks to be truthful, must vary,” (Bonhoeffer 604). Bonhoeffer gave the illustration of a teacher questioning a child in front of his peers about his father’s drunken antics. Bonhoeffer believes that the child is in the right if he denies the allegations even though they are true. On one hand, the child is lying - his father did indeed come home drunk the previous night. On the other hand, it’s really none of the teacher’s business, especially in front of the child’s peers, to ask such a personal question. To protect his father and the sanctity of the family is morally more important than answering the teacher’s inappropriate question truthfully. “In flatly saying no to the teacher’s question, the response becomes untrue, to be sure; at the same time, however, it expresses the truth that the family is an order *sui generis* where the teacher was not justified to intrude,” (Bonhoeffer 605-606). Bonhoeffer himself lied repeatedly during the Second World War as part of a resistance movement in order to save innocent lives. I daresay many of those same Christians who agreed lying is wrong would say that Bonhoeffer was justified in his deceit. A crime in the name of greater good might then itself be considered good or at least permissible.

Before the establishment of the New Covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s people got what they deserved. If one committed a crime, one was punished in equal measure according to God’s laws. Paul writes in Romans, “For the wages of sin is death...” (*New Living Translation* Rom. 6.23). This is justice. After Christ’s ascension, grace was extended to all who believed. Paul continues to write, “but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord,” (*New Living Translation* Rom. 6.23). Those of us who believe and accept the free gift no longer get

what we deserve, death, but receive exactly the opposite; “life, and have it in abundance,” (*Amplified Bible* John 10.10). Those who do not accept the free gift, although Christ still died for them and they are included in His salvation, choose instead justice. Justice is still an attribute of God. Grace is the completion of the law but the law still stands without grace (*Amplified Bible* Rom. 3:19). Creating and writing a show about vigilantism is to tell stories that reflect the just nature of God.

To stop at justice, however, would be to present an incomplete picture. I do not intend to write this show as “Christian” or to present a complete, as I know it, representation of God. I am, though, concerned with imbuing the show with a redemptive nature. As a Christian, redemption is central to my worldview. Specifically, this is a redemption by means of accepting Jesus Christ’s free gift of grace. Generally, any situation in which a person seeks forgiveness for past sins or guilt and then tries to repay the debt of those sins portrays the concept of redemption. It is these latter situations which will be written into the show. Redemption is always available, to any who seek it (*Amplified Bible* Colossians 1.20). Sadly, dramatically, not everyone will.

The Long and the Short of Cons

There are, as I’ve said, con games of various size. It follows then that there are con artists of varying ability or specialty. At the top of the game are the Long Con artists, investing sometimes substantial time and resources into fleecing their marks (Maurer, 3). Long cons are so named because of the time they take to pull. This can be as short as a day or as long as a week or more depending on the travel time of The Send (more on that in Chapter Two: Confidence Games) (Maurer 33-52). Then all the way at the bottom are

the small-time gamblers earning a few bucks at a time on simple bar bets (Lovell 3). “The short-con games are, theoretically, any confidence games in which the mark is trimmed for only the amount he has with him at the time—in short, those games which do not employ the send,” (Maurer 248). Their games require no special skills and little-to-no overhead (apart from the odd cigarette or book of matches). All that *is* required are willing participants with money to burn; and if they happen to be drunk, all the better (Robbins 12). These games usually consist of seemingly impossible challenges like tying a cigarette into a knot without ripping the paper or flipping a paper match into the air only for it to land on its side (Lovell, 3-5).

By way of example, these simple bets function similarly to two-part comedy gags hilariously employed by Michael Maltese and Tedd Pierce in classic Chuck Jones Warner Bros. Cartoons shorts. The bet and the gag both begin with an assumption (Every Frame a Painting). For instance, we know it’s impossible to tie a cigarette into a knot without ripping the paper just as we know a painting of a road on a solid wall does not an actual road make. The bet and the gag end when the assumption is trumped by reality. A cigarette really can be tied into a knot without ripping the paper if first tightly wrapped in cellophane and the Road Runner will pass right through that painting and travel down the road as if it were real (Lovell, 4).

One reason the grifter can freely walk out of the bar, wallet full of other people’s money as opposed to being thrown out on his duff, is that the bet, like the gag, is entertainment. People pay small fortunes to be entertained; movies, video games, cable TV, sporting events, etc. Parting with ten or twenty dollars in order to see what you

thought impossible isn't so great a tragedy. Moreover, people may actually *like* to be conned.

P. T. Barnum, before creating his circus, opened the American Museum in New York City in which he displayed, among many other curiosities, the Fejee Mermaid. As Amy Reading describes in her book *The Mark Inside*, Barnum did his part to lure visitors by publishing pamphlets and writing stories for newspapers about its authenticity (Reading, 66). The public, mostly unconvinced, did their part by paying the admission fee to Barnum's museum to prove to themselves the mermaid was indeed a hoax. They knew they were being fleeced of 25 cents but went along willingly out of a sense of irony. They knew the mermaid was fake. They knew Barnum knew, and they knew Barnum knew they knew. "It is flattering to be welcomed into a deception as a knowing participant of guile and cunning," (Reading 71). When people go to movies, they know what they're seeing on screen is fake. But they are told and are quick to suspend their disbelief and accept, for the duration, that it is real. They often respond emotionally as if it were real. They've agreed to go on a journey with the creators of this story, this hoax, and paid good money to be lied to because it's entertaining.

The long con, conversely, is not so easily forgiven or enjoyed when experienced first-hand. Like a film, it is a full drama replete with script, players, sets, props, and acts. Unlike a film, the price of admission can be significantly greater; in some cases thousands of dollars and in others, millions. No one wants to be the victim of a long con but if it happens to someone else, boy does it make a fascinating story. As Will Rogers wrote, "everything is funny as long as it is happening to somebody Else, but when it

happens to you, why it seems to lose some of its Humor, and if it keeps on happening, why the entire laughter kinder Fades out of it,” (Rogers 75).

The term “Confidence Man” was coined in 1849 by a New York reporter for the *Herald* and ever since, Americans have been fascinated by these unique criminals. The con man for which the term was created, Samuel Williams (a.k.a. Samuel Thomas, William Thompson), was even put on show in his jail cell for the public to get “a look at him,” (Reading 25). Con men are, in general, non-violent. “They are set apart from those who employ the machine-gun, the blackjack, or the acetylene torch. Their methods differ more in degree than in form from those employed by more legitimate forms of business,” (Maurer 3). Their intent is never to physically harm their victims, merely relieve them of as much money as the mark is willing to stake.

Early American con artists were men of birth and education, like Tom Bell, William Duer, and, by some accounts, even Benjamin Franklin (Reading 27). These were men who could blend into high society, ingratiate themselves upon their hosts, then make off with the spoils. As the art of the con matured, the artists grew subtler in their approach. “Although he is sometimes classed with professional thieves, he is really not a thief at all because he does no actual stealing. The trusting victim literally thrusts a fat bankroll into his hands. It is a point of pride with him that he does not have to steal,” (Maurer 3). The chief reason Americans love con artists, however, is because they are first and foremost capitalists.

As said, con artists don’t necessarily steal, they simply exploit “uncharted territory inside the system,” exposing loopholes, revealing chinks in commerce’s armor

(Reading 27). New laws had to be written in order to make their ploys illegal. They weren't outlaws at first, and in our country's first century or so, continually sought out new ways to keep it that way. "Even in their day, the stories of early American swindlers laid bare a terrible truth. Their country needed them. The new nation would never have prospered without imposture, speculation, and counterfeiting, because America was, from its inception, a confidence trick," (Reading 27). America as a confidence trick is an alluring if frightening thought. How trepidatious were those first moments and years as our fledgling nation strove to convince the world it too was a power player? The confidence of the founding fathers, real or feigned, changed the world forever.

Problems

My proposed series *Run* is a one-hour drama about a group of con artists led by a man named Taffy Price. Throughout the series, Taffy and his team are on the run from various antagonists, pulling cons all the while. His team is comprised of a diverse range of personalities and skills. The cons they pull are complex and surprising. Their antagonists are powerful, wealthy, and determined. Each of the aforementioned aspects will require substantial research in order to bring a convincing and entertaining show to television screens.

The first and most important area to be researched will be con artists themselves. Historic figures in the con world such as Titanic Thompson (the man who inspired *Guys and Dolls*), William Thompson (for whom the term "confidence man" was coined), Benjamin Marks (inventor of Dollar stores), Lou Blonger (the King of Denver), Charlie Gondorf (who inspired *The Sting*), and Joseph "Yellow Kid" Weil all appeared in

preliminary research and prove to be fascinating study. Their schemes, and those of many others, are well-documented by the likes of David Maurer whose 1940 exposé *The American Conman* was used as inspiration for the 1973 motion picture *The Sting*. A cursory search for information on con artists revealed no shortage of research material, at once nullifying one problem (my lack of knowledge concerning con artists) while creating another (an overwhelming amount of reference material through which to sift).

Beyond the con artists lay their games of which, again, I have little prior knowledge outside popular entertainment. Fortunately, the same authors, while documenting the artists, often include descriptions of the games they played, as is the case with Amy Readings invaluable book *The Mark Inside*. Further books like *How to Cheat at Everything* by Simon Lovell and *How to Get Something for Nothing* by Todd Roberts give their readers insight into the art of deception and grifting.

In order to construct effective episodes, I have researched television structure, particularly in the crime and police procedural genres. I have investigated the shifting nature and tone of the genre to best determine the direction of *Run*. I have also researched the history and evolution of anti-hero and unsympathetic protagonists as those characteristics are growing in popularity with American audiences and will play a part in Taffy's character development.

Moving on from con men, I researched Magicians and Illusionists. Con artists have a lot in common with illusionists as both make you see what you want to see. Both can show you something too good to be true but only the magician will admit up front it's a lie: all true magicians are very clear on this line (*An Honest Liar*). It is possible,

however, to ride the line or jump back and forth across it. The game of the cups and the balls, says Ricky Jay, “independently exists in the genre of both the gambler as well as the magician,” (Jay 52 *Assistants*). With a magician, an audience member knows up front what witnessing the performance will cost; the price of admission, for example. A hustler, however, will milk his mark for every penny he can. A fan of illusion since I saw a rerun of David Copperfield vanishing the Statue of Liberty as a child, the only problem I anticipated in this area of research is the illusions themselves. It’s no secret that magicians closely guard their secrets. Research was mostly limited to illusionists and their performances although Jim Steinmeyer’s 2003 book *Hiding the Elephant*, endorsed by Raymond Joseph Teller, explained many classic illusions in detail.

Narrowing in on character traits and roles revealed yet more areas of research. Sara Kaya, a member of Taffy’s team fulfilling the role of The Talent as well as the team’s “muscle,” is a Muay Thai expert. Despite a fascination with Kung-Fu movies and two days of karate lessons as a child I know very little about martial arts. Both Taffy’s Banker, Kristopher Roth, and season three antagonist Richard Mapes, A.K.A. Ctrl, are master computer hackers. I have some familiarity with web coding and computer programming but not yet enough to write a convincing hacker. The amount of research necessary into computer hacking was lessened due to a rewrite of episode which removed most of the hacking elements, but a quick exploration of the hacking world will yield fruit in writing Kristopher as a more fully developed character. Billionaire Max Corvo, season one antagonist, will require the least research as much of the information I need for his character will be covered during research for Kristopher Roth. Further research

would be necessary to flesh out the remaining season antagonists but as they do not feature in the first two episodes, that research is not pertinent to this document.

The Story: Synopsis

“Every long con needs at least six players. First there’s the Conductor. That’s me. The guy with the plan. The inside man. Then there’s the Accomplice, eyes and ears on the ground. It’s his job to gather intel, pick pockets, grease palms, that sort of thing. Long cons involve a lot of money and you need someone to handle all that money. That’s where the Banker comes in. Keeping track of every penny that passes hands. Next comes the Salesman. The person that really sells the con, makes it real. If the salesman fails, the whole con collapses. Finally, there’s the Talent. The talent runs distractions, making the mark easier to con. And that, to answer your question, is where you come in.”

“That’s only five. You said there were six players.”

“The Mark. The target of the con, the person whose money will soon be our money.” (Run: Pilot)

Taffy Price attempts to pull a long con on shady LA businessman Max Corvo who’s made billions as the private accountant and money launderer for an enormous criminal network. When Max realizes he is being conned, he kidnaps Taffy’s girlfriend Olivia and holds her ransom. Unable to rescue her, Taffy is forced to do what he does best: con his way to \$100 million dollars.

Unfortunately, there's another problem: Taffy has a mafia contract on his head. He owes a great undisclosed (to the audience) debt to the Abruzzo family and must constantly avoid their attempts on his life, especially by Filippo Abruzzo. Taffy runs from city to city, avoiding Filippo and pulling cons and grifting where possible to scrape together enough money to buy Olivia's freedom.

Assisting him are Leroy Perkins, Sarah Kaya, Kristopher Roth, and Charlie Bell. Leroy is an old grifter who, years ago, brought Taffy into the business before being quickly outshone by the intelligent and charismatic Taffy. Leroy now acts as Taffy's man on the street; pickpocketing, running distractions, odd jobs, etc. Sarah is a Muay Thai fighter who, when not in a bout, puts her beauty and fighting skills to work for Taffy. Kristopher, a CPA and die-hard Black Flag (band) fan, is Taffy's Banker, handling his money and all of the money for his cons. Finally, Charlie is the salesman, the man you bring in to really sell the con. He works odd jobs, mostly modeling, and occasionally as a magician/illusionist. He is the corroborator, the man who convinces the mark the con is legit.

What no one but Taffy and Olivia knows is that it's all a long con. Taffy going into debt with the mafia, Max discovering he was being conned and kidnapping Olivia; it's all a part of Taffy's brilliant long game designed to swindle many rotten people of their ill-gotten gains.

But it doesn't end there. Taffy's longest con of all is Olivia herself. Her father, Tom Spencer, is the head of the criminal network Taffy is taking down and was a crooked Chief Justice responsible for, among many other crimes, putting Taffy's father in

prison where he later died. Taffy needs to convince Olivia of her father's guilt and then convince her to help him relieve her father of his fortune and make him pay for his crimes.

Every week, Taffy and his team will enter a new city, identify a mark, and con that mark out of money, resources, information, or assistance. The marks are usually corrupt men and women, occasionally tied somehow to the season's antagonist. Each season will have a new antagonist as part of Taffy's ultimate long con. Season one's antagonist is billionaire Max Corvo. Season two's antagonist is mafia hitman Filippo Abruzzo. Season three's antagonist is super-hacker Richard Mapes, A.K.A. "Ctrl." Season four's antagonist is Cadence Byrne, Taffy's ex-wife and FBI super-sleuth. What each of these four antagonists do not know is they play a part in Taffy's long con: Max is the *Banker*; Filippo, the *Salesman*; Richard, the *Accomplice*; and Cadence plays the *Talent*. Taffy conducts all the players like a conductor would an orchestra. It all comes together at the end of season four when Tom Spencer is revealed to be the ultimate mark and antagonist of season five.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH

Literature Review

In approaching my research, my first goal was to attain a general impression of con artists in media. This meant saturating myself in films, television shows, and print showcasing con artists and their ilk. Much in the same way that it is easier to learn a new language when surrounded by native speakers, I felt immersion, such that fictional media can provide, would benefit my research and aid in my writing. After general impressions were arrived at, I could then, I supposed, narrow my focus with more precision on the areas I deemed most pertinent to my needs.

Perhaps the most famous film based on con artists is 1973's *The Sting*, which made it required viewing for my research and literature review. How it added to *Run* is covered later in this chapter. Additionally, I viewed the following films and television shows: *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), *Ocean's Twelve* (2004), *Ocean's Thirteen* (2007), and *Hustle* (2004-12, episodes 1-6), which portray the slick, glamorous, Rat Pack side of con artistry/criminality. *Confidence* (2003), *The Grifters* (1990), *House of Games* (1987), *The Spanish Prisoner* (1997), and *The Hustler* (1961) on the other hand, represent more realistic or brutal sides of the con. *The Hustler*, especially, shows the cost a con man risks and the trials he must endure to develop the "character" necessary to truly excel. *House of Games* and *The Spanish Prisoner* were interesting in that they subverted the usual romantic attachment to con artists as rebels and heroes and showed them instead from the point of view of the victim; in the first case a victim who by film's end embraces her own inner rebel and in the latter, a victim whose flaw of being too nice, the flaw that marked

him in the first place, also helped him to eventually avoid the fatal conclusion of the con. A film I believe bridges the gap well between brutality and glamour, despite other story inadequacies, is 2015's *Focus*. Both points of view are valid and inform the overall tone of *Run*.

