

GRAFFITI

Treatment for a feature film

by

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RATIONALE

"GRAFFITI" is an urban fantasy. It is aimed at children up to mid-teenage but it should have general appeal. It combines a realistic urban environment with a strong dark fantasy element. It is anti-graffiti, but the message is subtle one and the film doesn't preach.

LOCATIONS

Most of the scenes are in the streets of the Melbourne CBD. The fantasy world scenes are quite stark and don't require complex costumes or sets.

SYNOPSIS

Steven is a twelve year old boy travelling by train from Horsham to Melbourne on his own. He becomes lost in the city and is confronted by the members of a graffiti gang who say they need his help.

They explain that several of their members have been disappearing while doing graffiti "tricks". Jake, the leader, says that they've been sucked through into another world where there is no colour. So far they've only been able to get back one person, Midge - and that was by accident. The only way to find them is to locate their "tags", which the gang members are drawing on the other side, and to reach in and pull them back through. These tags can only be seen by someone who is lost, hence Steven is vitally important to them.

On the other side, Cel and Pike spend much of their time avoiding capture by hooded monk-like figures. They discover that the monks become mad when they see colour, so they use their spray cans to rescue the other gang members that have been captured and imprisoned in cells.

Steven and Jake find out after they pull through Cel that they have only until sunrise to get everyone out before the tags fade and the others run out of paint and will be trapped there forever. In a mad rush they get everyone except Pike, who has created a diversion on the other side to help the others through.

Finally Steven manages to find Pike's tag. He is almost pulled through himself in deadly tug of war with a monk. They save Pike just as the sun comes up and the first trams rattle past.

MAIN CHARACTERS

- Steven :- He is a country boy. He is prone to panic attacks but tries to keep them under control. He is worried and frightened about many things, including the trip to Melbourne and the orthodontist's appointment, but he tries not to show it.
- Jake :- The leader of graffiti gang. He has a tough exterior but has a heart of gold. He has a stubborn nature. He feels responsible for what has happened and considers it is his duty to rescue the others.
- Cel :- Resourceful, quick-witted and cunning. She is quick to grasp the situation on the other side. She is the one who usually comes up with all the ideas.
- Pike :- He is a little slow in his thinking, but once he gets something into his head, he has a one track mind. He has an unselfish side to his nature.
- Midge :- The first gang member to disappear and the first one to come back. He is physically small and often feels he has to be the loudest to get others to listen to him.
- Mordy :- Skinny and nervous with the unfortunate habit of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, he always thinks the worst is about to happen to him – and it usually does.

DETAILED STORYLINE

A twelve year old boy, Steven, is travelling by train to Melbourne from Horsham. He has recently had a tooth broken in a football accident, and he is going to see an orthodontist. He is nervous about the appointment and sees reminders about his broken tooth everywhere.

He is alone because it is sowing season on his farm, and none of his family can spare the time. His aunt is supposed to meet him at Spencer St Station, although she is extremely unreliable when it comes to dates and times.

He falls asleep and finds he is at Flinders St Station. He is disorientated and gets off the train. By the time he realises he is at the wrong station, the train has gone. He knows Flinders St and Spencer St aren't very far apart so he decides to walk to Spencer St to meet his aunt.

The crowds make him feel uncomfortable, and he imagines they are mocking him. He becomes confused. When it comes to showing his ticket, he can't find it. He panics and rushes out into the street. The bustle of the five o'clock mid-winter rush hour hits him, and he imagines the police are after him for not having a ticket.

Eventually he calms down, but it is getting dark and he is hopelessly lost. It starts to drizzle. He sees strange, flashing, brightly coloured pictures on the walls of the buildings. A street kid, Jake, confronts him. He seems very pleased that Steven is completely lost, and Steven is intimidated by him. Jake won't let him pass, so Steven starts running again. Soon he realises he is being chased by a whole gang of street kids. As he runs the pictures seem to be moving and calling out to him.

