

# The Room in which L o m b a r d i Died

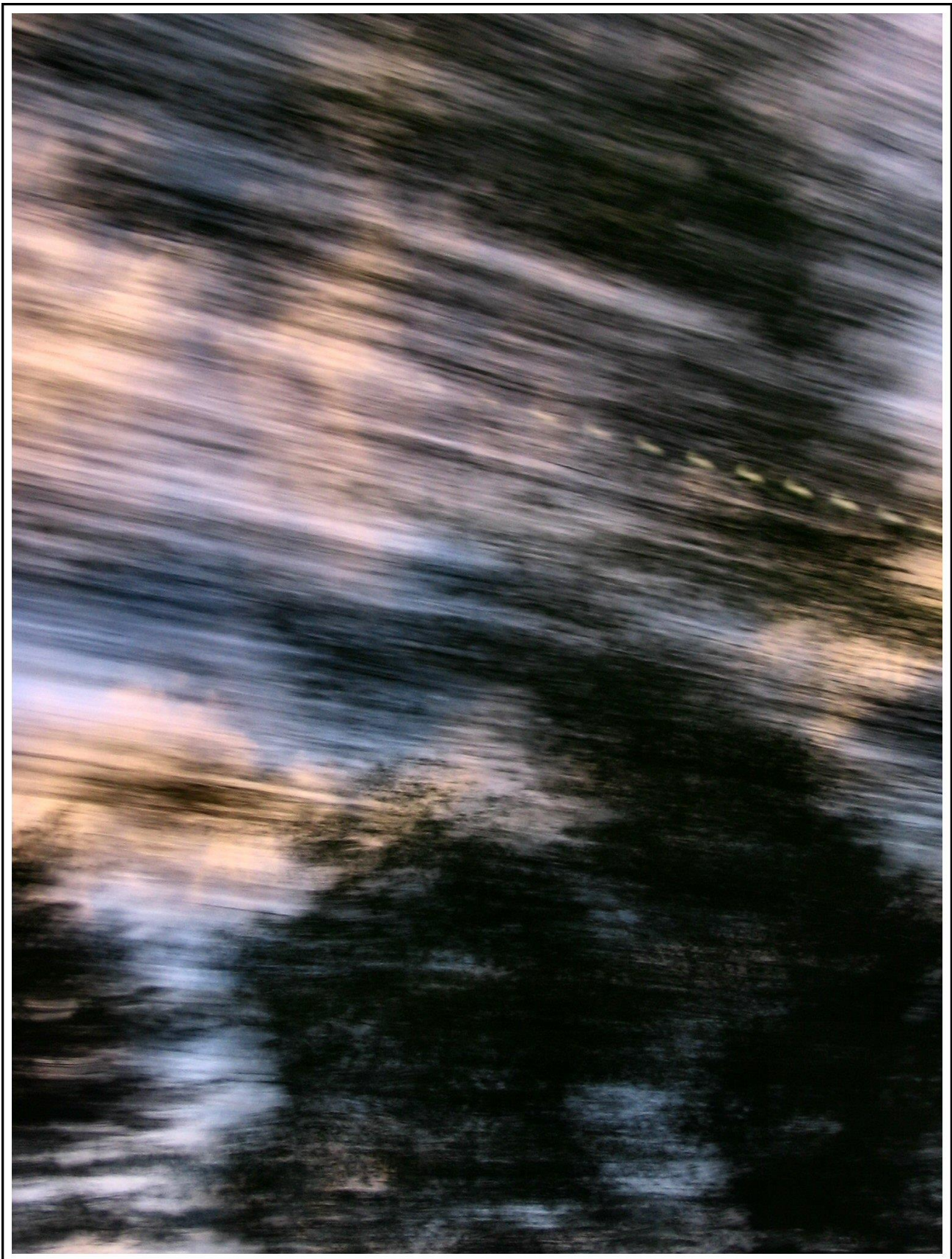
A Psychological Thriller  
for 2-4 Players and a Game Master

Lauri Lukka

Only to be read by the game master.

Do not read if you plan to play the game.