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (1988), *The Brothers Bloom* (2008), *Maverick* (1994), *Leap of Faith* (1992), *The Lady Eve* (1941), and *The Great Train Robbery* (1979) exhibit the fun and light-heartedness that can accompany or even drive a con artist story. *An Honest Liar* (2014), a documentary about an aging, controversial stage magician/con artist, helped to put a human face to the oft-times pedestaled con artist. The same is true of *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993), a film based on a play by John Guare. In the film, the con artist is shown to be a young man, possibly suffering some form of mental illness, who in the end admits all his cons amount to the search for "everlasting friendship." *Six Degrees* can also be viewed more as a character study than a conventional con story. The same could be said of *American Hustle* (2013) which, although featuring some elaborate con games, focused more on the characters; their motivations, what made them tick, and their ultimate success or failure. *Hustling America* (2013) showcased the art of the grift; simple bar bets that are the small-time grifter's bread and butter. Even long con artists, however, can use these techniques to get by without reaching into their wallets, as evidenced by *Hustle*, *Grifters*, *Criminal* (2004), and *Ocean's Eleven*.

Criminal did a fantastic job of withholding the true nature of the con until quite literally the last minute of the movie. The film is also noteworthy for conning the audience, or at least me, into believing the protagonist was the hero of the film. Not until the very end is it revealed the protagonist is the mark and though I had rooted for him the

whole movie I suddenly found myself glad to see him arrested. *The Flim-Flam Man* (1967) worked on some levels but not on others. George C. Scott is almost always a joy to watch on screen but his flamboyant portrayal of the titular character somehow didn't seem to fit the legend the movie established for him. It did however, like *Criminal*, feature an experienced con man taking on an apprentice and teaching him the trade.

While on the subject of apprenticeship, *Matchstick Men* (2003) and *Paper Moon* (1973) go a step further and portray a father teaching his daughter the art of the con. I should qualify that statement by stating that, in *Matchstick Men*, Roy only thinks Angela is his daughter while in *Paper Moon*, Moses and Addie likely are father and daughter though it's never established. There is a warmth to their relationships, a natural humor and closeness. These relationships can further inform the development of Taffy and Leroy's own mentor/student, surrogate father/son relationship.

Revolver (2005), Guy Ritchie's mostly critically panned con artist film, dealt with higher concepts like disconnecting from the ego. It can serve in my research as a cautionary tale to avoid overreaching; theme is important, but so is a plot the audience can follow. From *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) I learned the thrill of the chase. At the end of the film, as Frank plans to run yet again, he is allowed to go by FBI agent Carl who is confident Frank will be at work come Monday morning. When Frank asks why Carl believes that, Carl responds simply, "Nobody's chasing you," (*Catch Me If You Can*). Carl knew that most of the appeal for Frank's cons was the excitement of outrunning the law. The chase is central to at least the first two seasons of *Run*.

The Color of Money (1986), Scorsese's sequel to the *Hustler*, informs the *Run* character of Leroy Perkins, the aging grifter, by way of Paul Newman's Fast Eddie Felson. The hot-headed Eddie hasn't mellowed so much as stewed for twenty-five years, becoming more like the reviled Bert Gordon (George C. Scott) from *Hustler* than audiences, and probably he, imagined he ever would. This world-weariness but desire to still be in the game can be found in Leroy. These traits can be heightened in order to pay homage in later episodes.

Leverage (2008-12, episode 1 & 35), *Burn Notice* (2007-13, all episodes), and *White Collar* (2009-14, episodes 1-3) largely informed the structure of *Run* but are referenced again later in this chapter. I read the pilot script for each in preparation of writing my own. Each script was structured differently, and followed then broke different screenwriting rules. The largest take-away from the script reading was the reminder to write for an audience of one: the reader. Make sure the reader enjoys the script and it's more likely to get passed up the ladder.

Confidence Artistry in the Internet Age

The history of con artists, some of which is covered in chapter one, is vast and varied. This rich history gives the storyteller much from which to pull when crafting new stories. Additionally, there are, depending how one counts, between three and several hundred different confidence games (Maurer 3; Lovell vii-xx). The advent of technology and social media makes pulling cons at once both easier and more difficult: easier because there are more ways to approach potential marks and more mediums through which to con them, but more difficult because of the availability of information on the

internet. Cons can sometimes be easily avoided by checking first with Google. The feat therefore for the con man, or the writer of a con man story, is to either use technology to the con man's advantage or find a way to separate the mark from technology.

One way that the show *Burn Notice* addressed this issue was to focus primarily on criminal marks. There is less, if any information about current criminal enterprises to be found by search engines, leaving the marks to rely on inside information or intuition while being conned. Another option, less favorable to me but still necessary, is to rely on the technical ignorance of the general audience. While audiences are growing more and more tech savvy, much of the computer/hacker/technical information in television and movies border on pure fantasy. An exception to this rule is the USA Network television show *Mr. Robot* (2015) which features incredibly realistic computer hacking. This show raised the bar for all others to follow that wish to feature hacking. Still, it is possible to overcome a story hurdle by having the protagonists accomplish something by means of computer hacking that in the real world is either impossible or prohibitive due to costs and resources, but in the world of the story is perfectly acceptable thanks in large part to the audience's ignorance.

Conning the Audience

The audience's ignorance should never be abused but is essential to consider while constructing a con story. As with any good thriller or mystery, the audience needs to be kept in the dark concerning certain facts until such time as their reveal delivers the most impact. In a television show about con artists, the audience expects the protagonists to be one step ahead of the victims: this expectation leads to a drop in tension. For

example, when watching *Criminal*, I expected behind all the plot twists was one long con and so the tension wasn't in the moment but in waiting for the scene in which I was proven right. One way to bring some of that tension back is to widen the underdog gap between the con artists and the mark; the larger the mark, the smarter the con men need to be in order to pull off the con. The audience expects, even wants to be conned by the show while at the same time trying to solve the mystery. This demands of the writer an extra plot twist - to either fool the audience into believing the con has gone awry or collapse the con and force the protagonists to improvise. In the case of *Criminal*, the extra plot twist I didn't expect was that the long con was on the con artist himself. Evidence of both strategies having been successfully employed was uncovered during the literature review process.

In the third season episode, *The Gone Fishin' Job*, of the series *Leverage*, the team's plan goes wrong early on as two of the protagonists are taken hostage by a radical right-wing militia. The con is thrown further askew when, while infiltrating their mark's place of business, the rest of the team's cover is blown. All members of the team are forced to adapt and think on the fly in order to escape death or capture, and also relieve the mark of his money. The climax of 2015's *Focus*, directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, involved Will Smith's character being shot in the chest very near the heart. In the scene, Smith wears a shirt which leaves his chest exposed, proving to the audience that no squib, or explosive blood pack, was used to fake the wound. His character really is shot and appears to be quickly bleeding out. As the mark exits the scene, leaving Smith's character to die, it is revealed that the shooter, the mark's head of security, is in fact Smith's adoptive father who shot Smith in such a way as to avoid killing him. The score

Smith and his father were after was large enough to warrant the risk. The audience, meanwhile, unaware of Smith's and the shooter's relationship, were led to believe Smith had failed in his con, that he could actually die. Both strategies create suspense and elicit more empathy from the audience. These strategies are also most often employed during the stage of the con known as the crisis. This moment is pivotal if the con artist is to get away with the scam. If the crisis fails, the con fails.

Crafting the Con

Just as every movie, television show, and play has its script, so too does the con. Although this can appear formulaic, it exists because it works. Television shows, similarly, have a basic formula of their own because it's proven effective. Not only that, but audiences are easily disturbed by change. In his book *Perry Mason: The Authorship and Reproduction of a Popular Hero*, author J. Dennis Bounds wrote "Audiences expected to see a similar program each week. With this regular presentation of the same formula and major characters every week, there is a need for variation between each episode," (Bounds 108). It is a strange dichotomy that audiences should at once want something fresh and new but demand it be delivered in the same, familiar way. Cons are much the same. The steps remain the same but the effectiveness lies in the creativity of the artist. "Con games never remain stationary; the principle may be old, but the external forms are always changing, for con men know that they must adapt their schemes to the times. This is especially true of the big con," (Maurer 55). Maurer lists ten steps in his book to every big con game:

1. Locating and investigating a well-to-do victim. (Putting the mark up.)

2. Gaining the victim's confidence. (Playing the con for him.)
3. Steering him to meet the insideman. (Roping the mark.)
4. Permitting the insideman to show him how he can make a large amount of money dishonestly. (Telling him the tale.)
5. Allowing the victim to make a substantial profit. (Giving him the convincer.)
6. Determining exactly how much he will invest. (Giving him the breakdown.)
7. Sending him home for this amount of money. (Putting him on the send.)
8. Playing him against a *big store* and fleecing him. (Taking off the touch.)
9. Getting him out of the way as quietly as possible. (Blowing him off.)
10. Forestalling action by the law. (Putting in the fix.) (Maurer, 4)

There are, according to Edward H. Smith in his 1923 book *Confessions of a Confidence Man: A Handbook for Suckers*, only six stages to the con: Foundation work, Approach, Build-up, Pay-Off or Convincer, the Hurrah, and the In-and-In (E. Smith 35-37). This is very similar to the structure used in *The Sting* wherein the following title cards announce the progression of the con and therefore plot: The Players, The Set-Up, The Hook, The Tale, The Wire, The Shut-Out, and The Sting. Using this tried-and-true model, I have developed the following loose episode structure for *Run*: Act One is the *Set Up*. During this stage, the protagonists will identify a mark, making their reason for the choice clear to the audience. The choice may also be made clear by the inciting incident. The protagonist and his team will surveil the mark and investigate which con game would be

best played (more on games later) and how best to approach him or her. Act Two is the *Approach*, during which the inside man, usually Taffy, will either approach the mark or entice the mark to approach him. This is baiting the hook. Act Three is the *Pitch*, during which Taffy or a member of his team will pitch a money-making scheme to the mark; Act Four is the *Confidence*. Taffy and his team will gain the confidence of the mark and allay any trepidation concerning the scheme. Act Five is the *Crisis and Payday*. At this point, a crisis is created during which or after which the mark is separated from his or her money in such a way as to remove from the mark's mind any chance of retrieving it. The Payday is the episode's denouement when the protagonists can rest from their work and enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Vigilante Justice and the Anti-hero

The fruits in question are only able to be had because of something all con artists know; the old proverb, “a fool and his money are soon parted.”

A confidence man prospers only because of the fundamental dishonesty of his victim. First, he inspires a firm belief in his own integrity. Second, he brings into play powerful and well-nigh irresistible forces to excite the cupidity of the mark. Then he allows the victim to make large sums of money by means of dealing which are explained to him as being dishonest-and hence a “sure thing. (Maurer, *Big Con 2*)

Maurer here gives both a summary of the stages of the con and an explanation of why cons work: their marks are dishonest men looking to do further dishonest deeds. The characters of BBC's *Hustle* adhered to a code of conduct, one point of which was that

you can't con an honest man. We're told the same by the great W.C. Fields in the 1939 film *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* in which Fields runs a version of the False Change con on two men who believed they were themselves being dishonest by accepting too much change. This credo appears throughout con artist legend and literature. Apart from the evidence that dishonest men are easier to con than honest and the previously stated reasons that criminals have less leeway when it comes to reporting cons to the police and investigating con artists, seeing bad people get justice, even vigilante justice, is entertaining for an audience.

Vigilante justice is exactly, though not wholly, what *Run* features. Anti-heroes are more and more common on television these days with characters like The Punisher from *Daredevil* (2015-), Annalise Keating from *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-), Frank Underwood from *House of Cards* (2013-), Jessica Jones from *Jessica Jones* (2015), Jaime Lannister from *Game of Thrones* (2011-), Raymond Reddington from *The Blacklist* (2013-), Don Draper from *Mad Men* (2007-2015), Walter White from *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), Nancy Botwin from *Weeds* (2005-2012), Tony Soprano, Ray Donovan, Dexter, and House. This continuing trend of unsympathetic protagonists seemingly goes against long held beliefs about the kinds of heroes we want in our stories as defined by the likes of Aristotle and philosopher David Hume (M. Smith 31). That crime shows have grown darker as society has progressed out of conservatism and into liberalism may reflect audiences' desires for more realism.

Just as television shifted from black and white to color, so too did audiences realize the black and white, right-and-wrong lives of police and criminals on television were reductive. As Americans struggled with right and wrong during the Vietnam War

and after, attitudes toward authority changed. “The corpus of police procedurals post-1975 tend to capture the prevailing attitudes and social ethos of the era, mirroring the burgeoning complexities of real-world police work transpiring at that same juncture,” (Arntfield 81). Where once there was Joe Friday in *Dragnet* (1967-70), then there was Crockett and Tubbs in *Miami Vice* (1984-90). Crockett and Tubbs embodied and bolstered the western gunslinger archetype of American folklore. During the 1980’s, violence in media became more and more “righteous” and the “good bad man” dominated large and small screens (Arntfield 85). “The moral ambivalence of the gunfighter is made additionally evident by virtue of both Crockett and Tubbs being motivated, and ultimately united, by their mutual revenge fantasies rather than any bona fide commitment to public service or law enforcement as traditionally defined,” (Arntfield 85). No longer did we need our police (at least in fiction), those meant to protect and serve us, to be morally upright and above reproach. It became permissible that cops should be just like us; fallible, damaged even.

Based upon the success of these shows, though, the genre progressed from there into what Michael Arntfield calls the Dark Age of television. “Demarcating heroism from vigilantism in police procedurals during this unprecedented period of technological growth and change would become increasingly problematic during this televisual epoch,” (Arntfield 86). The police procedural, and perhaps crime fiction altogether, can be seen as mirroring culture, or as Harry Lee Poe says in response to John Cullen Gruesser’s book *Race, Gender and Empire in American Detective Fiction*, “Detective fiction reflects the development of modern society because of its adaptability,” (Poe xxi). The genre, by its nature, adapts to the crimes and moral zeitgeist of its age.

Run's protagonist Taffy will not be an anti-hero in the classical, purist sense but will exhibit some characteristics normally associated with amoral characters. It is not my intention to write a tragedy such as *Breaking Bad* or *Dexter* (the protagonists of *Run* will earn their happy ending by the series finale) but I intend to keep the audience guessing as to where Taffy's moral compass lies. My favorite and what I believe to be the best and most exciting season of *Burn Notice* was its seventh and final. The season's narrative arch involved tempting series protagonist Michael Weston, who had of late been considering getting out of the spy business, into operating his own personal, unaffiliated espionage organization. The previous six seasons had shown Michael what happens when people skirt red tape and government oversight in order to fulfil personal agendas; no matter how altruistic, the dangers of going too far are all too real. Season seven portrayed Michael at his most anti-hero, willing at times to put morals aside in the name of greater good (*Burn Notice*, season 7).

This willingness to not be bound by normal morals is part of Taffy's character; the dangerous part from which he needs but does not seek redemption. Herein lies part of the attraction to his character; self-deception. "The possibility of redemption, no matter how slight or remote, is thus an essential ingredient in these shows... And self-deception is a key to the possibility of redemption: White, Draper and company strive to dupe themselves because at some level they understand, but can't stand, what they are or have become," (M. Smith 33). The audience knows, or at least wants to believe Taffy is a good man but they also see him hiding this fact from himself and crossing moral boundaries in an effort to bring about vigilante justice. The audience longs for the moment when Taffy will reconcile the two halves of himself.

This longing for redemption may be another reason for the abundance of antiheroes in media. Taking for granted that all people are born with an innate desire, as C. S. Lewis might call it, to be reconciled to God, redemption, whether realized or not, is therefore part of the human condition (Lewis 136). But so, too, is a desire to see justice done. If someone wrongs you, commits a harmful act against you, there arises a natural desire to see that wrong righted, whether by means of recompense or punishment. A strange thing then happens when a storyteller places a villain in the role of protagonist, thereby mixing these two competing desires. The protagonist is classically the *hero* of the story, the doer of mighty deeds, the savior of worlds, the self-sacrificial warrior. These characteristics are often attributed to men of valor and honor, champions pure of heart. However, nothing prevents a scoundrel from performing the same acts.