The street kids finally catch him. They seem to take delight in the fact that he is hopelessly lost. He discovers that they need his help, and that they will take him to Spencer St Station once he's done what they asked him to do. Although he is unsure whether to trust them he feels he has no choice. They say they need to take him to their squat to explain it all, but that they will need to blindfold him first so he won't know where it is.

Once in the squat, Jake explains that his gang used to be graffiti artists, until a few

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weeks ago, when members of the gang started disappearing mysteriously while they were on their nightly "tricks". He explains how only one of them, Midge, has ever appeared again. Jake says that he found Midge when he tripped over a rubbish bin and reached out to brace himself when he fell against a wall. To his surprise his hand sank through as if the wall wasn't solid. He then felt a hand grab him and he pulled back. Midge came through the wall.

Midge then takes over the story. He explains that he can't remember much, but that he had sort of been sucked through the graffiti he had drawn into another shadowy world, one where everything is black and white and grey. He says that the missing gang members were over there, all lost and confused. He says that he was captured by these people with hoods and put in a cell. He says he used his spray can to draw his "tag" on the walls of the cell. He found that the tags seemed to keep the monks from entering his cell.

Jake explains to Steven that tags are pictures that graffiti artists use like signatures to their work. They usually feature a picture of something closely connected with that person.

These tags were the only way back, as Jake discovered by accident. You have to hit the wall where they appear at the right time, and your arm will sink through to the other world. The gang member whose tag it is will then grab hold of your hand and you can pull him back through the wall into our world.

The problem is, as the gang discovered, only people who are lost can see the tags, and all the gang members know Melbourne so well that they can never get themselves lost. Steven agrees to help them.

Up to this point, there have been several short scenes shown of the "other side", interspersed with the scenes from the real world action. The other world is entirely in black and white and gray. There are hooded figures which the graffiti gang members try to hide from. The gang members hear the monk-like figures talk only in whispers and occasionally they hear strange, sonorous chanting. The monks seem to be looking for them.

There is now a long scene on the other side. The first boy to be pulled through, Pike, meets up with Cel who is one of the girl members of the gang. They are both confused, but they decide they have to see if they can find any others that have fallen through. In their

search they witness the capture of Mordy by the monks. Pike and Cel follow as they take him into a large stone building. The entrance to the building is guarded by two hooded figures twice the size of the ones they have been observing. The guards are motionless apart from their heads and their glowing eyes which scan the landscape in a steady rhythm.

Pike and Cel discuss how they can rescue Mordy. Cel rolls some small rocks to test the reactions of the guards. One of them leaves to investigate, but there is nothing they can do to get the other one to leave his post. Pike suggests that his eyesight may not be too good. Cel laughs at this suggestion, but Pike decides to put it to the test. He takes out his spray can, coats one of the rocks in a luminescent green colour, and then rolls it past the remaining guard.

The reaction is totally unexpected. The guard screams a horrific sounding scream and covers his eyes with his hands. Cel realises what is going on. She explains it to Pike. She tells him to look around. Everything is black and white and gray. It is obvious that the monks can't stand colour. They spray paint more rocks and put them in their pockets for later use.

They roll out another rock and the guard, who has now recovered, once again screams and covers his eyes. They race past him and into the building. Once inside they sneak along stone corridors which are lit by rows of candles. They manage to avoid the silent hooded figures that also use the corridors. Pike and Cel hear deep chanting that they'd occasionally heard before. They follow it until it becomes louder and louder. Pike lifts up Cel so she can see through a high window into the room where the chanting is coming from. She sees rows of monks all facing what looks like a black hole in the far wall.

The two of them then continue their search. They find an empty cell which has Midge's tag drawn all over it, although most of the tags are fading. There is no sign of Midge, but one of the tags has a hole the size of a fist in the middle of it. Cel looks through and she can see a Melbourne street on the other side. Then she sees Jake and Midge sprawled on the footpath next to a rubbish bin. She tries to reach through, but it's as if the wall is still there.

She tells Pike what she thinks has happened. She believes that Midge got back somehow by drawing his tag. Pike suggests that they should start drawing their tags, but Cel

says they have to find the others first so that they can tell them how to get out. They find another cell, though this one is guarded. Pike pulls out one of the painted rocks and the guard screams and covers his eyes. They open the door and find that Shar is inside. Then all three race out and past the still disorientated guard.

