

EPONA

SCREENPLAY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Four primary creative priorities for the next phase of development

A focused plan to transform the current draft into a distinctive, culturally responsible and production ready feature screenplay.

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PURPOSE AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

This plan identifies the four primary creative priorities required to move EPONA from its current draft into a compelling, culturally authorised and market ready feature screenplay. It is not a general list of aspirations. Each priority sets out a clear diagnosis, a defined creative objective, a specific program of work, the questions that must be tested and the evidence that will demonstrate meaningful progression.

The plan deliberately prioritises major story work before dialogue polish and formatting. Supporting craft development, including mythology, visual storytelling, dialogue, horse action, safety and production feasibility, is integrated within the four priorities rather than treated as a collection of unrelated tasks.

CREATIVE FOUNDATION TO PROTECT

The development process will protect the qualities that make EPONA distinctive: its fusion of mythological drama, horses, rural Australia, Country, grief, belonging and cultural connection; its emotional relationship between Epona and Lilly; its accessible rural humour; its ambitious visual language; and its central proposition that people are not defined by inherited darkness and can choose a different future.

1. EPONA AND OLC

Interconnected protagonist and antagonist arcs

CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

OLC commits the defining act of violence in the opening by killing Croithe and condemning Epona to centuries of isolation. His motivation is not yet sufficiently dramatised, and the intended revelation that he is Epona's brother is not adequately seeded. At the same time, Epona's movement from addiction and despair to renewed strength occurs too quickly. The emotional relationship between their arcs must become the spine of the screenplay.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Build parallel but opposing journeys around the human need to be chosen. OLC responds to rejection by forcing loyalty and destroying what he cannot possess. Epona begins believing that she is incomplete without Croithe, but learns that identity and power are also created through choice, responsibility and connection.

SPECIFIC WORK PROGRAM

- Create detailed emotional and dramatic arc maps for Epona and OLC across every major sequence.
- Clarify the shared history, wound and conflict that make the sibling relationship dramatically necessary.
- Seed controlled clues through objects, reactions, imagery and behaviour so the reveal is surprising but retrospectively inevitable.
- Define why OLC has waited centuries, why he needs Croithe, why he acts now and what being chosen by Epona would mean to him.
- Build Epona's recovery through costly choices, setbacks and relationships rather than through explanation or the automatic return of her powers.
- Test the sibling reveal through the writers room, professional script editing and independent assessment. Retain it only if it strengthens the whole film rather than functioning as a late explanation for OLC's behaviour.
- Standardise the antagonist's name as OLC throughout all drafts and development materials.

2. FIRST NATIONS STORY DEVELOPMENT

Cultural authority, local specificity and dramatic integration

CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

The current draft includes First Nations characters, Dunghutti Country, local history, language, spirits, a massacre site, cultural objects, mourning, burial, healing and animal symbolism. Several of these elements currently operate as mythic devices or exposition rather than as culturally grounded dramatic material. The next phase must deepen the story through genuine collaboration and ensure that cultural authority can materially change the screenplay.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Develop First Nations content that is locally specific, dramatically essential and created through an accountable process of consultation, consent and shared creative decision making. Sam, Shannon and Walumarra must exist as complex characters with agency, relationships and contemporary lives, not primarily as guides to culture or spiritual meaning.

SPECIFIC WORK PROGRAM

- Continue structured consultation with the relevant Walcha First Nations community and appropriate cultural authorities before, during and after each major rewrite.
- Research local history, language, place, creation stories, spiritual concepts, gendered knowledge, mourning practices and the cultural meaning of relevant animals, objects and locations.
- Review the use of Gins Leap, restless spirits, massacre history, Walumarra, the spear, the waddy, burial, healing and the relationship between story and Country.
- Identify what may be shared publicly, what requires specific permission, what is restricted and what should not be represented on screen.
- Develop any additional culturally significant scene from authorised local knowledge and community priorities rather than adding a generalised cultural scene to an existing plot.
- Use local language only with approved wording, translation, pronunciation and dramatic context.
- Strengthen Sam and Shannon's choices, relationships, knowledge and contribution to the outcome so they are active participants in the story rather than sources of exposition.
- Define Walumarra through authorised cultural guidance and avoid reducing him to a mystical helper whose purpose is to advance Epona's journey.
- Keep Celtic and First Nations visual and spiritual systems distinct, legible and culturally grounded.
- Remain open to changing, removing or replacing existing material where community guidance determines that it is inaccurate, inappropriate, restricted or not the production's story to tell.
- Engage appropriate First Nations writers, cultural advisers and an independent First Nations script assessor at defined draft stages.

EVIDENCE OF COMPLETION

Completion will be demonstrated through documented consultation, recorded decisions and permissions, a culturally revised screenplay, formal First Nations script assessment and a written response showing how significant advice was considered and addressed.

3. STRUCTURE AND FEATURE DEVELOPMENT

Causality, escalation, supporting arcs and cinematic logic

CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

The current screenplay is approximately sixty one pages. Major turns, relationships, reversals and consequences require further development for a feature length narrative. Several events occur because the plot requires them rather than because one character's decision creates the next consequence. The mythology is emotionally evocative but its rules, limits and stakes are not yet consistent enough to support suspense and payoff.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Rebuild the screenplay as a sustained chain of choices and consequences. The story should escalate through character decisions, reveal information at the moment it creates maximum pressure and reach feature length through deeper conflict and transformation rather than additional explanation.