“Neurosis is the result of a conflict between the ego and its id, whereas psychosis is the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relation between the ego and its environment (outer world).” - Sigmund Freud, General Psychoanalytical Theory



## Game Principles

The Room in which Lombardi died is an freeform tabletop role-playing game for 2-4 players and a game master. It incorporates themes from film noir, dark fiction and psychological thrillers. The game uses several narrative techniques to tell a compelling story about an author travelling to Los Angeles with his family to discuss the details of a movie script based on his bestseller.

As a game master, you not only affect the characters, but also the players. Unlike most games, this experience targets the latter. Besides telling a compelling, yet confusing, film-noir narrative, the game attempts to break the players' concept of game and have them question their expectations.

The game is inspired by movies by David Lynch, novels by Neil Gaiman and psychedelic music.

### The Goal of the Game

The game aims to break to boundary between the character and the player. Does the game master control the characters or the players? Who are the player characters? Is there any story to the game at all? Why is everything repeated? Why nothing makes any sense? If the players get somewhat frustrated and start to second guess themselves in the game, you have succeeded.

## Disclaimer and Ethics

Once you start the game, the game master - not the author - is responsible for the experience he or she conveys. The author acknowledges that this game may arouse strong feelings in many players and partly this is its aim. However, it is not meant to arouse excessively negative mood in the players and break your game group. This game, as all games, should be enjoyed responsibly, even if you do not have a chance for informed consent due to the nature of the game.

### The Four Phases

The game consists of four phases in which the game master introduces certain themes and elements which are detailed below. It should almost feel as if the game and its rules change several times during the game.

The materials provide a rough roadmap for the game master, but you are free to improvise a lot within those boundaries. More important than specific events is the mood and atmosphere. Aim for something between film noir, dark science fiction and psychological thrillers.



### **Themes**

At the very last page you will find an excerpt from the book the main character wrote. You should deal a copy to each player at the start of the game. It has metaclues about the game genre and themes that should guide the players. Do incorporate many themes and symbols from the excerpt to your game:

indians  
oppression  
submission  
mistrust  
broken promises and treaties  
burning, fever  
sickness, smallpox  
rebirth

### **Where Are the Players Going?**

Give the players some leeway and options to affect where they are going and adjust the course according to it. However, do not hesitate to take control when they steer the game in wrong direction.

### **Narrative Techniques**

The game master should use more and more metatechniques or narrative techniques as the game progresses: talk to the players as if they are one; only look at one player; jump the scenes without any notice; give the players mixed clues about other characters; guide the players half-way a plot and then start a new. Read the game text for more detailed thoughts about these techniques.

### **Who is Lombardi?**

Lombardi is a plot device called MacGuffin. Look it up on Wikipedia. It does not matter whether Lombardi has actually existed or not, and this should remain unknown to players. All efforts to find actual proof of his existence or nonexistence should end up ambiguous. More important question is "Why Lombardi is?"

### **What is the gold fish?**

Gold wish is a story motive and represents incomprehensible consistency in the incomprehensible world.

### **When and how Should the Game End?**

The story should end when the players ask some of the following questions but do **not** have the answers to them:

- Are we all the same character?
- Is the hotel actually a mental institute?
- Are we in a strange science experiment in the future?
- Are we actually characters in the book the main character is writing?
- Are the characters in a movie?

End the game when the players are confused enough. Do not explain the game afterwards.

### **Why has this game been made?**

This game is an attempt to gamify psychosis, a state in which reality breaks down and nothing is certain anymore.