Shar tells them that she knows of seven others that had disappeared from Melbourne before her, so they search for them. The monks are now aware of the disturbance and they are searching for the intruders. Pike and Cel find the others, including Mordy. They all make their way back out of the building but are confronted by several of the hooded guards. The guard knocks the rocks out of the hands of Pike and Cel, and they all start running. Eventually they are cornered, but they get away by spray painting the eyes of the guards. Finally they make it back out.

Once outside Mordy says that he wants to get as far away from the building as possible. Cel explains that the way out seems to be to draw your tag on the building walls. There are only twisted bushes and stunted trees as far as the eye can see. They all walk around to the back of the building and start drawing everywhere. They wait but nothing happens. The tags start to fade and they have to start drawing new ones. Finally Pike sees a hand come through one of Mordy's tags. He yells at Mordy to come. Mordy isn't sure at first what to do. Cel points out that she can tell it's Jake's hand by the way the nails had been bitten so badly. Mordy grabs the hand and feels himself being dragged through the wall.

Back in Melbourne, Steven points to Mordy's tag and Jake hits the wall and pulls him out. Mordy is dazed and confused and they leave Alli, one of the other gang members, with him while they search for other tags. They pull out a number of other graffiti artists from the other side, including Cel. They are all equally disorientated.

The problem for Jake and Steven is that the timing has to be just right to coincide with the flashing tag, and the wall has to be hit with full force or it doesn't work. The person punching the wall has to hit it as if they don't expect anything to be there. Jake ends up not quite getting it right quite a few times, and he hurts his hands quite badly.

Steven says that he should be the one who gets the rest out since he is the only one who

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can see the tags. Jake becomes stubborn, even though both his hands are now aching. He says that the graffiti drawing was all his idea and that since he had got the gang into this mess, he was going to get them out. There is a stand off between the two until Cel, who is the first to come to, joins them.

Cel explains a bit about what is happening on the other side. It becomes obvious that time and space are different in the two worlds. Much time is passing on the other side. Also, even though most of the tags are drawn fairly close together on the other side, they appear all over Melbourne on this side. She says that once someone has been pulled back through, they leave a type of window back to Melbourne. It's possible to look through them but you can't climb back through. She explains that light shining through the hole from Melbourne, like a street lamp or a car headlight, causes the tags to fade. She says that she believes that once the sun rises in Melbourne the next morning all the tags would fade to nothing, and the gang members who were still on the other side would remain there forever because they had run out of paint.

On the other side, the monks have discovered the remaining graffiti artists. The artists have kept the monks at bay by drawing a "border" with the spray paints. The monks are now lined up just outside the paint line and are staring at the graffiti artists. The border is fading, and the artists know they are running out of time and paint. Pike and the others discuss the problem. They realise that if they redraw the border line, it will take a great deal of paint, and it will mean they won't have enough to continue drawing the tags. Pike says he has an idea, and he charges through the line of monks and back into the building.

Some of the monks follow him, but he manages to avoid them and find the place where they had seen the chanting. It is empty. He goes to the huge black hole on the far wall and spray paints directly into it. He sprays until his can runs out. There is a huge cry of pain as if the building itself has been injured. The building starts shaking as he makes his way back out again.

In Melbourne Steven and Jake run from street to street, retrieving the others in a mad rush, desperately trying to get them all out before sunrise. Steven ends up taking over because

Jake's hands are no longer up to it and because the rescues have now become a matter of urgency. He too ends up hurting his hands because it is so difficult to time correctly the hitting of the wall. They have one more person, Pike, to get out when they hear the trams rattling in the distance, indicating that it is almost sunrise.

Steven now finds to his dismay that he can't see any more tags. He panics when he realises that he now recognises some of the buildings from yesterday. He is no longer lost, so he can no longer see where the tags are. Although he tries to keep this from Jake at first, he eventually tells him. Jake slumps down in resignation. He presses his face into the wall of a building and says goodbye to Pike, even though he knows he probably can't hear him. Steven has an idea. He suggests that Jake blindfold him again and then take him somewhere so that he can become lost again.