When I read a story about a good man doing good deeds for good reasons, I cheer for him because I see the best parts of myself in him and imagine myself doing the same. When I read a story about a bad man doing good things for multifarious reasons, I cheer him on because I want to see him redeemed by his actions and story's end. Perhaps audiences grew tired of watching good men perform bravely. It's a little one-dimensional, to be sure. Stories have shifted from moral characters who bend the law (Rick Blaine, *Casablanca*) to criminals of increasing immorality (Jordan Belfort, *The Wolf of Wall Street*). Maybe there's more catharsis in watching out-and-out villains being redeemed. Audiences get wish fulfillment by imagining themselves as villains, then experience redemption through the villains as they become heroes. Audiences get to have their cake and eat it, too.

In the same way that storytellers humanized law enforcement by making them fallible, perhaps yet another reason for the increase in amoral protagonists is the humanizing of criminals. When I was a child during the 1980s, criminals in movies were unapologetically evil. Think Alan Rickman in *Die Hard* (1988), Kurtwood Smith in *Robocop* (1987), Billy Drago in *The Untouchables* (1987), Dennis Hopper in *Blue Velvet* (1986), Rutger Haur in *The Hitcher* (1986), M. Emmet Walsh in *Blood Simple* (1984), Clancy Brown as The Kurgan in *Highlander* (1986), and Ian McDiarmid as The Emperor in *Return of the Jedi* (1983). If they didn't have an excuse to be evil, they found one. Modern film and television, on the other hand, often explain or even excuse the evil acts of men and women. To be clear, this isn't a new concept. Looking again at Rutger Haur, this time in *Blade Runner* (1982), the reasons for his evil actions are laid bare. However, outside of horror films, and even including some, criminals' actions are being shown as a direct result of nurture over nature. Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* (1988) is a prime example. Batman's arch nemesis, The Joker, was humanized in Moore's comic by exploring his origins as a normal man who suffered one incredibly bad day which drove him to become the Clown Prince of Crime. In the comic, The Joker is adamant that the only thing that separates him from anyone else is just that, "one bad day," (Moore 39). Modern storytellers seem to have latched onto this idea, wearing impossibly thin the line between normal, well-functioning members of society and those who would burn it to the ground.

It's Just a Game

As said there are numerous con games but according to David Maurer there are really only "three big-con games, the *wire*, the *rag*, and the *pay-off*," (Maurer 3). All

three games require, at their best and most elaborate, what is called the *store*. Benjamin Marks, mentioned earlier as the creator of Dollar Stores, is also the inventor of the store. In fact, at their inception they were one and the same. Marks “rented a storefront in downtown Cheyenne, filled its window with tempting merchandise, and displayed a sign announcing that the price of everything in the store was a dollar or less. Marks never sold a single item,” (Reading 105). The reason he sold nothing was simple; as soon as a customer entered his store, Marks turned their interest to one of the many games of chance being played in the back. What Marks created was a “carefully set up and skillfully managed theater where the victim acts out an unwitting role in the most exciting of all underworld dramas,” (Maurer 8). It was from the safety of the store, away from the prying eyes of the public and the law where con artists could take their marks for thousands and tens of thousands of dollars instead of the pocket change of the three card monte tables.

The store eventually dropped the merchandise in the windows for more complex facades, the most famous of which is the wire room, thanks to the film *The Sting*. “Of the three modern big-con games, the rag, the wire, and the pay-off, the wire was invented first. Without it, the rag and the pay-off probably could not have developed,” (Maurer 31). Established at the turn of the twentieth century, the wire involved tapping into Western Union telegraph lines and delaying horse race results while a mark inside the store was led to place a bet on a “sure thing,” or guaranteed winner. The mark is aware the results are being delayed and is therefore aware of the illegality of the bet. What the mark doesn’t know is that his coconspirators, unknown to him just a few days prior, are confidence artists and that the store exists solely to separate him, and others like him,

from their money (Maurer 31-33). If the cons played their parts right, the mark is usually either none the wiser to the con or too humiliated or afraid to go to the police. In the case of William F. Walkner, who absconded with \$600,000 of his employer's money to spend at Charley Gondorf's wire store in New York City, "he refused to testify against his swindlers, like so many marks who decline to hold their gullibility up to scrutiny in the courtroom," (Reading 117). In the event of the rare mark who does try to contact the law, a tail or "tailer" would immediately contact a previously bribed policeman or "fixer" to handle the matter (Maurer 51). In most cases, the con artists made away with the money.

Once convinced of the strategy and having seen it in action, the mark then places an enormous bet, often the most money the mark can get his hands on plus some of the inside man's money. The mark receives instructions via a telephone across the street and is told to place his bet on such and such a horse. The mark places his wager and waits while the race begins. The inside man, the one feeding him the information, arrives at the store to share in the victory. He looks at the mark's ticket and pales (he is a very good actor), then curses the mark for his stupidity. He insists he told the mark the horse would *place*, not *win*. It's too late, the race has begun and there's no changing the bet. The mark's money is now the store's money. The mark is either conned again if he's not wise, or blown-off if he is or hasn't any more money (Maurer 47-52).

The second game to develop out of the store was the pay-off. As explained by Maurer, a mark chosen by a con man called a roper would be roped into a situation, usually by means of a wallet-drop, in which an inside man would pose as an agent of a syndicate that fixed races. The roper and the mark, upon returning the inside man's lost wallet, would be thanked with the offer of placing a small bet on their behalf. The mark, a

first-hand witness to the “truth” of the inside man’s word and enticed by the crisp new bills in his hand, would almost always be game for more. The inside man would then send the roper and the mark on his behalf to the store, this time dressed as a high society club where bets of \$100,000 were commonplace, to place a bet using a check for \$50,000 written out in the roper’s name. After winning the bet and while attempting to collect their winnings, often times of several hundred thousand dollars, a manager would intervene and demand confirmation by the roper’s bank that the check could be covered. Of course it couldn’t be, so the roper, the inside man, and the mark would pool their resources, the mark pitching in maybe \$25,000 (Maurer 56-73). Now at this point, the con artists could take the mark’s money and run but the mark would know he’d been had and might seek revenge, personally or through the law. What the con men do next goes a long way to prevent that possibility.

When the money is collected and they have their \$50,000, the roper, the inside man, and the mark return to the store to collect their winnings. As they enter, the inside man is notified by his syndicate as to the next winning horse. At the counter, at the site of all that money, the inside man suggests putting it all on their next sure thing. They agree and the roper takes care of it. What follows is exactly the same as in the wire. The roper bets on the horse to win but the inside man claims it should have been to place (Maurer 54-76). What may happen next, and what the makers of *The Sting* included in their film, is a crisis moment in which the inside man *shoots* and *kills* the roper (Maurer 77). This bit of theater is often enough to put the mark on the run and swear off gambling for good.

The third long con is the rag. The rag plays nearly identical to the pay-off except instead of horse racing it involved the stock exchange. The store would be set up as a

broker's office "complete with tickers, phone service, brokers, clerks and customers," (Maurer 18). The marks were roped in, convinced, sent off for money, swindled, and then blown-off. These three cons, the wire, the pay-off, and the rag, are the basis of all other long cons. These cons can also be played without a store; it's called playing a mark "against the wall," (Maurer 136). Most cons found in films and television shows owe their origins to these three.

To fill in the gaps or to supplement the long cons are the short cons. Con artists must be adept at reading people in order to choose and manipulate marks. Running short cons helps them stay on their game. In *Run*, these short cons will be used in at least two ways: to augment and support long cons and for their entertainment value. The long con, as it works in a television show, has two peak audience-engagement moments; when the plan is explained, and when the plan is later executed with a surprising twist. In order to keep audience engagement up, short cons can be implemented at other times during the episode. For example, in the "Cops and Robbers" episode of *Hustle*, two characters are kept out of the action of the A plot and, to pass the time, run several short cons. These short cons had no bearing on the episode's plot but neither were they time wasted as they revealed character while entertaining the audience.

Muay Thai

In an attempt to subvert the stereotypical team member role of "muscle" or "fighter" as male, *Run* will have as its muscle a woman named Sarah Kaya. Sarah, of Thai origin, is proficient in Muay Thai, the national sport of Thailand (Vail 509). Even more, she is an expert in Muay Boran, the "ancient muay" or traditional form of the

martial art with moves considered too brutal for the modern ring (Vail 510). I chose Muay Thai as Sarah's fighting style because it is less common in American media and therefore more exotic.

US audiences are accustomed to Japanese and Chinese fighting styles due to the popularity of Kung-fu and karate action movies such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Matrix*, and stars like Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Bruce Lee. America had a love affair with ninja movies in the 1980s and early 90s with cult classics like *American Ninja* (1985), *Shogun Assassin* (1980), *Enter the Ninja* (1981), *Revenge of the Ninja* (1983), *Ninja Terminator* (1985), *Three Ninjas* (1992), *Surf Ninjas* (1993) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990). America has had some, although limited exposure to Muay Thai thanks in part to Tony Jaa's *Ong Bak* trilogy (2003, 2008, 2010). It was Tony Jaa's amazing work that inspired me to choose Muay Thai over other martial arts and martial sports styles. Muay Thai is characterized by the unique use of "kicks, punches, elbow- and knee-strikes," which, again, are uncommon and therefore visually arresting to domestic viewers. (Vail 510).

Magicians and Illusionists

As previously mentioned, there are similarities between con artists and illusionists. Both are performers and like all performers, the better one is, the better living one can make. The greatest difference between the two, besides the legal and moral, are the tools used. The great con artist tools of illusion are the store and man's inherent greed while the magician's tools of illusion are mirrors, wires, and misdirection (Steinmeyer 1-

332). Charlie Bell, the Salesman of Taffy's team, works occasional legitimate jobs as a magician. He also puts those skills to work during cons.

When I was in sixth grade, my teacher Mr. Ebenhoh was eccentric, at least by small town standards. He formed what he called the Budd Club, named after our school, C. E. Budd Elementary. He bade us call him *Rambo* and his wife, *Beach Goddess*. We had access to all areas of the school, from the boiler rooms to the catwalks over the theatre. We ditched school work to make movies. I took a turn as Mr. Bumble in our film adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, still available to rent from Loudonville Public Library. We attached a bicycle to a generator to power all sorts of things in the classroom. Most memorable of all, however, was the end of the year Magic Show we put on for the lower grade levels for which I was chosen as Host. Apart from introducing each act, I also opened the show with my own bag of tricks. My favorite was a lighter that fit on a finger, facing the palm, invisible to the back of the hand. Into the lighter I'd stuff flash cotton. When the curtains rose, I stepped onto the stage and with a flourish, out from my hands erupted a great fireball. From that moment on, I had their attention.

Hosting that magic show, I learned the thrill of performing for a large crowd. I also learned how difficult it is working with volunteers and just how much could go wrong. There were a few missteps when we worked the bike generator into the show. Thankfully, nothing went wrong while classmate Stuart broke a cinderblock on Mr. Ebenhoh's chest with a sledgehammer while he laid on a bed of nails wearing a Tutu. Like I said, eccentric. All of this to say, I've been on that stage. I've worn the tux and top hat. When I rewrote episode two after securing Gaffney's feedback, it was this experience that led me to shift the teaser from computer hacking to a magic show.

Just like a big con, a magic trick is a scripted performance rehearsed until perfected. Jim Steinmeyer, author of *Hiding the Elephant - How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear* (2004), wrote that “Like any real play, there are characters and a developing plot. There is a progression, or an *arc*, to the action. There is a surprise and a resolution, which not only completes the audience’s expectations but builds upon them,” (17). In like fashion, Michael Caine’s character in *The Prestige* says “Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called The Pledge... The second act is called The Turn... [The] third act, the hardest part, [is] the part we call The Prestige,” (*The Prestige*). Three acts, like a play or film. A difference between magic and plays, movies, or television is the focus on spectacle. Where the focus for the latter is most often character (the spectacle exists to support character), the focus of magic is the spectacle itself. Also similar to film and television is the audience’s participation. “It’s a delicate battle of wits—an audience that welcomes being deceived, then dares to be fooled, alternately questioning, prodding, and surrendering,” (Steinmeyer 17).

The similarities do not end there. Audiences watch film, television, and plays not merely for entertainment but for catharsis. They experience the emotional journey of protagonists and likewise process their own withheld emotions. Regent University stresses *redemptive* filmmaking partly for this reason (and also as a way of sharing the gospel). Steinmeyer has congruent sentiments toward experiencing magic tricks. “It’s a redemptive feeling, a reminder of many potential wonders... Unlike a mere deception or a simple secret, which gives the impression that something’s been taken away, a great magician makes you feel like something’s been given to you,” (Steinmeyer 21-22).

Audiences find themselves akin to children, when everything was new and mysterious. Considering the responsibility, doldrums, and grief of adulthood, this is an exceptional gift to be given.

As it pertains to *Run*, elements of illusions and magic tricks will aid in constructing some cons, especially during the fifth act Crisis. Big cons may be elaborate plays but often, if the mark were to just step back and examine his or her situation, I believe the con would become visible. I'd also suggest con artists know this, too. But they know something else, that people only see what they want to. Con artists choose marks they believe are morally ambiguous who can be prodded to cross ethical or legal boundaries in order to make a profit. This mindset is accompanied by blinders which are heightened if the con is well-conceived. The same is true of illusion. "Magic is not what you see but what you perceive," (Witter 11). If a mark perceives an opportunity to get rich quick, he or she won't want to see how fake the opportunity is.

Computer Hackers

Hollywood would have you believe computer hacking is a super power. The faster you type, the better hacker you are, says *Swordfish* (2001). Jeff Goldblum wrote a computer virus in moments that infected an entire alien fleet in *Independence Day* (1996). My favorite is the completely fanciful graphical interface from movies like *Hackers* (1995), *Jurassic park* (1994), and even *Skyfall* (2012). It appears as though filmmakers know hacking exists but they don't understand it, and they don't expect their audience to understand it either. But in an increasingly tech-savvy world, accurate portrayals of computer hackers is becoming more necessary.

To start, the word *hacker* needs to be defined. Jonas Löwgren, professor of interaction and information design at the Division of Media and Information Technology, Linköping University, Sweden, speaks to the roots of the term. “Academic hacking is generally traced to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where... the word “hack” was used to refer to technology-based practical jokes or stunts. Its meaning shifted... to mean a clever technical solution in general,” (Löwgren). A *hacker* then was someone who came up with the clever solution. These hackers were an “incredibly diverse set of people... academics, students, hobbyists and penetration professionals,” (Burningham 49). Löwgren separates hackers into three general categories: academic hackers, hobbyist hackers (interested more in hardware than software), and network hackers, who began on phone networks but evolved with technology to include the internet.

There are two different categories of hacker into which Löwgren’s categories could be redistributed: Black Hats and White Hats. Simply put, black hats are criminals and white hats are security. The terms white hat and black hat are “derived from old Western movies, where you knew who the good guy was based on the color of his hat,” (Burningham 49-50). Black hats, a term made slightly more mainstream by the 2015 film *Blackhat* starring Chris Hemsworth, are people who use their computer hacking skills for illegal purposes and usually to make money. Also in 2015, Cisco Systems, Inc., in collaboration with two other cyber security companies, uncovered a scheme in which a group of hackers had stolen approximately \$60 million using something called the Angler exploit kit. An exploit kit works when “a user’s browser is invisibly directed to a malicious web site that hosts an exploit kit, which then proceeds to exploit security holes,

also known as vulnerabilities, to infect the user with malware,” (Tun). Once infected, Angler would install ransomware on a victim’s computer which would encrypt the victim’s files, “only unlocking them after receiving payment,” (Gatlin). Exploit kits are only one of hundreds of tactics used by black hats.

On the other side of the law are white hat hackers. White hats also look for vulnerabilities but for the purposes of patching or eliminating them. White hats mostly get into hacking because of their innate curiosity for how things work. Security researcher Matt Jakubowski explains his approach to hacking as, “what is the way they don’t want me to use this and how can I use it in ways that they’re not expecting,” (The Good Stuff). If vulnerabilities are found, researchers like Matt will contact the product’s or software’s manufacturer to report the security flaw. Sometimes these reports are ignored, or worse, the hacker is threatened with legal action since the hack was technically illegal. Other times, however, the report is rewarded, often called bug bounties, in which the company will give a cash or cash value reward to the researcher. Most bug bounties are small but some can be substantial. “Facebook ended up hiring one of its best bug hunters, Reginaldo Silva, a Brazilian engineer who got a \$33,500 payout in 2014,” (Burningham 50). In spite of white hats’ best work, “the black-hat hackers often tend to have the advantage over the white hats,” (Gatlin). This is due to the fact that while both can locate security flaws equally quick, it’s faster to exploit those flaws than to fix them.