## Premise

Explain this to the players:

*“We will play a game called The Room in which Lombardi Died. The genre is modern psychological thriller with film noir touch. The game is completely narrated by you and me and there are no game mechanics.*

*The characters are a family whose father or mother is a rather well-known author in Britain. They and his family have been invited to Los Angeles to discuss turning one of his best works into a movie with the company called Osis productions. This is a great opportunity for the family to spend a luxury holiday - all expenses are taken care of by the company.*

*The book in question is a historical drama about the struggles of native Americans called the Last Dance at the Rabbit Creek. Here is an excerpt of the book for you to read. After you have read the excerpt we will build your character and discuss the family dynamics. Do you have any questions?”*

### The Player Characters

First character:       The author  
Second character:     Their spouse  
Third character:       Their son  
Fourth character:     Their daughter

## Creating the characters

- Use the excerpt on the last page or choose a literary style in which the first character writes.
- The players can play a gender they choose.
- Ask the players to describe their character and come up with a name - and a picture if they want to.
- Then ask the players to discuss their relationships within the family.
- If you do not use the excerpt, ask them to name the book to be made in to a film; ask them what the book is about; Ask them to describe a sample scene in the book.

## Acknowledgements

My most humblest thanks to all the players who have enjoyed - or suffered - the game this far and given their feedback on it. Picture by Noora Hirvonen.

How was the game in your group? Let me know your thoughts and ideas:

[lauri.m.lukka@gmail.com](mailto:lauri.m.lukka@gmail.com)  
[laurilukka.wordpress.com](http://laurilukka.wordpress.com)



## The Game

### Phase 1: Welcome to LA!

#### Summary

The Characters are picked up at the airport by eccentric but dedicated taxi driver Arthur (actually a Mexican named Pedro). They are taken and welcomed to Hotel Sunrise, a famous hotel from the 1920s, and given a room 309, opposite 306 - the room in which Lombardi died.

In the third floor an old cleaning lady feeds a gold fish swimming in a big tank. The gold fish and its mood will be mentioned every time they leave or enter their room. It always stares with a different emotion, resonating that of the players, to the players as if knowing something they do not know.

Later that evening they are taken by the enthusiastic taxi driver to a dinner with a movie producer. The producer small talks mainly about LA and Lombardi, keeping them good company. He avoids talking about the contract and wishes first to get to know the family.

#### Characters

Taxi driver: Arthur - Pedro (Mexico)  
Portier: John - Bernard (France)  
Hotel manager: Errol - Mihail (Ukraine)  
Old cleaning lady: Marlene - Yasmin (India)  
Movie producer: Robert - Lukasz (Poland)  
Gold fish: Marilyn

### Theme 1: The Room in which Lombardi Died

Every new character the players meet ask if they are at the Hotel Sunset and insist on telling their own story about how Lombardi died in the room 306. Supposedly Lombardi was a famous eccentric sociolite in the 1950s who hanged with actors and the like. Their stories include:

- Lombardi was suffocated in 306 by Grace Kelly during sex.
- Lombardi was shot to death in 306 by John Wayne when they were trying a mock wild west shootout.
- Lombardi committed suicide by writing love letter to Marilyn Monroe in his own blood.
- Lombardi was doing cocaine with James Dean and Elvis Presley and overdosed.

### Theme 2: The Changing Names

Every character in the game is somewhat eccentric or ominous. Additionally, they all have names that do not match their ethnicity, both of which they mention quite soon. There are two exceptions to this: the gold fish and the femme fatale introduced later. Other characters claim to be immigrants and have changed their names to better fit Los Angeles.

### Theme 3: The Hope of Negotiations

The players are first treated very politely, even if a tad strangely. They are asked for their wishes and brought to dinner. The players should be kept hopeful about the negotiations.



## Phase 2: Film Noir

### Summary

The players return to hotel. They may see movement in the room 306, which is supposedly empty. The key is lost. There are some minor strange incidents in the room: a pair of socks in different place, a bill with white "cocaine" traces, old writing paper etc.

The taxi driver still drives the players around as needed. The next day, the negotiations continue but now with the manager of the company. The producer has hangover. However, nothing major is decided, there is only vague talk about possible actors, directors and locations etc. The real negotiations will be held "very soon", but today they will be shown around Los Angeles: in an interactive museum about native Americans and/or taken scuba diving to see exotic fish. Additionally, the players are taken around sightseeing places and restaurants by their driver. Everywhere, there is more talk about Lombardi.

Later that evening, they go to a fancy restaurant "the 50s", where they meet femme fatale asking for assistance. She claims to be abused by her husband. She tries everything to get to the player's good side, even to bed the main character or her husband. Afterwards, the players notice someone following them in a Ford.