Meanwhile Pike has returned to where the artists had been drawing their tags. The monks are now in a rage and many are screaming and running around in mad confusion as the building is shaking. The painted border has faded and some are running toward the wall as Shar's feet disappear through. From the holes in the walls, Pike can tell all the others are back in Melbourne and that he is the only one left.

In Melbourne Jake has blindfolded Steven and the plan works. Steven can see Pike's tag, even though it is very faint and is flashing at an irregular interval. Steven manages, after a couple of tries, to get his hand through. There is a long wait and his hand starts to get numb. Finally he feels someone grabbing hold of it.

Pike sees the hand come through and weaves his way through the monks and makes a desperate lunge.

Steven feels Pike's hand, but instead of pulling him through to Melbourne as he expected, he finds himself being pulled through the wall to the other side this time. Jake grabs Steven by the feet before he is fully sucked through. Steven is caught half way between the two worlds. He looks at the other world and sees that he has Pike on the end of his arm. He also sees that one of the monks has Pike by the legs, and that the four of them are involved in a tug of war.

Jake and Steven eventually win and they pull Pike, and the monk through the wall. The monk turns into what looks like an oil slick and slides down a gutter and into a drain.

Jake and Steven hear a tram rattling past, and they realise that it's sun rise. They are all exhausted. Jake keeps his end of the bargain and takes Steven to Spencer St Station. He asks if Steven wants to be an honorary member of the gang. Steven is not sure until Jake explains that they won't be doing any more graffiti drawing. He says that Steven will need a tag though, a picture that sort of sums him up. He says he can draw it on paper - it doesn't have to be on walls. Steven says that he will think about it. He is suddenly very tired. He falls asleep on one of the benches using his backpack as a pillow.

He is woken by his aunt, who has had the day of his arrival wrong. Or was he the one who had the date of the orthodontist appointment wrong? He is confused. He goes to pick up his backpack and sees that someone has drawn a broken tooth on it.

SAMPLE SCENES 4 - 6

4. EXT. STREET. DUSK. 4.

A city lane. It is drizzling. STEVEN is walking along the footpath and is looking confused. Another boy, JAKE, suddenly steps out from a doorway in front of him. JAKE is taller than STEVEN. He is wearing torn jeans and an old, dirty jacket. His hair is hanging down in thick, wet clumps. It is hard to see his face. STEVEN tries to step around him, but JAKE blocks his path. He tries again but the same thing happens.

JAKE
You're lost, right?

STEVEN looks away and doesn't answer.

JAKE
(louder)
I said, you're lost, right?

STEVEN
No, I'm on my way to my dentist.

JAKE
No dentist's open now. It's too late for 'em.

STEVEN
Mine's different. Mine's an orthodontist.

JAKE
Prove it.

STEVEN
Look, I'm going to an orthodontist. My tooth
got broken in a footy match.

JAKE
Show me.

STEVEN
I just want to go...

JAKE
I want to see the tooth first.

STEVEN opens his mouth so that JAKE can see the gap in his front teeth.

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JAKE

Yeah, okay. Still reckon you're lost, but.

STEVEN

No, I've got the address right here.

STEVEN gets a piece of paper out of his pocket. JAKE snatches it from him. He holds it up to a street lamp to read it. He looks at STEVEN and smiles.

JAKE

Your appointment was at five-thirty, right?
You're a bit late.

STEVEN starts to panic.

STEVEN

I missed it. I'm going back to Spencer St Station
now. My aunt's waiting for me there.

JAKE strokes his chin as if in deep thought.

JAKE

Ah... I reckon Spencer Street's that way.

JAKE points to street to his left.

Or is it that way?

JAKE points behind him.

Or is it that way, or that way, or...

STEVEN looks in each direction as he points and becomes increasingly agitated.

JAKE

You *are* lost, right?

STEVEN

(feebly)

Yes.

JAKE rubs his hands together.

JAKE

Good.