Despite Hollywood’s poor track record with computer hackers, one television show is getting it right. *Mr. Robot* (2015-) debuted June 24, 2015 on the USA network to near universal acclaim. It set a new record on Rotten Tomatoes when it became the first

television show to earn a rating of 100% for each of its season one episodes (Reiher). This is quite an accomplishment considering what it takes to make what hackers do look exciting while also staying true to life. “The problem is that spending hours in front of computers trying to root out vulnerabilities in software can be, well, ‘really boring,’” says Marc Rogers, hacking consultant for *Mr. Robot* (Gilbert). He goes on to say that “when I would see people portraying things that I have done and known intimately, I would cringe.” This cringe-worthy portrayal of hackers may be coming to an end thanks to the bar now set by *Mr. Robot*.

In addition to being a hit with critics, it earned applause from “hackers of all stripes,” (Gilbert). Aramaki, the pseudonym for a member of the hacker group Rustle League which is known for pranking fellow hacker group Anonymous, said that Mr. Robot “seems 99 percent more accurate than any CBS crime drama made recently,” (Fruzsina). Anonymous, too, seems impressed. “I know people pretty much exactly like that character,” says former active member Gregg Housh in reference to protagonist Elliot (Fruzsina). Even Edward Snowden, arguably America’s most famous hacker, at least in terms of his being a household name, praised the show’s “authenticity,” (Dockterman 54). Sam Esmail, the show’s creator, wrote the show “in part from a frustration with the kitschy way Hollywood portrays the Internet, all binary digits and glowing tubes,” (Dockterman 54). Esmail makes sure to consult with experts in multiple fields, often times leaving the details “to technical advisors to make sure each hack on the show is actually plausible,” (Gilbert). The extra lengths the show’s creators go to don’t elevate the show above all the criticism, however. Jaimi Cochran, former leader of Rustle League, says that “while not perfect, [*Mr. Robot*] will suffice for entertainment

purposes,” (Gilbert). Sam Esmail has done a fine job if that’s the worst that can be said for his show.

Taking all of this into account, the goal now is to write the character of Kristopher in a way that pleases both general audiences and hackers alike. Run will not be nearly as hacker-centric as *Mr. Robot* but some hacking will occur in most episodes. Some episodes are likely to revolve around hacking, especially during season three. *Mr. Robot* and its protagonist Elliot can inform the character of Kristopher in both appearance and psychology. The script establishes Kristopher as identifying with the punk rock scene. This falls in line with the “outsider” persona often associated with hackers. The character of Elliot “rings true from ‘paranoid and introverted personality’ to ‘how he dresses,’” says Gregg Housh, (Fruzsina).

As far as the actual hacking is concerned, there are two options. One option would be to not show Kristopher’s computer screen while hacking. In *Mr. Robot*, all the code visible on screen is accurate as if it were real life. The show’s technical advisors actually test each hack themselves before allowing it into the show (Gilbert). Unless I become an expert hacker myself or consult with one (option two), any computer code I write into the scripts would be nonsense. More than code, there’s tools. Some tools from the series were recognizable even to me, such as the Raspberry Pie, a computer roughly the size of a credit card. Most, however, I was completely unaware of. The website HackerTarget.com identifies a number of these tools: Kali Linux, which is a Linux operating system that comes preconfigured to penetration test other systems; candump, a Linux utility for canbus hacking, or hacking into cars’ computers; bluesniff and btscanner, used to scan for and access Bluetooth enabled devices, and many others

(Exploring the Hacker Tools). Other common hacker tools are RFID (radio frequency identification) chips, cards, and readers; portable penetration testing devices such as the Pwnie Express Pwn Plug R3 (named for the leetspeak term pwn, pronounced “pōwn” which means to *own* or *dominate* someone); and USB memory sticks (Fulton 76).

In the end, writing Kristopher in a convincing manner will require a focus on his character as opposed to his work. Allowing him to look, act, and sound the part is a good first step. Still, a familiarity with command line entry programs like Ruby and Python, tools like exploit kits and ransomware, and general leetspeak like pwn, *haxor* (hacker), and *warez* (plural, software) will go a long way toward appeasing hackers in the audience.

Nootropics, a.k.a. Smart Drugs

Episode two of *Run* features an antagonist who operates a nootropic production company. Nootropics, or smart drugs, are “drugs and other interventions to modify brain processes with the aim of enhancing memory, mood and attention in people who are not impaired by illness or disorder,” (Hall 1105). An example of this would be the film *Limitless* (2011) in which Eddie Morra (Bradley Cooper) takes a smart drug called NZT-48 that allows him to fully utilize his brain’s potential. A much more extreme example would be 2014’s *Lucy* in which a character’s access to full brain function gives her supernatural abilities.

The real-world effects of nootropics are much less exciting. In fact, neuroenhancements have been around for some time. Fluoxetine (Prozac) enhances mood while methylphenidate (Ritalin) treats attention deficit disorder (Outram 324). Even

nicotine can be considered a smart drug as according to a number of double-blind studies it enhances “motor abilities, attention, and memory,” (Heishman). The problem with nicotine, however, is the side effects of smoking in order to ingest the drug. The side effects outweigh the potential benefits and it is these side effects that give some ethicists cause for worry. Harmful side effects are accepted when treating a person with an illness if they are less serious than the illness being treated. But, “the trade-off between side effects and improvements may be less clear if healthy people use pharmaceutical enhancements to improve their mental performance,” ((Hall 1105). The line between harmful and beneficial becomes much more subjective.

Which drugs, and what types of drugs, fall under the nootropic umbrella can be difficult to determine. The previously mentioned drugs are certainly enhancers but they are also government scheduled and regulated drugs, meaning they require a prescription. Many other nootropics, such as Piracetam, Aniracetam, Oxiracetam, and Noopept are not regulated or approved by the FDA and therefore do not require a prescription. Some, notably Piracetam, were sold as *dietary supplements* despite not meeting the FDA’s strict definition of that term (Unlimited). That “what if” of *Run* episode two is what if the FDA were finally to recognize the term nootropic as Hall defines it and grant approval to a drug that was solely designed for neuroenhancement.

In the script, I focus on one clinical drug trial participant, a college student with Tourette syndrome. The student, Esther, is given a fictional drug called Siatine, produced by the antagonist’s company and named after Sia, the Egyptian deification of perception. I chose a student because of the high use by students of neuroenhancing drugs (Holloway). On many campuses in the US, pressure for academic excellence is high and

smart drugs “are thought to be useful for enhancing studying and work capabilities through improving the ability to concentrate, especially in the context of high-stress situations such as academic testing,” (Outram 324). Showing a student taking and experiencing harmful side effects of a smart drug is intended to ground the episode more in the factual realm of nootropics than either *Limitless* or *Lucy* portrayed.

Performance of Comparable Entertainment Media

When creating a television show about con artists, it is perhaps a good idea to investigate how other shows and films featuring con artists fared financially and critically. Neither of these factors can predict the success or failure of another attempt but they can at least serve as possible indicators of an audience’s willingness to invest their time and money.

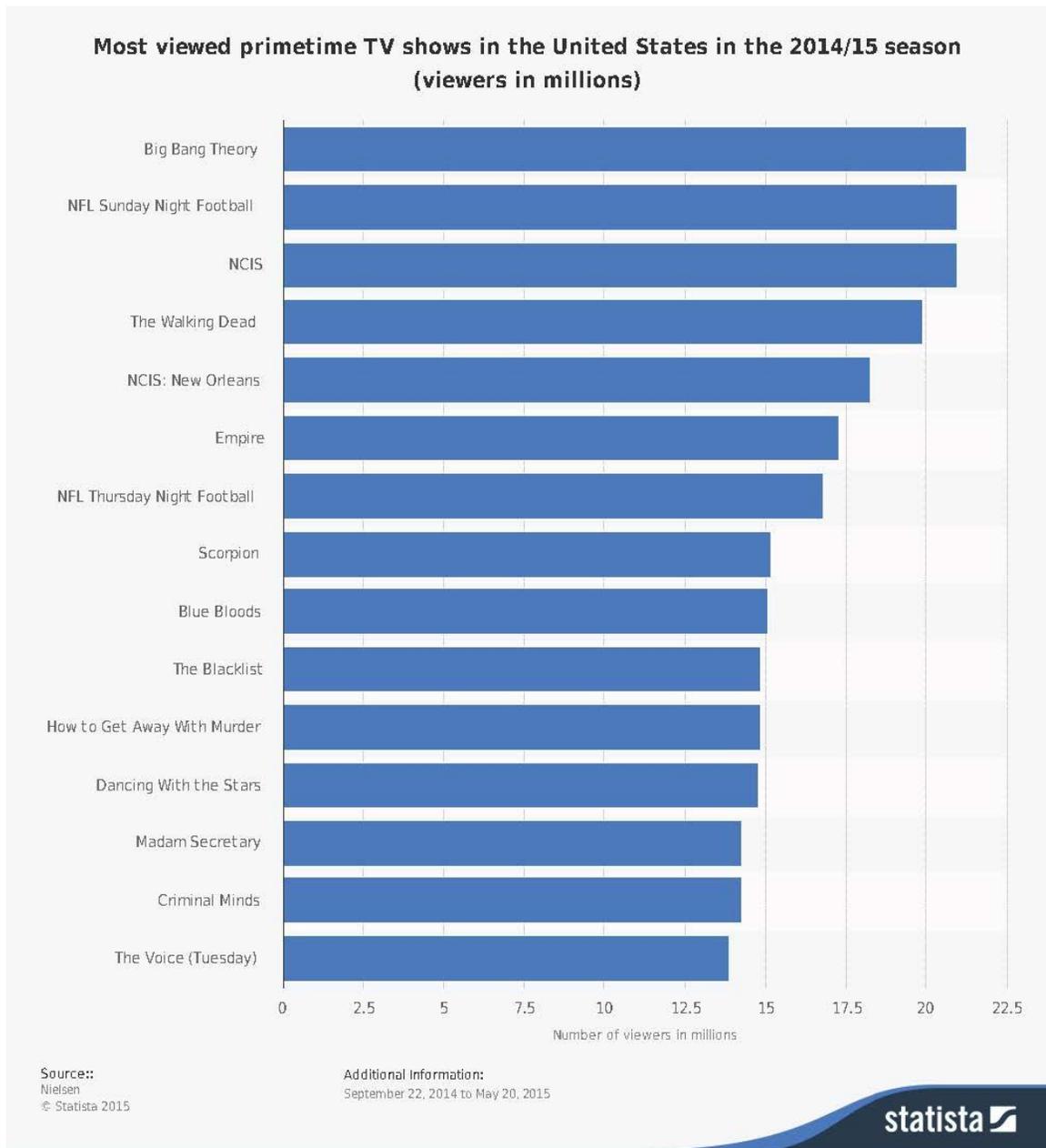
Television

Burn Notice debuted in 2007 on the USA Network to 3.99 million viewers (Kissle). The show ran for 111 episodes, and one TV movie, over seven seasons until 2013. The series finale was seen by 4.97 million people (tvbythenumbers.com). *Leverage* debuted in 2008 on TNT to five million viewers (Mitovich) and said goodbye five years later to an audience of 3.04 million. *White Collar* debuted on the USA Network to 5.4 million and continues for six seasons. All three shows were later picked up for syndication (*High Tech*; Lieberman). These shows were chosen as comps due to their inclusion of con artists and con games and to suggest the commercial viability of *Run*.

In an effort to be as marketable as possible, *Run* will be a blend of procedural and serial television. “Today, the best shows that close each episode also have ongoing dramatic stories. *House* and the *The Good Wife*, for example, have built followings on their continuing characters. But from a writing point of view, they are constructed as procedurals,” (Douglas, 15). Serials can be more interesting from the writer’s perspective as characters have more room to change and grow. Procedurals, on the other hand, are often preferred by producers and studios, especially network television, for its easy transition into syndication. When each episode is a story unto itself, audiences can watch in any order without feeling lost. “If the episodes have no ‘memory,’ that is, no significant development of ongoing relationship, the order of the episodes isn’t supposed to matter,” (Douglas, 15).

Broadening the scope of research from con artists to one-hour dramas, statistics show that drama, in particular procedurals, is the most watched prime time television (see figure 1). Despite *Big Bang Theory* topping the list, dramas dominate with *NCIS*, *The Walking Dead*, *NCIS: New Orleans*, *Empire*, *Scorpion*, *Blue Bloods*, *The Blacklist*, *How to Get Away With Murder*, *Madam Secretary*, and *Criminals Minds* all making the top fifteen primetime TV shows of the 2014/15 season. Of the nine, six are more-or-less classic procedural while the other three bear at least some of the hallmarks.

Figure 1.



Source: Nielsen. "Most viewed primetime TV shows in the United States in the 2014/15 season (viewers in millions)." Statista, June 2015. Web. 11 Feb. 2016.

Film

No one can say what makes a hit television show or movie. The following comps in figure 2 are offered not as evidence that Run is a sure-thing but as evidence that entertainment media featuring con artists can and have been successful.

Figure 2.

Film	Budget (million)	Gross (million)	Score (rottentomatoes.com)
<i>Focus</i> (2015)*	50.1	159	56%**
<i>Ocean's Eleven</i> (2001) [†]	85	450.7	82% ^{††}
<i>Matchstick Men</i> (2003) [‡]	62 ^{‡‡}	65.5	82% ^{‡‡‡}
<i>American Hustle</i> (2013) [§]	40	251.1	93% ^{§§}

Source: *"*Focus*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. IMDB, Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

**"*Focus*." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Flixster, Web. 24 Feb. 2016.

[†]"*Ocean's Eleven*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. IMDB, Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

^{††}"*Ocean's Eleven*." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Flixster, Web. 24 Feb. 2016.

[‡]"*Matchstick Men*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. IMDB, Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

^{‡‡}"Number Crunch: A Look At Ridley Scott's Career." *pro.boxoffice.com*. Box Office Media, LLC. 15 June 2012. Web 23 Feb. 2016.

^{‡‡‡}"*Matchstick Men*." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Flixster, Web. 24 Feb. 2016.

[§]"*American Hustle*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. IMDB, Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

^{§§}"*American Hustle*." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Flixster, Web. 24 Feb. 2016.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Series Description

Run is a one-hour drama for cable or streaming services aimed at men and women eighteen-and-up. The tone of the show will be a blend of action/drama/thriller with light comedy.

Hook: Different day. Different city. Different con. Same Con Man.

Premise Line: Con man Taffy Price is between a rock and a hard place; his girlfriend Olivia is held ransom and the mafia wants his head, forcing Taffy to run from city to city, grifting his way to \$100 million before he and Olivia both pay the ultimate price.

Narrative Series Arc

Taffy's quest is to seek revenge for his father's wrongful incarceration and death. The man he holds responsible is Tom Spencer, a former California Chief Justice and head of an international criminal enterprise. Throughout the series, Taffy's cons are designed to either take down elements of Spencer's organization or get closer to Spencer himself in order to exact his revenge.

Season One: Taffy first goes after Spencer's money man, Max Corvo. Max is a billionaire money launderer living in Los Angeles with fingers in many financial pies. Taffy intentionally goes into debt with Max in order to plant Olivia inside his home as a spy. Olivia feeds Taffy new marks which serve as episode antagonists. When Max has been totally ruined and needs protection from the organization for which he once acted as

accountant, Taffy will step in and lend a hand. Max figures into Taffy's long con as the uber Banker, bankrolling his final push against Spencer.

Season Two: Taffy's debt to the mafia comes back to haunt him. Throughout series one, Taffy is hunted by and may be an occasional ally with professional hitman Filippo Abruzzo. Taffy somehow incurred an unpayable debt of dishonor with the mafia prior to season one and by the beginning of season two, they intend to collect his head. Taffy continues to run from city to city, avoiding Filippo while using list he acquired during the season one finale to track down and con mafia connections to Tom Spencer. Filippo serves as the uber Salesman for his long con, selling the dire nature of his situation to Olivia.

Season Three: Former ally Richard Mapes, known only as Ctrl to Taffy and his team, will serve as the season three antagonist. Ctrl is a computer hacker with dreams of a worldwide socialist society. Ctrl was helping Taffy access information about Spencer's organization but went rogue and started taking out financial institutions, credit card companies, etc. Taffy and his team must stop Ctrl and reign him back in because Taffy intends to use him as the uber Talent in his long con.