### Characters

Movie manager: Gary - Manuel (Spain)  
Guide in an interactive museum: Jayne - Saki (China)  
Scuba instructor: Thelma - Mai (Japan)  
A strange orange fish in the sea: Mari-mari fish  
Femme fatale: Marilyn  
Waitress in the 50s' : Grace - Camilla (Italy)

### Theme 1: The Room in Which Lombardi Died

The players are told various stories about how Lombardi died. Every character is more confident than the other claim to back their story with an item. However, the evidence is lost, loaned or sold if they actually try to actually find it.

- A letter by Harry Houdini in which he explains how he loaned Lombardini his handcuffs to be tried on in a bathtub.
- A secret photograph of the crime scene by the police.
- An audio recording by Gene Kelly explaining the nights happenings.

### Theme 2: Frustration about the Negotiations

Will the negotiations ever take place? The players are given vague reasons why the negotiations will be held "tomorrow", "as soon as the lawyer returns", "when the copy machine is repaired".

### Theme 3: Film Noir

The characters are seduced by the femme fatale. Then they are being followed, supposedly, by her abusive, narcissistic and sadistic police husband in a dark Ford.

### Phase 3: Dreams



**Summary**

At this point, the players should be somewhat irritated. Next, the game takes some unexpected turns. The players have had very strange and aggressive dreams that introduce more themes mentioned above. The characters will find themselves waking up next morning in the wrong room - namely in the room that was 306. The staff insists they are in their own room, 309. The room numbers have changed on the hotel doors.

Marilyn comes to the hotel with bruises. She is mad at someone and gives the players a gun asking them to shoot the "bastard who did this to me". She sometimes talks as if the characters were only one person. Later they are again trailed by the ominous man supposedly cop and abusive husband. They can confront him if they want. If they shoot him, they get away with the shooting until end of phase 4.

The negotiations drag on. They become ominous. There is always someone new showing around. If the players want to do something on their own, they insist and even give vague hints "not to be difficult", "there is no hurry", "lets enjoy LA first". The hotel has confiscated their passports. Do not let the players escape.

At evening, the ominous man confronts the players insisting that Marilyn, the femme fatale, is a con artist and should not be trusted. He claims he is employed by Johnny at Osis productions to protect the players. He will stay and protect them at their door next to the gold fish the whole night.

**Characters**

Supervisor at Osis productions: Johnny  
Private eye / abusive husband: Russell  
Hotel supervisor: Kristen

**Theme 1: Fading the Past Themes**

There is no longer any questions about the room in which Lombardi died. No one wants to talk about it and will try to avoid the subject.

**Theme 2: Forced Negotiations**

The negotiations grow more ominous and forced, The players are kept on a short leash and prevented from escaping.

**Theme 3: Breaking the Laws of the Game**

- New characters introduced have not changed their names and only have one name.
- The name policy changes: previously the characters have had names from actors of 1950s, now they have names from 2000s.
- Old characters have taken on their actual name and do not respond or recognise the 1950s name.
- The players have an elaborate dream scene that includes strong elements from the excerpt.
- The newspapers in the world are of wrong year.
- The players wake up at strange places where they are shown around LA. There may be gaps in time. To accomplish this, use metatechniques to affect ingame time, "jump" the scenes without much notice.





## Phase 4: Breakdown

### Summary

The players wake up and are called to a meeting organised by Osis production. They have organised an tv interview to a local lighthouse. The characters are interviewed about the book. The interview begins with questions like: “how long did you write this book” , “are you satisfied with it” , “do you look forward to the movie” , “who will play the main character” . Slowly, it will turn into a psychological evaluation: “how did you feel during the writing” , “were you depressed” , “did you ever wish to be somebody else” , “does the main character reflect you” etc.

After the interview the players are finally taken to the lawyer of the company. The team that filmed the interview follow them. They claim that they are making a documentary about them. Suddenly, there is a director, who wants to shoot some moments again and again: “please, go into taxi with a little less vigor” , “talk to your son with authority” . There are props for the characters such as a horse and a bow.