JAKE steps towards STEVEN and STEVEN turns and starts to run. JAKE chases after him and he is soon joined by a dozen gang members.

MIDGE

There he is.

ALLI

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He's lost.

JAKE

Don't let him get away.

STEVEN runs down an alley. He jumps over a pile of rubbish. On the walls around him he sees coloured pictures moving and twisting through the drizzle. He turns a corner, slips and falls, and the gang members catch up to him and surround him. STEVEN lifts up his elbow as protection.

STEVEN

I'd better warn you, I've done two years of judo.

JAKE

That's real nice.

The others laugh.

Now, just have a look around and tell me where you are.

STEVEN

M... Melbourne

MIDGE

Yeah... Victoria.

ALLI

Australia.

GANG MEMBER 1

The Southern Hemisphere.

GANG MEMBER 2

Earth.

GANG MEMBER 3

The Solar System.

GANG MEMBER 4

The Galaxy.

GANG MEMBER 5

The Milky Way.

GANG MEMBER 6

The Universe.

JAKE

Okay, that's enough... now point to where you reckon Spencer St Station is.

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STEVEN lifts his finger, but leaves it hanging in mid-air.

STEVEN

I... I don't know.

JAKE

We've got one.

The others nod in agreement. JAKE walks up to STEVEN. STEVEN has started to cry.

JAKE

You help us, and we'll take you where you want to go, okay?

STEVEN is surprised. He looks up at JAKE.

STEVEN

Wh... what do you want me to do?

JAKE

Just come with us first, and we'll tell you.

5. EXT. STREET. NIGHT. 5.

STEVEN is blindfolded and is being led along city streets by JAKE on one arm and ALLI on the other.

ALLI

Watch out for the gutter.

STEVEN steps up from the street to the footpath.

STEVEN

Why do you have to blindfold me?

ALLI

No-one gets to see where our squat is. You have to be one of us.

JAKE

And I don't want you suddenly working out where you are.

STEVEN

Why?

JAKE

You'll find out... Okay, watch it here - there's some steps.

STEVEN is led down some stairs into an old building.

6. INT. LARGE ROOM. NIGHT 6.

A large room with cracked, bare stone walls. Old mattresses with stuffing coming out of them have been pushed up against the walls. Thick, woollen blankets, and lumpy looking pillows are lying everywhere. There are candles burning on ledges, and a small kerosene lamp sits in the middle of the room. Everyone is sitting down on the mattresses, in a circle. STEVEN is in the middle.

JAKE
You could see the tags, right?

STEVEN shrugs his shoulders.

MIDGE
He's useless. I could'a told you that just by looking at him.

A few voices mumble in agreement. JAKE looks straight at STEVEN.

JAKE
The tags. The graffiti. You could see it, right?

STEVEN
You mean the pictures on the walls?

JAKE
Yeah... told you I'd find one for us.

The others nod and shadows move on the walls.

STEVEN
What do you want me to do?

JAKE
It's all to do with the graffiti. The whole thing's our fault, so it's important that we get ourselves out of this mess.

STEVEN
What mess?

Turns to ALLI.
JAKE
Okay, Chuck me one.

ALLI throws him a can of spray paint. JAKE hands it to

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STEVEN and STEVEN looks at it.

JAKE

That's what we used to do. Paint pictures all over the city... and some of us are pretty good artists too.

STEVEN

But it's illegal, isn't it?

JAKE

Yeah... okay, it is, but we weren't really hurting anyone, and some of the pictures were real good.

STEVEN

That doesn't make it legal. The police -

JAKE

Look, the police could never catch us. They caught most of the other gangs, but they could never catch us. Our pictures were so good I reckon they didn't want to catch us. Anyway, the police weren't why we stopped.

STEVEN

What happened?

JAKE

Some of us just started... disappearing. One night someone was there, and the next they were gone. It took us a while to make the connection, but it was happening every night we went out on a trick - that's what we call it when we go out drawing graffiti.

JAKE shifts a little, as if he is uncomfortable.

We stopped tricking and people stopped disappearing. The problem was how to get 'em back.