Season Four: Season four gets even more personal by bringing in Taffy's ex-wife Cadence Byrne, FBI super-sleuth tasked with apprehending Taffy after Ctrl made it appear as if Taffy perpetrated many of the crimes from season three. The only flame Cadence still holds for Taffy is one of anger. She ruthlessly hunts him down while Taffy continues to run from city to city, pulling cons to get himself closer to Spencer and maybe buy a few favors to keep the FBI off his heels. Taffy's ultimate goal this season is

to turn Cadence from enemy to friend, or at least ally as she is the intended uber Accomplice.

Season Five: Season five and on will deal directly with finding and executing revenge on Tom Spencer. At the end of season four, when Taffy reveals his ultimate long con to convince Olivia of her father's true character and recruit her help in making him pay for his crimes, Olivia will disappear in order to take time and process the new information. Taffy and his team will use whatever means necessary to track down the remaining members of Spencer's organization, relieving them of their money, and coercing them into giving up Spencer. Upon Olivia's return she agrees to help and Spencer's days are numbered.

The Characters

Taffy Price, a.k.a. the Conductor

Olivia Merdot, a.k.a. the Thief

Sarah Kaya, a.k.a. the Talent

Charlie Bell, a.k.a. the Salesman

Kristopher Roth, a.k.a. the Banker

Leroy Perkins, a.k.a. the Accomplice

Primaries

Name: John "Taffy" Price

General Stats

Age: 38

Ethnicity/Nationality: Caucasian/American

Occupation: Con Artist

Marital/Family Status: Divorced, in a relationship, no children

General Personality Notes

Extrovert

Optimist

Confident

Calm under pressure

Sense of:

Sexuality: Manly, but not overtly so. Monogamous. Comfortable in his own skin.

Spirituality: Has a vague sense of Karma. Was briefly raised in a Catholic boys' home.

Morality: Strong sense of justice. Believes what he does is right except when it isn't, has few qualms about being a bad guy when it's called for. Morality is relative.

Smarts:

Book Smarts: No formal education, didn't even finish high school. Has read a few books, doesn't have much use for them.

Street Smarts: He has all the street smarts. He spent many of his formative years on the street. His education was in the reality of life on your own and fending for yourself.

Intuition: His instincts are sharp and usually accurate. Has a feel for people and their motivations.

Empathy level: low unless he knows you.

Fears: Ending up alone (though he'd never admit it)

Pet Peeves: mumbling

Mirror/Major Traits

Major Trait: Confidence

Exhibited: being a confidence artist, one of the best

Mirror: Afraid he isn't good enough to find justice for his dead father

Exhibited: occasional nights of heavy drinking

Major Trait: Loyalty

Exhibited: Rewarding his friends

Mirror: Afraid to get close to people

Exhibited: keeps people at arm's length

Major Trait: Risk-taker

Exhibited: taking risks

Mirror: careful planner

Exhibited: has 5-year plan to exact revenge on his father's killer

Personality/Behavior Crossover

When under pressure: Taffy remains calm, thinks quickly.

When in an argument: Would rather win than be right

When in a fight: fights dirty, fights to win

When working: tunnel vision

When in a group: is the leader

When alone: his mind goes to dark places

When out of control: drinks a lot

When in the minority of an opinion: Does what he wants anyway while reserving the right to say I told you so

When criticized: Accepts it

When praised: Deflects it

When caught in wrongdoing: Freely admits it.

When in a moral quandary: Doesn't let morals get in the way, but can be persuaded to do the right thing by a close friend.

General

Significant Life Events: Taffy's father was convicted of embezzlement and sent to prison when Taffy was just eight years old. Taffy was sent to live with a foster family. A year later, as Taffy's father was appealing his trial, he was killed by another inmate. Taffy moved from foster family to foster family. He eventually ran away and lived on the streets until found by Leroy who raised him.

Occupation: Con Artist

How long: on and off since 12 years old.

Prior: Private Jet Company rep/salesman

Dream job: Already doing it

Education: no formal education

Class/Wealth: Broke (on paper) but very well dressed and always has cash on hand.

Religion: none

Background: catholic

Clubs/Associations: Mile High Club, many country clubs and similar under false names

Hobbies/for fun: Golf, Pool, betting

Past Record: Two years for harassment, breaking and entering, and assault

Habits: drinking when depressed

Other People

Family

Connected Family: No blood family

Past Family: Father died at 12. Mother died in childbirth.

Upbringing: privileged, despite just him and his father.

Home life: lives with Olivia, always an adventure

Friendships

Types attracted to: smart people with similar interests; outgoing; loyal

Types repelled by: clueless; self-promoters; no ambition

Closest Associates: colleagues, fellow con artists

Most valued associates: those he's known the longest

Key Enemies:

Tom Spencer, Max Corvo, Filippo Abruzzo, Ctrl, Cadence Byrne (his ex-wife)

Self-Evaluation

Goals: make Tom Spencer pay for what he did to Taffy's father.

Perceived Strength: determination

Perceived Weakness: tunnel vision, willingness to cross the line

Would change if he could: the drinking

Secrets kept from the world: he keeps most of his cards close to the chest

Blind spots: Orphans,

Appearance

Age: 38

Birthdate: February 28, 1978

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 165 lbs.

Build: athletic

Hair: dirty blonde

Eyes: brown

Skin: light tan

Scars/birthmarks: several small scars on hands

Health: healthy

Attractiveness/Appeal: decent-looking but most of the appeal is in his confidence

Best Feature: jawline

* * *

Name: Olivia Merdot

General Stats

Age: 34

Ethnicity/Nationality: Caucasian/American

Occupation: Unemployed/thief

Marital/Family Status: In a relationship, no children

General Personality Notes

Introvert

Reserved Optimist

Reserved self-esteem,

Amped up under pressure but thinks fast

Sense of:

Sexuality: Aware of her innate sexuality, uses it to her advantage

Spirituality: Agnostic

Morality: Believes in justice but also believes the universe delivers its own form of justice.

Smarts:

Book Smarts: has an MBA.

Street Smarts: Most of what she's learned, she learned from Taffy.

Intuition: Excellent intuition.

Empathy level: Above average.

Fears: Afraid that Taffy is wrong for her

Pet Peeves: Not being listened to

Mirror/Major Traits

Major Trait: Curiosity

Exhibited: She's a thief because she steals information

Mirror: lies to herself

Exhibited: is afraid Taffy is wrong for her, refuses to acknowledge it

Major Trait: Loyalty

Exhibited: Will do almost anything for Taffy

Mirror: Is slightly afraid of him

Exhibited: afraid to make him angry

Major Trait: Empathy

Exhibited: taking risks to help people

Mirror: doesn't mind stealing from certain people

Exhibited: is a thief

Personality/Behavior Crossover

When under pressure: gets amped up (blood pumps) but thinks quickly.

When in an argument: tries to find a resolution

When in a fight: looks for alternate ways to win or delay the fight

When working: isn't above letting her empathy distract her

When in a group: is the peacemaker

When alone: reflective, reads

When out of control: lashes out

When in the minority of an opinion: goes along with the group but holds a grudge

When criticized: takes it too hard

When praised: gets shy

When caught in wrongdoing: redirects attention.

When in a moral quandary: relies on her gut, second-guesses herself later.

General

Significant Life Events: when she met Taffy two years earlier. He brought out a side of her she didn't know she had. She was the daughter of a judge and had done everything by the book her whole life. When she met Taffy and she learned what he did, she wanted to do it to. Then she found out she was good at it, and liked it.

Occupation: Unemployed/thief

How long: 2 years.

Prior: Human Resources

Dream job: Already doing it

Education: B.S. in Business Administration, UC Berkley; MBA, Stanford

Class/Wealth: Upper class, financially secure.

Religion: none

Background: none

Clubs/Associations: the gym, arts & humanities charities

Hobbies/for fun: yoga, shopping, Paint Night (painting lessons at a bar)

Past Record: none

Habits: flossing, meditation,

Other People

Family

Connected Family: father and mother

Past Family: no other immediate family

Upbringing: privileged, lacked for nothing, but strict father.

Home life: lives with Taffy, always an adventure

Friendships

Types attracted to: smart people with similar interests; those who can help her career

Types repelled by: me-monsters,

Closest Associates: best friend Karen from her “Paint Night” group

Most valued associates: Karen and Olivia’s former boss

Key Enemies:

Max Corvo

Self-Evaluation

Goals: live life to the fullest for now.

Perceived Strength: intelligence

Perceived Weakness: dependence

Would change if she could: stop being a perfectionist

Secrets kept from the world: she's a thief

Blind spots: women in abusive relationships

Appearance

Age: 34

Birthdate: June 16, 1982

Height: 5'7"

Weight: 125lb

Build: slim

Hair: blonde

Eyes: blue

Skin: tan

Scars/birthmarks: strawberry on her shoulder

Health: healthy

Attractiveness/Appeal: attractive by most standards

Best Feature: eyes

* * *

Name: Sarah Kaya

General Stats

Age: 26

Ethnicity/Nationality: Thai/American.

Occupation: fitness trainer/muay thai fighter/con artist

Marital/Family Status: single, never married

General Personality Notes

Introvert

Pessimist

Confident.

Under pressure: cool as a cucumber

Sense of:

Sexuality: sex is a boxing match

Spirituality: Buddhist

Morality: adjusted Buddhist moral code

Smarts:

Book Smarts: very well-educated

Street Smarts: not a lot but a quick learner

Intuition: spooky intuition

Empathy level: hard to tell. Sometimes inhuman, sometimes hyper empathetic

Fears: her mother

Pet Peeves: needless talking

Mirror/Major Traits

Major Trait: quiet confidence

Exhibited: quietly executes her parts with confidence

Mirror: overly confident

Exhibited: thoughts of her mother cause Sarah to either overdo it or be afraid

Major Trait: independent

Exhibited: prefers missions on her own, resents the company of others

Mirror: lonely

Exhibited: needs the company of others to avoid bad thoughts/bad dreams

Personality/Behavior Crossover

When under pressure: fearless

When in an argument: allows the other person to win, will extract revenge later

When in a fight: wins

When working: determined

When in a group: hangs out on the fringes

When alone: thinks of her mother, of her tortured past

When out of control: fights

When in the minority of an opinion: holds resentment

When criticized: wounds her deeply

When praised: can't understand it

When caught in wrongdoing: makes no excuses

When in a moral quandary: does the most good/least harm

General

Significant Life Events: she had an incredibly strict mother who beat her mercilessly.

She secretly took Muay Thai lessons to learn how to defend herself. When her mother learned of the lessons she beat Sarah within an inch of her life then shipped her off to live with relatives. There, Sarah was treated as a slave. At night she would practice Muay

Thai Most of the family hated her except the youngest daughter, Suchart, who took pity on her. One day she spilled supper as she was serving it and began to be beaten. She finally got the nerve to defend herself and beat up the family, all except the youngest daughter who was now afraid of her. Sarah ran away to Bangkok and managed to survive on the streets, eventually competing as a street fighter. One day she was contacted by Suchart and they arranged to meet. It was a setup and Sarah was arrested and beaten by the police. Sarah spent several years in jail and upon her release fled to the United States on a container ship. Before she left, she tracked down Suchart, broke into her home at night and made it clear she could kill Suchart but didn't. Whether it was a threat or forgiveness is unclear.

Occupation: Muay Thai instructor

How long: 2 years

Prior: street fighter

Dream job: artist

Education: very little

Class/Wealth: lower class, no savings

Religion: Theravada Buddhism

Background: Theravada Buddhism

Hobbies/for fun: exercise, running, painting

Past Record: assault and battery

Habits: sleeping on hard surfaces, meditation, paints

Self-Evaluation

Goals: never be taken advantage of, never be penniless

Perceived Strength: her fighting skills

Perceived Weakness: her emotions

Would change if she could: stop the bad dreams

Secrets kept from the world: the scars on her back

Blind spots: her mother/mothers

Appearance

Age: 26

Birthdate: May 4, 1990

Height: 5'4"

Weight: 120 lbs.

Build: athletic

Hair: brown

Eyes: brown

Skin: pale

Scars/birthmarks: lots of scars on her back, back of arms, and bottoms of feet.

Health: very healthy

Attractiveness/Appeal: attractive

Best Feature: legs

Secondaries

Name: Charlie Bell

General Stats

Age: 30

Ethnicity/Nationality: Lebanese/American.

Occupation: part-time male model, part-time magician, con artist

Marital/Family Status: single, never married

General Personality Notes

Extrovert

Optimist

Self-esteem bordering on narcissism (but in a charming way).

Under pressure: puts on the charm

Sense of:

Sexuality: uses sex to get what he wants

Spirituality: depends on his mood

Morality: has specific lines he won't cross

Smarts:

Book Smarts: barely finished high school

Street Smarts: school of hard-knocks, learned everything the hard way

Intuition: shaky, loses any at the site of a beautiful woman

Empathy level: entry level

Fears: imposter syndrome, afraid he is nothing more than a handsome face

Pet Peeves: hates the male model stereotype

Mirror/Major Traits

Major Trait: confidence

Exhibited: Strong persona

Mirror: imposter syndrome

Exhibited: occasional fits of low self-esteem

Major Trait: honesty

Exhibited: tells the truth (when not on the job)

Mirror: can't handle true criticism of himself

Exhibited: lashes out when honestly criticized.

Personality/Behavior Crossover

When under pressure: turns on the charm

When in an argument: gets flustered

When in a fight: ends it as quickly as possible to avoid damage to his face

When working: doesn't take it too seriously

When in a group: tries to impress the others

When alone: talks to himself

When out of control: cries

When in the minority of an opinion: sides with the popular opinion

When criticized: lashes out

When praised: loves it

When caught in wrongdoing: freezes

When in a moral quandary: freezes

General

Significant Life Events:

Occupation: part-time male model

How long: 10 years

Prior: waiter

Dream job: own a restaurant

Education: high school

Class/Wealth: upper middle, big home but few assets

Religion: whatever is popular in LA that week

Background: pagan (parents were hippies, worshiped Gaia)

Hobbies/for fun: exercise, cook

Past Record: 1 count of possession

Habits: checks himself in mirrors/reflective surfaces

Self-Evaluation

Goals: open a restaurant

Perceived Strength: his looks

Perceived Weakness: his intelligence

Would change if he could: be smarter

Secrets kept from the world: his insecurities

Blind spots: beautiful women

Appearance

Age: 30

Birthdate: September 30, 1986

Height: 6'3"

Weight: 180 lbs.

Build: male model, athletic

Hair: brown

Eyes: brown

Skin: olive

Scars/birthmarks: none

Health: health nut

Attractiveness/Appeal: male model, very attractive

Best Feature: abs

* * *

Name: Kristopher Roth

General Stats

Age: 32

Ethnicity/Nationality: African American.

Occupation: con man/computer hacker

Marital/Family Status: married, separated

General Personality Notes

Introvert

Pessimist

Low/medium self-esteem.

Under pressure: cracks, unless he's at his computer, then he's good.

Sense of:

Sexuality: more interested in numbers

Spirituality: none

Morality: morality is a human construct

Smarts:

Book Smarts: several degrees (some earned, some self-assigned)

Street Smarts: outside of the computer/banking world, not so much

Intuition: only in relation to money/numbers

Empathy level: detached

Fears: surveillance, small spaces

Pet Peeves: people who know nothing about computers

Mirror/Major Traits

Major Trait: Annoyed

Exhibited: is generally annoyed with everyone, everything

Mirror: likes to please others

Exhibited: trying his best

Major Trait: industrious

Exhibited: can MacGyver computer/money problems

Mirror: lazy

Exhibited: is a slob

Personality/Behavior Crossover

When under pressure: panics, or nearly panics

When in an argument: gets very passive aggressive

When in a fight: runs

When working: focused

When in a group: tries too hard

When alone: is happy

When out of control: hacks dangerously

When in the minority of an opinion: keeps his mouth shut

When criticized: throws insults

When praised: gets an ego

When caught in wrongdoing: makes excuses

When in a moral quandary: does the right thing

General

Significant Life Events: grew up in the Midwest, not popular at school, got into computers then hacking. Hacked some government site on a dare, was arrested by FBI and served a brief sentence at a juvenile delinquency center. His mother was overbearing to begin with but was now ashamed of her son, that he ruined her supposed image in the town. His father didn't mind so much but did as his wife said. He could only access a computer at a friend's house and kept computer hacking. His mother forced him to study finance and he became a CPA.