The players are taken to a lawyer at a courtroom to write the final version of the movie rights. The contract makes no sense at all.

The players notice once again a man trailing them. He comes to them authoritatively and asks them to “nicely follow me so things don’ t get complicated” . The players are taken the easy or the hard way to meet with Marilyn in a social services. Marilyn claims the players are abusive. The kids are taken away by social workers. The players are taken to a room 306 to wait.

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### Characters

Interviewer: Scarlett  
 Cameraman: Brad  
 Soundman: Viggo  
 Director: Denzel  
 Attorney: Penelope  
 Social worker: Alexis

### Theme 1: Are we in a Movie?

It should be unclear, whether the players are in a documentary or in the movie they are making the deal about. Introduce the themes the book is about.

### Theme 2: Who are these people?

It should be made unclear whether the non-player characters are what they claim to be or are they actresses or perhaps mental health workers, military agents or something else. For instance, they may have seen the attorney as side kick in a sitcom, the interviewer has a white jacket like a doctor and he fills out strange questionnaires, the soundman has a secret agent type headset etc.

### Theme 3: Who are we?

The players should be treated as one person. They cannot go their separate ways, someone always blocks their way. They are addressed as one person. The players are hinted that they could be Lombardi.

### The Game Ends.



**Excerpts from the Book**  
*the Last Dance at the Rabbit Creek*

Chunkash Anli watched the buffalo graze along a gentle stream. It chewed every bite leisurely with the concentration and dedication that only ruminants have. It looked calming despite its enormous mass and ungorvernable nature, that the white men despised. They could not tolerate a creature whose temperament resisted to be submitted. Ironically, they did not appreciate anyone who yielded. The white men wanted their cattle in clear enclosures, as they wanted their land.

After his brother Hina Hanta had died on the road of tears, Chunkash Anli had felt bitterness, which one feels when faced with insurmountable obstacles, towards his father. Mushulatubbee had written the treaty, that put his brother on that road. Now those talking leaves are literally but words, empty talk to the wind. It should have been obvious that they were the tools of oppression and power in the first place. Still it felt inconceivable how the lands of their ancestors could just be taken, ruined and raped. Now they only live in the dreams of the land and its exiled people. In his mind' s eye, across the river, he saw a whole tribe watching his activies with understanding silence.

In the middle of all that calmness, yesterday' s events burned him. Perhaps they were but a nightmare, from which he had now been roused to the real world. "Before the object, hate and greed will destroy their bearer" Mushulatubbee used to say. This day would be the reality in which peace was real. The surface of the water reflected the smoke signal meaning the last flames of a burning village.

The blade cut the water attracting the awareness of the buffalo, until it noticed that they were of no threat to each other. On the stone was a small heap of human hair and a lock of hair: long, strong and black as that of a wild horse. The black roots of the hair were tainted with the bile deep spewed by the black spider within. The hair should have been individually picked but Chunkash Anli did not have the time nor the strength for it. Instead, he scratched his skin feverishly until it reddened. Now he truly was a redskin. Yet, the hair germinated within.

Beside him was a large vase filled with milk, a thin layer had congealed on the surface. He took a small sip, it was greasy and smooth. He began to oil himself with from head to toes with determined dedication. It felt comforting and balsamic as bird' s milk, and eased the pain from the rash that covered most of his body.

He lay down to the bone-dry bed he had devotedly prepared earlier. He watched the milk dry and leave white veins on his skin. The holy symbols of Manitou that were carved on the supportive wooden pillars seemed to move. Every tribemember waved him goodbye excitedly, expectantly. They did not grieve because they knew he would return purified by the flames and be born again.

The boils on Chunkash Anli burst.