STEVEN

From where?

JAKE

Midge over there was one of the ones who disappeared. He's the only one we've been able to get back so far. Midge, you tell him.

MIDGE

I can't remember much, except that it was kind of like being inside a black and white movie when the TV's not working real well. There were shadows sorta everywhere and things never stood still. And there were these monk things after me all the time. They got me too.

STEVEN

What did you do?

MIDGE

What do ya reckon? I tried to get back out. I still had my spray can, and I worked out them monk things hated the paint. So I kept drawing - mainly my tag. I know it doesn't make much sense, but I was sorta hoping that someone would see my tags and would try to get me out.

STEVEN

You drew graffiti?

MIDGE

No... not just any graffiti. I drew my tag.

JAKE

Tags're like signatures. Only it's drawing not writing. They kinda belong to us, like our names, only they mean a lot more than just names. All of us have a tag that we add when we do a trick. It's so we know whose drawn it, but no-one else does.

STEVEN

So how did you get out?

MIDGE

Luck.

JAKE

Yeah, it turns out that if you hit the spot on a wall where they've drawn their tag, you can sorta pull 'em back through. With Midge it was a million to one chance. I accidentally fell over a rubbish bin two nights ago and stumbled into the wall of a building in Flinders Lane. My hand kinda

slipped through and disappeared. I couldn't believe it when I felt someone grab my hand really tight. I pulled back as hard as I could and Midge was at the other end. He was real confused at first, and he couldn't tell what'd happened to him. A bit's come back since then, but not much.

STEVEN

So what's the problem? All you've got to do is look for the tags of all the others who've disappeared. Why do you need me? I don't even know what the tags look like.

JAKE grabs STEVEN by the arm.

JAKE

That's just it. We can't *see* the tags they're drawing from the other side.

MIDGE

But they're all drawing 'em over there like mad. I know it.

STEVEN

I still don't know how I can help.

JAKE

You're lost. We need people who are lost.

STEVEN shakes his head in confusion.

JAKE

Look, when Midge came out, he didn't know where he was, right?

MIDGE

Yeah, and I remember seeing all these tags all over the place. The trouble was, I was so mixed up I didn't know what they meant. I was just real tired and wanted to go to sleep.

JAKE

And when he woke up, his head was sorta clear again and he remembered where he was.

MIDGE

But I couldn't see the tags any more.

JAKE

We tried to find 'em by guessing, but you've got to be spot on when you hit the wall or your hand won't go through. And you've got to do it really hard, like your not expecting a wall to be there. You wouldn't believe how many walls there are in Melbourne. We've already hurt our hands trying to find the tags.

STEVEN

So you need me because I'm lost.

JAKE

Right. Now you're getting the picture. I don't know why, but only people who're real lost can see the tags.

MIDGE

I reckon it's because everyone over the other side feels so lost.

JAKE

Yeah, maybe they're on the same wave length or something. But it doesn't really matter why, does it? It just works that way. The trouble is, all of us know the city so well we never feel lost. We even tried blindfolding Alli over there and leaving her in a lane in the dark, so that she wouldn't know where she was.

STEVEN

Did it work?

ALLI

I was sort of confused for a bit, and I thought I saw some tags out of the corner of my eye, but it didn't last very long. It only took me a few seconds to work out where I was, and then I couldn't see the tags any more.

JAKE

We tried the spots where Alli thought she saw a tag... but, like I said, you have to be really spot on. They kinda flash, and we could have been missing 'em by only half a centimetre.

STEVEN

Why me? There must be lots of people who are really lost?

JAKE

Don't you think we've been trying? It doesn't work with people who are just a bit lost. It's got to be at night, too. I don't know why, but even if someone's lost, they never see 'em during the day. We've asked lots of people for help, but most of 'em either don't believe us or they don't like the look of us. We're getting desperate.

STEVEN

So you really do need me?

JAKE

You finally got it. Now are you going to help us?

STEVEN looks at the faces of the gang members. The candle light is flickering across them, making them look like something out of a horror movie.

STEVEN

Do I have a choice?