Occupation: con artist

How long: 6 years

Prior: CPA

Dream job: con artist

Education: BS

Class/Wealth: upper middle, financially secure

Religion: none

Background: Lutheran

Hobbies/for fun: gaming, computer hacking, dancing/clubbing

Past Record: computer hacking

Habits: talks to himself, insomnia

Self-Evaluation

Goals: win back his wife

Perceived Strength: good with numbers

Perceived Weakness: is a nerd

Would change if he could: better eyesight

Secrets kept from the world: loves trash TV

Blind spots: puzzles

Appearance

Age: 32

Birthdate: October 31, 1984

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 145 lbs.

Build: skinny

Hair: black

Eyes: brown

Skin: dark

Scars/birthmarks: none.

Health: skinny but not health conscious.

Attractiveness/Appeal: average.

Best Feature: hands.

* * *

Name: Leroy Perkins

General Stats

Age: 56

Ethnicity/Nationality: African American.

Occupation: grifter

Marital/Family Status: Divorced twice

General Personality Notes

Social Introvert

Pessimist

Confident.

Under pressure: holds it together, comes into his own.

Sense of:

Sexuality: dirty old man

Spirituality: agnostic

Morality: old west code of morals

Smarts:

Book Smarts: not so much

Street Smarts: decades on the street (but not as street smart as Taffy)

Intuition: suspicious of everything

Empathy level: empathetic with women and children

Fears: intimacy

Pet Peeves: not being included in the whole plan

Mirror/Major Traits

Major Trait: grumpy

Exhibited: is generally grumpy

Mirror: has a soft side

Exhibited: is more selfless than the others on the team

Major Trait: suspicious

Exhibited: questions everything, especially “good” things

Mirror: loyal

Exhibited: is loyal to Taffy to a fault

Personality/Behavior Crossover

When under pressure: comes into his own

When in an argument: pleads his case with reason and logic

When in a fight: usually loses

When working: complains but loves it

When in a group: observes

When alone: sleeps

When out of control: disappears, runs away

When in the minority of an opinion: abandons others but will stand by Taffy

When criticized: rolls off his back

When praised: brushes it off, secretly appreciates it

When caught in wrongdoing: runs

When in a moral quandary: choose selflessly

General

Significant Life Events: he took Taffy in off the streets and raised him, taught him how to grift and con. Leroy’s parents were LA socialites. He didn’t care for the life, ran away at 16, joined the marines at 18, and was deployed overseas in Lebanon and Panama before washing out. He remained in Panama and learned the grift from locals before

returning to the states in 1991. He was married once during the 80s, divorced. He was married again briefly in Panama, divorced.

Occupation: grifter

How long: 27 years

Prior: U.S. Marine

Dream job: not working

Education: GED

Class/Wealth: working class

Religion: none

Background: none

Hobbies/for fun: collects business cards, plays mini-golf

Past Record: public intoxication, petty theft

Habits: walks/drives as if trying to lose a tail, checks for bugs (listening devices)

Self-Evaluation

Goals: one day at a time, protect Taffy

Perceived Strength: hardy, grizzled, questions everything

Perceived Weakness: getting old

Would change if he could: could have said goodbye to his parents

Secrets kept from the world: why he washed out of the Marines

Blind spots: Taffy

Appearance

Age: 56

Birthdate: March 3, 1960

Height: 5'11"

Weight: 185 lbs.

Build: solid

Hair: black

Eyes: brown

Skin: brown

Scars/birthmarks: a few scars here and there from fights.

Health: liver and kidneys have taken a beating.

Attractiveness/Appeal: forgettable face.

Best Feature: rough hands.

Season One Episodes

Episode One: Pilot

Premise Line: Taffy has only 48 hours to con his mark out of \$2 million in order to pay the ransom for his kidnapped girlfriend but his mark's greed and a mafia hitman may end up costing Taffy and his team much more.

Episode Two: Salting the Mine

Premise Line: With a dangerous new smart drug nearing FDA approval and Taffy's team divided over who their mark should be, the team must learn to trust each other in time to keep the drug and its creator from hurting more people.

Episode Three: Albatross

Premise Line: When a commercial fisherman knowingly releases toxic fish into the marketplace, Taffy uses sailors' superstition to stop him; but a Pacific storm cuts Charlie off from the rest of the team and threatens to capsize the con.

Episode Four: Pig in a Poke

Premise Line: When a bank owner buys out other private banks and calls in debts to the ruin of families and businesses, Taffy gambles on an age-old, high-risk con to stop him; but when the con backfires, the team finds their own money gone and their lives as collateral.

Episode Five: Face the Music

Premise Line: A hip-hop record label is increasing sales by encouraging violence between warring black and white gangs: while trying to relieve the label of its money, Taffy and his team find themselves smack in the middle of a gangland war.

Episode Six: Pay the Piper

Premise Line: Taffy enlists a hacker named Ctrl to take down the founder of an online pay portal who slowly and quietly steals from his users; but when the mark gets wise, the hacking war that ensues threatens to expose Taffy and his team to their enemies.

Episode Seven: The Clip Joint

Premise Line: To take down a notorious arms dealer, the team must catch him in a compromising situation; but by the time Taffy realizes they have the wrong man, the right woman has the team in her crosshairs.

Episode Eight: Natural Gas

Premise Line: When a natural gas company threatens to destroy a local town, Taffy and his team step in to relieve the owner of his resources; but eco-terrorists bent on destroying the operation take the company and Taffy's team hostage.

Episode Nine: Fashion Week

Premise Line: When the CEO of a modeling agency is found to be prostituting his models in exchange for better publicity, Taffy arranges to have the operation exposed; but with Filippo closing in, Taffy becomes a danger to the con and the team.

Episode Ten: All For A \$

Premise Line: Taffy aims to take down a chain of stores using underhanded tactics to muscle out the competition; but when the chain's muscle turns out to be an old friend of Taffy's, he must decide between honoring a promise or putting his friend out of business.

Episode Eleven: Hollywoodland

Premise Line: When the last man on Max's money list is a Hollywood producer with no idea he's laundering money, Taffy and the team must convince him to sacrifice his life's work to take down his largest investor.

Episode Twelve: Taking down Max part 1

Premise Line: Taffy sets his sights on Max's billions but Max won't go down without a fight; meanwhile, Filippo has taken a new contract and is now hunting for Max's head.

Episode Thirteen: Taking down Max part 2

Premise Line: Having formed a temporary alliance, Taffy protects Max from Filippo in exchange for information about Max's employers; but when Max goes missing, Taffy is forced to infiltrate the mafia to rescue him.

Note:

The following episode outlines were brought up to date to match the second drafts of the scripts and exist here as they did going into the final defense. At the request of my committee, they have not been updated since.

Step Outlines

Episode One: Pilot (The Spanish Prisoner)

TEASER

INT. ART GALLERY

Taffy flirts harmlessly with an attractive woman in the gallery before Max Corvo and his security detail arrive. Taffy sends her on her way then shows Max the painting he's agreed to buy for \$2 million. Max admits he knows the painting is a fake by bringing in the forger himself. Max then tells his security to kill Taffy and the forger but Taffy shoots the forger first then escapes.

ACT ONE

INT. TAFFY'S CAR

Taffy races home and calls his girlfriend Olivia from the car. He tells her the con went south and to expect company.

INT. TAFFY AND OLIVIA'S APARTMENT

Olivia grabs a gun and tries to fight off Max's henchmen. One of them gets the jump on her and subdues her, ripping her necklace off in the process.

LATER

Max arrives home to find Olivia gone, just her necklace in the bedroom floor. He gets a call from Ma who holds Olivia ransom for \$2M, the same amount Taffy almost stole from him.

INT/EXT. ILLEGAL GAMBLING DEN

Taffy arrives at an underground gambling joint in K-town and intervenes on behalf of an old pickpocket in trouble. Outside, the pickpocket is revealed to be Leroy, Taffy's old friend and teacher.

INT. DINER

Taffy asks Leroy for help in conning Max. Leroy rightly suspects Taffy has an emotional angle. Taffy cryptically tells Leroy "I found him" and that he needs Leroy to help take him down. Leroy relents.

INT. MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

Taffy tries on new clothes for the con while he and Leroy vet potential other team members.

INT. MUAY THAI GYM

Leroy and Taffy enter a gym and ask to speak with Sarah. Sarah tosses down a pair of sparring gloves and says she'll only talk in the ring. Taffy dons the sparring gear and they discuss his job offer. Sarah kicks Taffy's ass, causing him to flashback to a prison fight before blacking out.

ACT TWO

INT. GYM

Taffy awakes on the mat, tells Sarah apologizes and helps him to his feet. Taffy has Leroy hand her a business card and tells her to meet them later that night. Sarah says she doesn't even know who they are but they leave without telling her.

INT. WAREHOUSE

Taffy gathers together the new team together and introduces them to Sarah. He then shows them their mark, Daniel Barnes. Barnes imports black market cell phone parts for his company. Taffy plans to sell him knock-offs. Sarah realizes they are con artists but when Taffy says how much money they'll be making she decides she's in.

INT. SPANISH VILLA - WINE CELLAR

Olivia sits blindfolded in a stone wine cellar. Max removes the blindfold and introduces himself, lightly questions her. Olivia proves tougher than she looks.

EXT. BUSY L.A. STREET

Leroy follows Barnes and picks his pocket, taking his phone. He drops the phone with Kristopher who plugs it into his computer to hack it. He hands it back to Leroy who pretends to find it at a coffee shop and give it back to Barnes.

INT. TAFFY'S APARTMENT

Taffy prepares to leave in order to meet Barnes but is ambushed by Filippo Abruzzo, a mafia hitman. Filippo informs Taffy there is a hit out on him. Their fight spills out into the parking lot where Taffy manages to lose Filippo.

ACT THREE

EXT. BARNES' OFFICE

Sarah runs a distraction so that Taffy can access the computers and locate Barnes' office and Kristopher can make a key card for Taffy.

INT. BARNES' OFFICE

Taffy, in disguise, approaches Barnes in his office and admits he knows Barnes' illegal activities. Barnes calls security while Taffy offers to sell Barnes better parts at a better price. Security arrives and Taffy says they'll meet again.

EXT. BARNES' OFFICE

Taffy says the approach was successful and sends the team off on assignments. Immediately after, a white van pulls up to Taffy and men jump out and grab him.

INT. WHITE VAN

Taffy speaks with Special Agent Joe Lipinski of the FBI who is keeping tabs on him. They chit chat, Joe showing lots of contempt for Taffy. He also reveals Taffy's ex-wife has a message for him then punches Taffy in the face. Taffy asks if the FBI is ready - they are. They drop him off at a random street corner.

INT. SPANISH VILLA

Olivia is shown into a guest bedroom. Right away she searches the room for anything she can use. She finds a metal fingernail file in the bathroom and discovers she can sharpen it on the stone tile floor. She then rips a spring from the mattress but cuts her hand in the process. Max knocks on her door and brings her a dress, asks her to join him for a late dinner that night.

EXT./INT. SHIPPING YARD/OFFICE

Charlie and Sarah break into the shipping yard where Barnes has his goods imported. Charlie breaks into the office, and uses a computer to guide her to a shipping container they can use. Sarah plants a case inside but is caught by two security guards. She quickly takes them out and Charlie guides her to another container, this one owned by Barnes. Inside, Sarah finds automatic weapons.

ACT FOUR

INT. WAREHOUSE

Sarah shows the group the weapons, proving Barnes imports more than just electronics. Leroy again wants to drop the con. Taffy insists they continue. Leroy reminds him this is how good con men go to jail or worse. Taffy thinks a moment then tells them all to be ready before leaving with Kristopher..

INT. BARNES' HOME

Barnes arrives home to find Taffy inside waiting for him. Barnes calls the police while Taffy pitches a deal. Meanwhile, Kristopher sits in Taffy's car outside Barnes' home and intercepts Barnes' 911 call and poses as the operator. Inside, Taffy admits knowing Barnes' secret deal with a different company and says his devices can help bankrupt

Telcet faster. He offers a demonstration. Barnes agrees to meet Taffy at the shipping yard.

INT. SPANISH VILLA

Max waits at the dining room table when Olivia arrives in the dress he gave her. Max laments this is their last night together before Taffy takes her home. She expresses doubt he will come through and suggests Taffy cares about money more than he lets on. She gets emotional and Max says there is a bathroom down the hall if she needs to freshen up. Instead of entering the bathroom she breaks into Max's office using a homemade lockpicking kit and steals a file from his desk. She then rejoins Max for dinner.

EXT. SHIPPING YARD

The team take their places in the shipping yard. Taffy waits by the shipping container where Sarah planted the case. Barnes arrives with a bodyguard and they swap the case for the money. Only there is no money, just shares in Barnes' new company that aren't currently worth anything. Taffy tries to complain but another car arrives and two masked men get out looking for Barnes. They shoot Kristopher and Sarah then accuse Barnes of selling them bad guns and demand their money back. Barnes agrees and transfers the money on the spot. They prepare to kill Barnes and Taffy but Leroy shows up guns blazing. Taffy and Leroy are both shot and the two men drive away. Barnes and his bodyguard escape.

ACT FIVE

EXT. SHIPPING YARD

The masked men return to the scene and reveal themselves to be Charlie and Ferguson the art forger. The shootings were staged and Barnes' money was transferred into their bank account, plus a little extra. Taffy makes a phone call.

INT. BARNES' OFFICE

Barnes enters his office, fixes himself a large drink, and opens his safe. While he pulls money out the FBI, led by Lipinski, raids his office and arrest him. Barnes is told that his secret second business is also being raided as it was being used to launder money.

EXT. SPANISH VILLA

Taffy and team arrive at Max's villa to pay Olivia's ransom. Max refuses, demands \$100 million instead because he suspects Taffy was involved in Barnes' arrest (it was Max's money being laundered). Max cuts Olivia to prove his point and sends Taffy away but not before Taffy secures a note from Olivia.

EXT. SPANISH VILLA

Under the cover of night, Taffy follows the instructions on the note from Olivia to help

her escape. Kristopher shuts off power to the villa and Olivia meets Taffy at the perimeter. She gives Taffy a file, tells him there's more where that came from. Taffy kisses her and gives her a small emergency cell phone. She goes back inside the villa to Kristopher's surprise.

INT. WAREHOUSE

Taffy informs the team that Olivia being kidnapped was part of the plan. She will stay inside and feed him information about Max's criminal network while he takes them each down. He also tells them he's an FBI informant and that in exchange for early release, he agreed to turn them in. But, he doesn't intend to make good on that promise and by the time the FBI raid the warehouse, Taffy and his team are long gone.

Tag

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Taffy is drunk and holds a picture of Olivia. Leroy enters and helps him into bed, like he's done it a hundred times before. He asks Taffy if Olivia knows about his father. Taffy says she'll know when it's time.

* * *

Episode Two: Salting the Mine
Teaser

INT. SOUTH STREET MAGIC THEATRE

Taffy, Sarah, Kristopher, and Leroy sit in the audience of a small club. Charlie takes the stage as Tassar the Terrific and asks for a volunteer from the audience. Sarah begrudgingly raises her hand and Charlie picks her. She and Charlie proceed to perform the Impaled Illusion. The illusion falls apart and the audience boos him off stage.

Act One

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM

Esther walks out of class with the other students when the teacher asks her to stay behind a moment. The teacher remarks how well Esther has been doing lately and asks what's changed. Esther says positive thinking and the teacher dismisses her. Outside the building, Esther collapses.

INT. UNFINISHED OFFICE BUILDING

Sarah and Charlie surveil the OneMind offices. Sarah worries that their investigation into Singleton hasn't revealed any criminal activity, quips all they've learned is he's allergic to selfish. Charlie uses a long range listening device to listen in on a board meeting.

INT. ONEMIND BOARD ROOM

Singleton announces their new drug Siatine is under FDA review. He shows photos of the drug's effects on the brain and its success in clinical trials. After the meeting, Reggie expresses his concern that Siatine hasn't held up under clinical trials. Singleton promises nothing will be done until the drug is ready. After Reggie leaves, Singleton suggests jokingly to Campbell that Reggie will one day take Campbell's job.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE BOARD ROOM

Campbell catches up to Reggie and fires him, has two guards escort him out.