## Parts of the Game

1. Preparations
  - a. Welcome the players
  - b. What is movie production? Who are involved?
  - c. How to play: storytelling, techniques, collaboration, saying yes
  - d. Aim: to make something *beautiful*, produce one perfect movie scene
  - e. Hand out the inspirational text
  - f. Describing the scene to be perfected
    - i. Casting: Who are present? Who is who?
    - ii. Location: Where are the character?
    - iii. Script: What is happening? Describe the beginning, do not describe the end
    - iv. Note: Anyone can cut the scene by pointing out what was wrong
    - v. Play out the scene
2. The Director
  - a. Deal out the four directors
  - b. Each director describes an opening scene for the movie
  - c. The players point at the same time to choose a director
  - d. One remains as director, others are given new characters
  - e. The director restates the opening scene
3. The Location
  - a. Players introduce themselves
  - b. Discussing the three location options
  - c. Reaching conclusion
4. The First Try
  - a. Time jump into making the scene to be perfected
  - b. In turns, everyone describes something about the scene
  - c. Play the scene, not until the end
5. The First Scene
  - a. Time-jump to the future
  - b. Choose one player randomly to direct the scene
  - c. Choose the scene randomly among the ones produced
  - d. The director makes up a scene, introduces and casts characters (not main character)
  - e. The scene is played out
6. The Main Character
  - a. Casting interview
  - b. Others ask questions and ask the player to come up with scenes
7. The Second Try
  - a. Collaboratively, everyone describes something about the scene
  - b. Anyone can cut the scene
  - c. Play the scene over and over again, until perfect
  - d. Or go back to negotiations



## Casting of Director

### Christopher

- Young and ambitious YouTube video producer
- Specialized in high quality animations and special effects
- Has made one commercial music video
- Self-taught and risen from rags to riches, ambitious and fast-paced

### Sofia

- Critically acclaimed director who has not received much attention
- Known mainly for her documentaries
- Has previously worked extensively with Native Americans
- Highly oriented to details and authenticity

### Kathryn

- Directed over 50 movies out of which 5 big hits - others less so
- Does not focus on any genre specifically
- Doesn't appeal to star actors but can find talent in unlikely places
- Hard-working and productive appreciating results and timetable over quality

### Peter

- Has made only a couple movies that are critically acclaimed but not commercial successes
- Prefers to work with specific actors (Michael, encountered later)
- Has clear own vision and refuses to make compromises for the sake of budget
- Professor of media studies and widely seen in media



The Writer, Oliver

- Is ready to make changes to the original script but wants the focus to be in the inner world of the main character
- You appreciate authenticity
- Thoughtful and principled, you want to help people grow through your texts
- You are African American but work under pseudonym because ethnicity doesn't matter in the face of universality of the human condition

The Producer, Jerry

- Your career needs a spectacle, a blockbuster - you have no time for b-movies
- You have already made great movies but you haven't received awards - this movie should change it
- "Any publicity is good" is one of your principles
- You donate regularly to Amnesty and participate in fundraisers because it looks good

The CEO, Drew

- The company can't take many risks: the movie should strive to make secure profit by pleasing wide audiences
- The actors should be relatable and notable
- Preferably, this could be the start of a trilogy
- You don't specifically want this movie made but the stockholders expect an ethically minded film next



## Location and special effects

### Shooting in authentic environment

- Most costly option
- Difficult location logistically
- Requires special permits
- Authentic environment could inspire actors and act as marketing tool

### Shooting in similar environment

- Not as costly as authentic
- Educated people see the difference
- Requires post-production in some cases
- The environment enables extensive use of horses

### Shooting in studio

- Cheapest option
- Easy to apply special effects
- The scene in the original script involving a huge battle could be easily produced

## Casting of Chunkash Anli, ~25

### Laurence

- From US, white, male, 28
- One of the most popular actors currently - and one of the priciest
- Critiqued for superficial acting
- Strong preference movies for large audiences

### Michael

- From Ireland, white, male, 48
- Acclaimed actor performing in minimalistic style
- Works for free - but requires 10% of movie profit going to charity
- Moderately neurotic and has background in narcotics

### Robert

- Native American, male, 38
- Prior background in theatre, where received limited acclaim
- Spokesperson for Native Americans - a political threat or opportunity?
- Not very fit - requires a body double

### Nora

- Native American, female, 25
- Prior successes in movies
- Exceptional actress, strong voice, positive persona
- Marketing does not see potential in reaching audiences below 35