SPECIFIC WORK PROGRAM

- Complete a scene by scene diagnosis identifying each character's objective, obstacle, decision, consequence and change.
- Rebuild the narrative around a clear inciting incident, Epona's active commitment, a meaningful midpoint reversal, an escalating cost of failure and an inevitable movement into the climax.
- Strengthen the causal chain connecting Jacko's actions, Lilly's decision to follow Epona, Wesley and Sam's pursuit, OLC's progress and the movement of the spirits.
- Develop Wesley, Lilly, Sam, Shannon, John and Walumarra as characters with distinct needs and choices that affect the central plot.
- Create a concise mythology rules document defining the origin, powers, limits and costs associated with Epona, OLC, Croithe, Drochan, the pendant, the Cornucopia, the spirits and the keepers.
- Introduce every essential rule before it becomes necessary in the climax and remove solutions that depend on powers or knowledge appearing without preparation.
- Select a limited visual system and track its changing meaning across the screenplay. Priority motifs will be chosen for dramatic function rather than visual decoration.
- Replace explanatory dialogue with action, reaction, image and consequence wherever the audience can understand the story visually.
- Refine tone so rural humour releases pressure without undermining danger, grief or cultural gravity.
- Review every major horse, child, battle, bird and gorge sequence with horse action, stunt, safety and production specialists so spectacle remains emotionally necessary and achievable.

EVIDENCE OF COMPLETION

Completion will be demonstrated through an approved structural beat sheet, character arc maps, a mythology rules document, a substantially revised feature screenplay and specialist feedback confirming that the major action is clear, safe and achievable within the intended scale.

4. CLIMAX AND THEMATIC RESOLUTION

Protagonist agency, collective action and an honest ending

CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

In the current climax, Walumarra releases Croithe and Sam kills OLC. Both actions can remain important, but together they risk displacing Epona at the decisive moment of her own story. The sibling reveal is not integrated into the confrontation, OLC is defeated primarily through physical force and the restless spirits appear capable of being resolved too easily by one battle and a single promise.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Design a climax in which Epona makes the defining emotional and dramatic choice, while Sam, Walumarra, Wesley, Lilly and Croithe remain essential to the outcome. OLC's defeat must express the failure of forced belonging, possession and vengeance, not merely the destruction of his body. The ending should offer hope while acknowledging that truth, remembrance and healing require continuing work.

SPECIFIC WORK PROGRAM

- Test alternative climax structures before committing to a final solution.
- Integrate the sibling reveal into the active confrontation so it changes the choices available to Epona and OLC.
- Create a decision that only Epona can make and that proves she has transformed before Croithe restores her physical wholeness.
- Make Croithe's return a dramatic consequence or completion of Epona's choice rather than the sole source of her strength.
- Give Sam, Walumarra, Wesley and Lilly indispensable actions that arise from their own arcs without transferring authorship of the resolution away from Epona.
- Clarify whether OLC's physical death is necessary and ensure that any final action reflects the moral conflict established throughout the film.
- Resolve the spirits with humility and cultural authority. Avoid suggesting that historical trauma is healed by the intervention of one heroic group.
- Let the final scenes establish an ongoing commitment to truth, remembrance, cultural process, care and responsibility.
- Pay off the film's chosen visual motifs through final images that communicate change without restating the theme in dialogue.

EVIDENCE OF COMPLETION

Completion will be demonstrated through a revised climax that resolves character, mythology and theme in the same dramatic movement, followed by an ending endorsed through cultural review and tested through professional script editing, independent assessment and a table read.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND DECISION POINTS

- 1. Story diagnosis and mapping:** Complete the scene analysis, character arc maps, relationship maps, theme map and mythology rules before commencing the full structural rewrite.
- 2. Cultural research and consultation:** Undertake focused research and consultation before and during writing, with clear records of advice, permissions, unresolved questions and material that cannot be used.
- 3. Writers room and structural rewrite:** Test alternative solutions for the central arcs, cultural integration, structure and climax, then produce a substantially revised feature draft.
- 4. Script editing and specialist review:** Engage a professional script editor, relevant First Nations cultural and script advisers, horse action specialists and an independent script assessor.
- 5. Table read and final revision:** Use a table read to test clarity, pace, character voice, emotional impact and audience understanding, then complete the final development draft.

MEASURES OF COMPLETION

The development phase will be considered complete when the project has produced all of the following:

- A substantially revised feature screenplay that demonstrates clear progression from the current draft.
- Completed protagonist, antagonist and supporting character arc maps.
- A structural beat sheet and scene level causality analysis.
- A mythology rules document governing powers, limitations, objects, spirits and consequences.
- Documented First Nations consultation, cultural review and all relevant permissions available at this stage of development.
- A professional script editor's report and a written response recording how major feedback was addressed.
- An independent script assessment and a First Nations script assessment.
- A completed table read and final revision pass covering dialogue, continuity, geography, time, names, objects and character knowledge.

DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME

The intended outcome is not a polished version of the existing draft. It is a substantially reimagined and strengthened screenplay with a protagonist who drives the story, an antagonist whose emotional logic deepens the central conflict, culturally authorised First Nations content, consistent mythology, feature level structure, cinematic storytelling and a climax that delivers the full meaning of the film.

The final screenplay should be distinctive enough to attract high calibre creative collaborators, cast, market partners and financing while remaining truthful to EPONA's central purpose and accountable to the people, culture and Country represented within it.

Prepared in alignment with the Screen Australia Narrative Content Development Funding Guidelines and Pathways and Protocols.