INT. UNFINISHED OFFICE BUILDING

Sarah and Charlie see Reggie get fired. While Singleton is on the phone, someone enters Campbell's office and Sarah gets a few pictures of him. She has Charlie move the recorder to his office. They hear the beginning of the conversation but the recorder malfunctions.

INT. ONEMIND LOBBY

In the lobby of OneMind, Leroy watches as Reggie carries a box of his belongings (obviously just fired). He manages to “accidentally” bump into him and spill his box, giving him an opportunity to try and talk with him. The security guards approach and Leroy can see Reggie is frightened. Reggie says he can’t talk and hurries out. Taffy tells Leroy to stay with Reggie and he’ll follow Peter.

INT. OLIVIA’S BEDROOM

Olivia and Taffy argue over the phone. She hangs up quickly when Max visits. He asks if she’s comfortable, laments he has to keep her locked away. Olivia asks why she’s imprisoned when Taffy is the one who committed the crime. Max says it’s just business. Olivia implies she isn’t all that loyal to Taffy.

FLASHBACK - INT. PRISON VISITING AREA

Eight-year-old Taffy visits his father in jail along with his lawyer. Taffy, or John as he went by back then, tells his father people are saying all sorts of bad things about him. They say he killed a man. John asks if it’s true. His father, Andrew, tells his son to trust him. Their time is up and Taffy begins to cry when he can’t hug his father.

INT. CARGO VAN

Taffy snaps out of his reverie when he gets a call from Leroy who says Reggie has been killed.

Act Two

EXT. CITY PARK

Taffy gathers the team for a meeting. Leroy fills them in on Reggie then Taffy says their play is Salting the Mine. Sarah has no idea what that is so Taffy explains the origins of the con. They are going to create a fake pharmaceutical company and convince Singleton to buy them out. Sarah asks if it’s wise to go ahead with the con without proof Singleton is shady. Taffy trusts Olivia’s intel. Kristopher is tasked with setting up a store and a cover. Charlie is told to get after Peter and turn him. Taffy tells Leroy to keep tabs on Singleton and investigate the hit and run. Taffy tells Sarah they’re going shopping.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE

Taffy and Sarah attend a medical and scientific equipment auction. Sarah says it isn’t the kind of shopping she expected. She and Taffy take their seats and bid on items. Singleton and Campbell are also there bidding. Taffy loses to Singleton then he and Sarah leave without meeting him (but he noticed them).

EXT. CHINESE RESTAURANT

Kristopher exits a Chinese restaurant and stuffs his face with noodles. He rounds a corner and sees an empty brick building with a “For Rent” sign in a distinctive window with a picture of a real estate agent and a phone number.

INT. MAX’S LOUNGE

Max has Olivia brought to him. He finds himself wanting her company. They flirt, getting more comfortable with each other. He tries to give her a gift but finds it missing. He complains of a possible thief among his staff. Olivia says the staff isn’t as afraid of him as they should be.

INT. OFFICE FOR RENT

The real estate agent hands over the keys to a rental office to Kristopher. Charlie begins moving in the supplies. The agent sees him carrying a set of Katanas and asks what business they are in. Kristopher quips “pest control.”

INT. WOMEN’S CLOTHING STORE

Taffy takes Sarah clothes shopping as she doesn’t have any formal wear. Sarah says this is the type of shopping she was thinking about. She steps out of the dressing room in a knockout evening dress. Kristopher calls, says the store is up and the information is planted. Taffy tells Sarah it’s time.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT

Singleton enters with several colleagues. As he sits, he notices Sarah sitting at the bar alone. He excuses himself from his colleagues and approaches Sarah. He remembers her from the auction and asks who she is. Sarah is evasive but leaves just enough bread crumbs, suggesting Taffy is controlling and abusive to her. Eventually Taffy appears and Sarah introduces Singleton. Taffy says he knows Singleton, everyone in their business does. Singleton notes that Taffy has him at a disadvantage, he doesn’t know Taffy. Taffy says he’s been careful to keep it that way. Sarah drops a clue as to who Taffy is (his cover identity, anyway) and Taffy scolds her then whisks Sarah away.

Act Three

INT. AUSTYN OFFICES

The team continues to set up the fake office. Kristopher arrives with Chinese take-out while Charlie carts in a medical aerosolizer. Leroy worries the store won’t look convincing enough for Singleton. Taffy asks Leroy for an update and Leroy says Charlie made contact with Peter, their meeting should be going down any time. They look over just as Charlie looks up. He realizes he’s late and takes off.

EXT. CITY STREET

Charlie poses as an OCI (Office of Criminal Investigations) agent investigating possible bribery and fraud in the FDA. He shows Peter the pictures of Campbell giving him the envelope but Peter doesn't break.

INT. OLIVIA'S BEDROOM

A maid enters and Olivia keeps an eye on her, making small talk. Olivia notices the uniform's logo and asks if they are laundered on site or at home.

INT. SINGLETON'S OFFICE

Taffy arrives at Singleton's office and is greeted by Campbell who acts suspicious. Taffy enters Singleton's office, acts impressed at the surroundings. Singleton thanks Taffy for accepting his invitation and presses Taffy for information about his company. Taffy reluctantly admits they've nearly completed a new wonder drug that does more than enhance intelligence. Singleton wonders why he's never heard of Austyn before. Taffy says he has just as many cyber security personnel as scientists in order to keep their operation as under wraps as possible. While Singleton isn't looking, Taffy inserts a USB stick into his computer then pulls it out.

INT. POLICE EVIDENCE LOCKER

Leroy pretends to be a member of OneMind security and visits the police to pick up some of Reggie's effects. He buddies up to the officer on duty by pretending (?) to be a fellow marine.

INT. AUSTYN OFFICES

Taffy says Singleton is on the hook. Kristopher confirms that Taffy, with the USB stick, gave them access to the OneMind servers. Sarah continues to express doubts as to whether or not Singleton really should be their mark. Leroy appears with documents Reggie had on him when he died. They suggest something went wrong with one of Siatine's trial patients. Kristopher is able to give them an address of one of the subjects.

INT. ESTHER'S HOME

Esther is on a respirator with permanent brain damage. Taffy questions her father. At first the effects seemed to be positive. Her anxiety and Tourette's were under control, no other medication. Her grades in college improved. But then there was a stroke and she's been like this ever since. He couldn't sue because Esther was forced to sign a waiver. They tried anyway but were threatened by OneMind's lawyers and given a small sum to keep quiet. It still wasn't enough to get Esther the best care. Outside, Sarah and Taffy argue about who's responsible resulting in Sarah walking away.

Act Four

FLASHBACK - INT. CAR

Young Taffy sits in the back seat of a car driven by his father's lawyer. The lawyer apologizes again for his father's death, that he wasn't able to do anything. He promises Taffy he'll like his new foster home, "trust me."

INT. AUSTYN OFFICES

Kristopher shows Taffy how the aerosolizer works. Taffy calls Charlie, tells him to get after Peter again.

INT./EXT. PETER'S HOME

Peter's at home with his family when Charlie knocks on the door. Charlie shows him evidence that Singleton is lying and that Siatine hurts people. Peter turns, agrees to shut down FDA approval of Siatine. Charlie gives Peter something to show Singleton.

INT. SINGLETON'S OFFICE

Peter informs Singleton that the FDA is dropping Siatine approval and is instead focusing on Lohaptermine. He shows Singleton stolen "surveillance video" from Austyn's clinical trials overseas. Although the audience can't yet see it, it's obvious Singleton is shocked.

INT. SPANISH VILLA

Olivia creeps through the villa at night and plants stolen goods in the maid's locker.

INT. SINGLETON'S OFFICE

Singleton watches the video again and this time the audience can see. It's hidden camera video of several "clinical trial patients" exhibiting strange, even telepathic abilities. Sarah enters his office. Singleton threatens to call security but Sarah admits he's being conned.

Act Five

INT. AUSTYN OFFICES

Austin (Taffy) arrives at his office but is surprised to find Janet (Sarah) there with Singleton. Singleton says that Janet told him that Austin was trying to pull one over on him. He accuses Austin of colluding with Campbell in order to tank OneMind and so remove the competition. Austin lectures Janet about trust and betrayal. Janet complains he never truly trusted her, only ever controlled her. Singleton tells them to fight about it later. Right now, he wants Lohaptermine. Austin refuses. Singleton pulls a gun but Janet intervenes and says she has a better idea. She pops a pill and Austin realizes it's Lohaptermine. She confesses to taking it for months. She scanners him and he grabs his

head in pain. He relents. Janet tells Singleton to pay for the drug. Singleton objects but Janet says this way it will appear above board. Besides, she has access to his accounts and can withdraw it anytime she wants. Singleton agrees and transfers \$20M into Austin's account. Austin laughs, tells Singleton that wasn't his account number. Janet is playing them both. The air vent above Singleton begins to leak gas (aerosolized tropomyosin, the protein in shellfish that causes allergic reactions) into the room and he chokes while Sarah pretends to "force choke" him. Austin comes up behind her and "impales" with one of the decorative katanas from the wall. The gas from the vent changes (aerosolized epinephrine) and Singleton's choking subsides. Janet grabs Singleton's gun and shoots Austin. They both collapse, playing dead. Singleton recovers and books it out of there. Once gone, Sarah asks if any of Taffy's cons end without everyone dying.

INT. SPANISH VILLA

Olivia frames the maid and Max fires her. As a reward, Max says she can walk around the villa, supervised, if they are able to reach an understanding. What understanding, Olivia asks.

INT. TAFFY'S CAR

Taffy and Olivia sit in the car outside Esther and Al's home. Taffy sends Al a txt to go outside while he explains the rest of the con to Sarah. She tries to apologize for not trusting him but he tells her Campbell wasn't innocent. He was responsible for Reggie's murder. They watch as Al exits his home and finds the money.

Tag

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Taffy receives a call in bed on his cell from Olivia. She reminds him that they agreed she could fulfill her mission by whatever means necessary. Taffy asks what she's getting at and she admits to sleeping with Max. Taffy hangs up and throws his phone across the room.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITIQUE

First Defense and Faculty Committee Evaluation

My committee consisted of Sean Gaffney, MFA, Chair, and J. Dennis Bounds, Ph.D., Member. Feedback from the committee was both welcome and much needed. Despite having what is perhaps an over-inflated sense of confidence, I had no illusions going into the first defense that my portfolio, as it then stood, was perfect. Constructive criticism is an important part of the editing process. With this in mind it is easier to not become defensive while being critiqued. It is also an honor, and I mean this sincerely, to be critiqued by two faculty whom I admire and who have contributed both to the industry to which I wish to belong and to my own personal growth as a writer.

The chief concern from the committee for my episode outlines was for the cons themselves. There was apprehension that the audience weren't being fooled enough and that they might lose interest if the cons weren't more elaborate. Specifically, in the pilot episode, Bounds suggested that Olivia appear to run a con of her own on Max, convincing him to ransom her instead of some other punishment. I had been considering how to make Olivia a more active participant in this episode and the series overall, going so far as to giving her an agenda of her own, unknown to Taffy. Bounds' suggestion opened up further possibilities for Olivia's character. There was also mention of the "pitch" scene from the pilot during which Taffy offers to sell Barnes cheaper, knock-off cell phone parts. While this is later revealed to be more elaborate, it doesn't necessarily sell the audience on the con. Something more complex or interesting may need to be

written into the scene. That, or previous, or immediate to follow, clues to the audience that the con is in fact much more involved need to be added.

In episode two, “Salting the Mine,” Gaffney expressed his concern for the fifth act. As it was written, Taffy, upon learning of antagonist Singleton’s victims, altered the con, turning it instead into a more conventional heist. Gaffney was correct in his admonishment that this was a mistake. I had previously entertained the thought of somehow earlier in the episode planting a bug in Singleton’s computers allowing Kristopher to access them later. This idea was dropped but after hearing my committee’s thoughts I realized it, or another con game element, would need to be employed. The audience both expects and deserves to see a con unfold which they weren’t expecting. To drop the con element of the show in the final act would have been a betrayal and the easy way out for me as the writer. Gaffney reminded me, as I’d heard him say before, the audience, upon learning the true nature of the con, should say to themselves, “I never saw it coming but I should have known all along.”

Shifting from the end of the episodes to the beginning, Bounds inquired as to how each episode would begin. He and Gaffney both asked why it was that Taffy’s team were on-the-run along with him at the start of act one and if it might be more interesting if Taffy had to gather them together, a la *Mission Impossible* (1966-73). I hadn’t considered this approach but had to admit the idea intrigued me. It wouldn’t necessarily factor heavily into the show but it could certainly add character development and variety to the show. Seeing as how the pilot episode already portrays Taffy putting his team together, I doubt I’ll incorporate this element into episode two. I could however work it into later episodes.

The Rewrite

With my committee's feedback fresh in mind, I began the task of writing the scripts. They came together over a forty-day period; quicker than I expected, considering the workload from concurrent classes. Despite natural hesitations to show anyone a first draft, let alone a professional writer, I passed my scripts on to Gaffney for review. His insight was, as always, welcome. His first criticism was expected; the pilot episode ran much too long at eighty pages. My goal for each episode was between fifty-five to sixty pages, a good length for one-hour dramas produced for streaming services. Obviously I'd gone beyond that but I believe it is better to overwrite up front and then scale back as opposed to the opposite. Gaffney believed that most scenes could be tighter and one or two could be cut altogether. He pointed out positive examples of voice and encouraged me to use that voice throughout the action.

In the second episode, in changing the fifth act from a heist into a con, I was forced to abandon a goal I had set myself months earlier: to introduce the first four season antagonists in the first two episodes. Due to the episode's new direction away from computer hacking, there was no longer an organic way to introduce Ctrl. This also meant I needed a new teaser to set up the fifth act action. I chose to focus on Charlie Bell as I had already done research on magicians for chapter two.

Where I thought I had achieved a better rhythm to the scenes in episode two, Gaffney pointed out that I had developed the habit of ending scenes on dialogue rather than on action. Further, he pointed out that the B plot was, to him, completely unbelievable. He made this same criticism during the first defense and I had adjusted the

story in an attempt to meet that criticism. It became clear to me that no amount of adjusting would shoehorn that subplot into the script. Finally, concerning the fifth act (which had by that point changed from a heist to a con), Gaffney expressed his concern that it was too much, too big. He suggested the abilities of the smart drugs had not been appropriately set-up and that Sarah's incredible actions might seem a bridge too far.

Then came the rewrites. I wanted to present an outside reader with at least a second draft (still an embarrassingly early draft to show a professional but time constraints offered little choice). My first goal was to cut pages from the pilot script. By the time it went to my outside reader I had it down to sixty-five pages; still five too many but much better than eighty. In an attempt to write the action with more character and attitude, I purchased and listened to the *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) film score while rewriting. Whether or not this made a difference, I can say it was fun. In the second episode, I completely rewrote the B plot and made sure all scenes ended on action. I also toned down the fifth act action and the story plays much better for it. It was time to send the scripts to an outside reader.

The Outside Reader

Robert Millett, MFA, served as my outside reader. According to his short biography on Regent University's website, Millett "has authored twenty original screenplays, ten of which have been produced, [and] forty teleplays for cable TV broadcast," (Millett) so I anticipated quality coverage. He returned to me a report giving his overall impression of the scripts, a detailed script analysis, and a mark-up of the first ten pages of the pilot script.

His summation of the scripts was generally fair as I found myself conceding to most of his criticism. He took special care to qualify his critique, recognizing that the scripts were 2nd drafts only, and suggested that most of the changes could be easily rectified through further rewrites. Millett identified what he believed to be especially well-crafted text from the scripts and suggested the inclusion of more, similar inspired writing would help to “garner viable marketability.” Similarly, he identified what he believed to be the greatest weakness of the scripts; a lack of character development. I grant that my chief focus in writing the scripts was the plot. Crafting a complex and believable con proved incredibly challenging and in only two drafts I hadn’t taken the time to make the characters shine as fully realized individuals.

Millett’s detailed analysis gave much more insight and clarity into the feedback he gave in his report. Right away, he proposed that the opening scene of the pilot doesn’t quite hook the audience and that I should dig deeper to find a fresh spin on the situation. An opening image and analysis of a Paul Cezanne painting would absolutely hook me but perhaps not a general audience. The inclusion of the woman, Diamond Earrings, in the opening scene was meant to create the illusion that the art gallery was an actual establishment as opposed to a con man’s store. The analysis of the painting was to foreshadow the staged nature of Ferguson’s shooting and the later shooting of Taffy and his team. Whether or not these two elements should be on the first page is a question I intend to consider.

While writing the second draft of my scripts I made the decision to include author intrusion. This was more or less an experiment to add energy and character to the action lines. It was also my first attempt at such a device. Millett expressed his dislike of the

device, calling it “cute” and “problematic.” This may well be true and it may be edited out in future rewrites but first I’d like to try to make it work. One of Millett’s criticisms of the author intrusions was they were not formatted differently from the action lines, offering the reader no indication if they were Taffy’s internal monologue, the screenwriter’s voice, or some other “god-like” narrator. However, after meeting with my committee for the final defense, Gaffney corrected Millett’s note, saying the author intrusions did not need to be formatted differently. What I could do, though, is find scripts with similar author intrusions to research how and if they were successfully written.

One of Millett’s most useful criticisms was of the inciting incident in episode two. I had misidentified the inciting incident as Esther’s collapse outside her school but Millett correctly identified it as Reggie’s death. In earlier drafts, Reggie’s death happened on screen but in the latest rewrite, the scene was omitted for time. Recognizing now the imperative to show that action, it will be reintroduced in a future draft.

When I first spoke to Robert Millett about being my outside reader, he mentioned he had some familiarity with law enforcement operations, especially FBI. I was both excited and worried to hear this. For one, I strive for realism and accuracy and looked forward to the viewpoint of someone with inside information. On the other hand, the story should always supersede fact. I was concerned that Millett might tear down the FBI elements of my story because they weren’t true to life. To my relief, there was little of that in his coverage. What he did offer was corrections, such as replacing the word “clip” with the correct word “magazine” in reference to semi-automatic pistols and assault rifles and term “flak jacket” with the appropriate “ballistic vest.”

In the pilot episode, during the sparring match between Taffy and Sarah, I establish the use of flashbacks in the series. In episode two, I expand on this with two extended flashback scenes. In the case of episode two they were late additions, only appearing in the second draft. Millett commented that the scenes feel out of place, or at least unearned. That is to say, the first flashback of young Taffy follows a scene featuring Olivia. There is no direct lead-in to the flashback and too little emotional fallout from it afterward. I can only say that this will be considered and addressed in subsequent rewrites.

There were several other moments Millett believed weren't earned. The scene in which Charlie turns Peter Kolker in episode two felt to him rushed. I have to agree with him. Too often I had to rush through a scene with an eye on page count. Another instance is the climax of the episode in which Sarah convinces Singleton to pay \$20 million for Lohaptermine. The moment happens fast with little argument from Singleton. My hope is that these and other rushed moments can be smoothed out in later drafts.

There were a number of lesser important or simple formatting issues that Millett identified throughout the script. He mentioned that the scripts contained excessive use of passive voice which surprised me as this is something I advise other writers to avoid, too. I have in my head a sound bite on repeat of Kara Lee Burke telling writers to remove words like "is" and "are" from their vocabulary. As I read through the scripts, though, I was disappointed to learn Millett was correct. An area in which I was surprised to be critiqued was in my use of time-of-day elements in the slug lines. It was drilled into me by my first screenwriting professor to use DAY and NIGHT almost exclusively and use other times, such as DAWN or AFTERNOON, only when it was absolutely necessary to

the story. Millett believes this to be inadequate and suggested more variety. However, Trottier advises to “avoid terms like DUSK, DAWN, LATE AFTERNOON, EARLY EVENING, HIGH NOON,” etc. (Trottier 130).

Occasionally, Millett identified what he saw as problems but what I perceive to be misreadings on his part. He admired Olivia’s character description, “a shot of Fireball in a glass of champagne” but failed to understand it, equating the champagne in the metaphor for Olivia’s clothing instead of her physical beauty. Because of this misunderstanding, I’m forced to re-evaluate the strength of the metaphor. If it confused one reader, it may confuse others. Later in the script, Millett called out what he believed to be a monetary discrepancy. After Taffy and his team con Barnes into giving them \$2 million, Ferguson reveals Barnes actually gave \$2.8 million. The script implies that Ferguson entered a larger amount so he could pocket the difference. Again, however, this misunderstanding could be my failure to write the scene clearly so will be revisited. The largest misreading was Millett’s accusation that Taffy and his team seem to get their information out of thin air when in fact, the goal of the first episode is to establish exactly how Taffy will get his information for the entirety of the first season. Scenes are also included of the team surveilling their marks in order to secure additional intelligence. Even so, because a reader failed to understand this element, clarification may be needed.

The remainder of the outside reader’s coverage consists largely of spelling, grammar, and formatting issues. He also highlights several more, albeit small and easily corrected story issues. All in all, I’m pleased with the feedback I’ve been given and believe it can lead to improved future drafts of the scripts.

The Final Defense

The second and final defense of this document and accompanying scripts was again led by committee chair Sean Gaffney, MFA, and committee member J. Dennis Bounds, Ph.D. The mood of the meeting was pleasant and their overall response positive. However, for them to spend two hours telling me everything I'd done well wouldn't have served our time, nor did my ego need the stroking. Gaffney therefore dove straight in by chastising me for the number of spelling and grammar mistakes in the second episode script. This was a misunderstanding on my part. I turned in the scripts, assuming there was an understanding that these were merely second drafts and accordingly did not need to be polished. I see now that of course the scripts should have been presentation ready, regardless of their development. My first act after finishing this document will be to address those errors in the script.

I had taken care to rewrite the chapter one introduction based on my committee's feedback. I contacted a psychologist friend of mine, Marsha Vaughn, Ph.D., for an interview and guidance. She directed me to Goffman's theory of Self Presentation which gave me the insight and inspiration I needed. However, both Gaffney and Bounds noted that the one sentence given to Goffman's theory was insufficient and awkward. I was confused because in actuality I devoted not one but three consecutive sentences to Goffman as a gateway to a discussion about gullibility. After reviewing, though, I could see how that section might be misread and so took steps to aid the reader.

Gaffney's next criticism was the lack of research into computer hackers, an intentional omission originally explained in chapter one. Despite the computer hacking

elements having been scaled back in the scripts, Gaffney believed at least some research was needed. I conceded his point and decided, instead of researching actual computer hacking methods which could be difficult to track down let alone comprehend, to research how hackers have been portrayed on television and what I can do to bring a more realistic portrayal to the screen. I chose to begin with the USA series *Mr. Robot* as it has won praise from hackers for its accurate depiction of hacker culture and abilities.

Bounds and Gaffney both expressed their approval of the character descriptions on page fourteen, stating that although brief, they were able to get a sense of who the characters are. All, that is, except for Kristopher whose description was limited to his function on Taffy's team. Immediately after hearing this criticism I knew how to fix it. When Kristopher is introduced in the pilot he is shown wearing a Black Flag T-shirt. This is a defining character trait as Black Flag was an influential American punk band from the 1970s. Punk rock culture is both rich and identifiable, making it good for television in that people are familiar with it (at least that it exists) and it can inform the character in surprising and subversive ways. Making note of this in Kristopher's description on page fourteen should address the committee's note.

Moving ahead to page twenty-five, it was suggested that I update the list of antiheroes to shows that are currently on the air. I've done just that, adding characters like Frank Underwood from *House of Cards* and Annalise Keating from *How to Get Away with Murder*. However, I also left the older references in tact as I believe them to be rather iconic. I agree with my committee that including current characters adds life to this document but I can't forget the memorable characters television has already given.

The final piece of substantial criticism of the document came from Bounds concerning the mention of the Hayes Code, also on page twenty-five. Its use came while I explored the evolution of the antihero, saying that the days of the Hays code and idealized portrayals of American society were in the past. Bounds found this to be a gross oversimplification or worse misunderstanding of the Hayes code and the films made before and during its time. I had to agree that antiheroes existed in films before Hollywood adopted the code, Raymond Chandler film noir stories being a prime example. Bounds and Gaffney suggested I explore the shift from protagonists who are moral characters who bend the law to protagonists who are out-right immoral. The thought intrigued me and so I decided to do just that.

The rest of the criticism was directed toward the scripts. Taking a look first at the pilot, I was told the characters of Charlie and Kristopher were too blandly written. Much like how the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are considered interchangeable, even to the extent that their names are sometimes switched by the director halfway through a production because no one will notice anyway, Charlie and Kristopher come off as equally indistinguishable. During my first two drafts I focused mostly on the plot, putting off character in an effort to make sure the complicated nature of a con game story made sense. In future drafts I'll do specific character passes of the scripts. Bounds gave useful advice to this end, which was to take each pass as if the character I'm focused on is the protagonist. I look forward to giving that a try.

The pilot's teaser is my chance to both hook the audience and establish the tone of the series. Gaffney suggested an adjustment that might address a current failure to do either. At present, the scene involves a standard gun fight and chase; fine for establishing

a standard action series but not so beneficial for a show about con artists. Gaffney's advice was to, immediately after Taffy shoots Ferguson, to force Taffy to lose the gun and effect his escape by way of being smarter than his would-be killers. Gaffney wisely pointed out that Taffy's biggest weapon should be his brain and this is what needs to be on display in the teaser. I was also invited to ask the following questions of the teaser: who are we (the audience) rooting for, and why? If all the audience sees is a con man who murders a colleague and then narrowly escapes without getting killed himself, there may not be enough there for an audience to empathize with (despite the opening playful flirtation with the woman). But, if Taffy can be seen humorously outsmarting the gunmen, that might keep audiences from changing the channel.

Gaffney directed me to page twenty-one of the pilot and my use of a superimposition to bring definition to a term used by con men but likely unfamiliar to general audiences. Gaffney appreciated the use but told me the convention needed to be introduced in the first act. In fact, it was introduced in act one, on page thirteen, in the diner scene, to define the conman slang word "cannon" as a pickpocket. A further suggestion, though, was to develop the simple superimposition into more of a stylized cutaway in order to further define the con vocabulary through action. As I am already struggling with page length, I think my first attempt will be to bring this convention into each script only once, during a scene of exposition. Bounds pointed out that it could be useful in the warehouse scene while Taffy is introducing the team members and their functions. I believe it could also be useful in the episode two, act five explanation of the con which Bounds said feels too "Mister Wizard" and could use some polishing. Gaffney's off-the-cuff idea was for the cutaways to be shot in black and white as if

during the silent film era. After further thought I wondered if making the cutaways similar in appearance to *The Sting* might work. I'll write it a few different ways and see what tests better with other readers.

Gaffney pitched an idea he initially brought up in the first defense and that is to have Olivia convince Max Corvo, covertly of course, to hold her ransom for more than the initial \$2 million. Essentially, she would be planting seeds in Max's mind that, given the opportunity, Taffy could be a source for more money. This would further complicate the plot but in a good way. Olivia already has an assignment but to give her another that at first appears to the audience to be disloyalty on her part sets up another good reversal. Squeezing it into an already long script could prove challenging but if the result is an incredibly tight script, all the better.

While on the subject of Max and Olivia, the current script has Max confessing to Olivia that this is his first kidnapping. I wrote the line without giving too much thought to how it affected the rest of the story. Gaffney pointed out that, if this was indeed Max's first, then Taffy would have no idea how Max would treat his victim or that he even would kidnap Olivia. For Taffy's plan to work, or even exist, he would have to know Max's modus operandi; when pushed, Max kidnaps for ransom but treats those he kidnaps with some dignity. Olivia is Taffy's girlfriend and although he is ultimately conning her, he does care for her and wouldn't put her in unknown danger. This line will be scrubbed and perhaps a line should be added addressing Taffy's knowledge of Max's past kidnappings.

On page fifty-six of the pilot, the word “shit” is used in an action line. This is the first appearance of this kind of language in the script, and the only. Gaffney suggested losing the word in order to maintain the overall tone of the script. If this show were to be pitched to a network, the use of an expletive could be damaging, even though it only appears in action and not in dialogue. The tone of the script needs to be consistent throughout and a reader for a network might see that word and decide the script is too crass for its audience. The tone can always be adjusted later for providers like HBO or Netflix but it is an easy fix for now to lose the word and keep a network friendly tone.

One final note for the pilot given during the defense concerned FBI agent Lipinski. At the end of act five, there is a time cheat in which Lipinski appears to be closing in on Taffy and his team but is in reality much too late. Gaffney believes that, while the cheat is fine, the location is daft. Lipinski and a team of agents crash the safe house used by Taffy in the episode. That Taffy gave Lipinski the actual location of their safe house even though he planned to betray the FBI all along would probably be a mistake. It’s much smarter, and more likely, that Taffy would mislead them to a different location. In the next draft of the script, this will be changed.

On to episode two, Bounds gave another suggestion for Lipinski, which was to include him in the story. Currently, local cops show up to the OneMind offices to find our antagonists and evidence against them gift wrapped. Much better would be for Taffy to trick Lipinski into showing up. This reinforces the idea that Taffy is in control and uses the FBI like a tool. It also reminds the audience that the FBI is looking for Taffy. This leads into another criticism. The pilot established that Taffy and his team will be on the

run for the foreseeable future yet no one appears to be running in episode two. Involving the FBI would address that issue.

Episode two required more details, more exposition, than the pilot. The second draft had a rather clumsy way of setting up some of the information necessary for understanding the climax. The story's antagonist, Singleton, is allergic to shellfish. I initially used author interference to draw attention to this detail but both Bounds and Gaffney advised me to find a subtler approach. Gaffney suggested giving Charlie a response to Sarah's line about the allergy would be enough to plant it in the audience's memory. Sometimes the answer to a problem is simpler than we imagine.

My committee voiced their issues with the episode's use of flashback. The criticism was that the thematic tie-in to the story wasn't apparent and the flashbacks themselves were sloppily formatted and placed. The flashbacks were a late addition to the script therefore do need more editing in order to feel natural and warranted. In future revisions I will give thought to the images and characters related to how the flashbacks are entered and exited. Also, Gaffney offered that the character revelations in the flashbacks should bear greater weight to the story.

Olivia's plot garnered two criticisms. First, the scene in which Olivia plants the necklace in the maid's locker isn't written like a screenplay. This scene was also a late addition and I rushed the writing of it, cheating in order to get through it quicker. Gaffney reminded me to write the scene from Olivia's perspective and to write what occurs on screen. Second, Gaffney was concerned Olivia and would appear less empathetic after getting an innocent maid fired. This was my mistake as the plot point of getting a maid

fired was originally planned for the pilot but was moved to episode two. The maid was supposed to be well compensated after the fact but during the shift to the second episode, this detail was forgotten. It will be included in future drafts.

The final two verbal notes given concern the climactic scene in Taffy's fake office. In order to convince Singleton that Sarah has supernatural powers, the team uses two invisible gasses. The way the script is written, the appearance of the gasses isn't visible or easily understood without the benefit of reading the script. The visuals aren't well written but can improve with further editing. Lastly, after Singleton leaves the office, Gaffney pleaded with me to savor that moment. In the script, Sarah and Taffy simply stand up, revealing it was all an act. Gaffney referred me to a similar moment in the pilot when I dragged on the ruse a while longer, teasing the audience. He said I should write this episode two climax similarly and leave the audience guessing just a moment longer.

At the end of the defense, Gaffney handed me a collection of notes, most of which addressed the script. These notes included the ones he spoke of during the defense but also included notes too trivial or brief to bring up verbally. This feedback will be reviewed and incorporated into the next round of revisions.

Next Steps

Since the Final Defense, the scripts have undergone a proof reading to clean up any grammar and spelling errors for the sake of this portfolio document. Going forward, I will incorporate, to the best of my abilities, the feedback and guidance given me by my committee and outside reader. The next drafts will attempt to finalize the plot and

structure of the episodes. After that, my goal will be to settle on and develop the show's unique devices: the superimpositions, the stylized exposition cutaways, and the flashbacks. Beyond that, character passes will be taken in order to make the characters leap off the page as fully realized individuals. The final scripts should be action-packed, clever, sexy, funny, and representative of my own particular voice

Conclusion

One year after beginning preliminary research for this project, I find myself with much yet to do. The scripts are in fine shape for second drafts but many more drafts are required before they're fit to be writing samples. They reflect not just what I've learned through this journey but also where I've been; both the writer I was and the writer I am now. I fully intend to edit out the voice of the writer I was in order to present the best version of the writer I am today to future readers. It's my hope to continue that process going forward: always learning, always improving, never settling. I'm proud of the work found in these pages and look forward to pursuing the full potential of the stories I've only just begun to develop. I'm thankful for the time and effort put forth by my committee and thankful for the opportunity Regent University has given me to achieve continue my education.

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