



# Loddon Mallee

## 12 x 60 Western Drama

**Logline:** In 1864, Colonial Victoria is in conflict; squatter barons brawl with new settlers, gold seeking immigrants flood in and a confederate deserter returns to a divided town besieged by a mob of bushrangers.

**An Unforgiving Setting:** Set in a small town on the frontier of the Victorian colony, the world of Loddon Mallee is familiar in its similarity to the American West, with an entirely unique Australian context.

This period of colonial Australia has been touched on by a horde of Ned Kelly and bushranger stories, but they all ignore the conflicts that dominated Australia before the rise of the Kelly Gang. In 1865, the struggle for land was at its peak. Government backed settlers contested the 'ancestral' claims of wealthy squatters occupying crown land. Immigrants flooded into growing cities and towns, alongside indentured Pacific Islanders, as explorers pushed deeper into the country in search for more land. Meanwhile, a small group of Australian men, having volunteered on both sides of the American Civil War; either for money or the cause, return home. Bringing the fallout of the war back with them.

**The Project:** Confederate deserter Ben Weaver returns home to Victoria to find his family land claimed by Elise, a new Selector, and the town consumed by conflict between Squatter families and the incoming Selectors. With no help to be had reclaiming his inheritance, Ben strikes a bargain with Elise to pursue a gang of bushrangers plaguing the town in exchange for his land. But even as they push them back, darker secrets within the town itself surface and Ben finds himself drawn into war again.

**The Engine:** The series is initially driven by the conflict between Ben and the Bushranger Gang, led by Ed Morgan, a conflict that extends outwards to the Squatters employing them and their campaign against the Selectors. Rapid changes in Australia from the mid 1860's onwards give the show a progression of social, cultural and political changes that can be drawn into the broader arcs of each season. Every core character has a drive to confront the challenges of their lives, and there is very little they won't rise to.

**A Reinvented Australian Western:** "What is worth fighting for?" Loddon Mallee poses this age old question by transplanting the larger scale mythos of American Westerns into an Australian setting. Leveraging the challenges of this period of Australia history to force its characters to face complex moral questions that challenge their black and white thinking, and subvert classic Western motifs.

**'I can readily imagine why most people speak of this part of the country with a certain dread for there is actually no grass and no water to be found.'**

- A description of the Loddon Mallee Region in 1864



# Wormtown

## 10 x 20 Narrative Podcast

**Logline:** A state investigator collapses in a dying mining town while investigating a series of bizarre wildlife deaths. With patchy memories, she remains far longer than she should, discovering something alien amongst the town's odd residents.

**The Story of a Fading Town:** Animals are dying in Stringers Creek, and Leah, a state investigator, is sent to uncover the cause. It's through her the world and story unfolds. She's a little over 30, with a severe nature that has only deepened since childhood. Her sister worries over her more and more now that their parents have passed, particularly during Leah's trips away from the city.

The town itself is resistant, stoic in its separation from the outside world. Aside from her connection with the local Park Ranger Jack, Leah is mostly left to her own devices as she works to uncover the cause of the deaths. Instinctively she knows something is off within the town, and this only drives her to investigate further in spite of resistance. Exploring the town's disused gold mine, and confronting a collection of strangely acting residents, Leah discovers something sinister and alien is lurking within Stringers Creek. The early loss of her memories only forces her to commit to her search.

**Personal Connection:** The current circumstances of Stringers Creek reflect what awaits many of Australia's small towns and cities, especially the one I grew up in. Newcastle is just as dependent on coal and its mines as Stringers Creek's inspiration, Walhalla, was. And whenever I hear someone musing about what 2050, and 2060, and beyond might look like, I wonder what awaits cities like my ex-home, and the smaller towns I've visited and gotten to know. After their primary industries fail, and tourism slows, will they be ghost towns, as well? What about the people still living there?

**Holding up a Mirror With Science Fiction:** The core difference of Wormtown comes from its underlying theme, a reflection on the exterior and interior forces that kill regional towns. Wormtown's characters come up against increasingly disturbing experiences that lead them to uncover a mysterious force from 'outside'.

The series is written to build a soundscape around suspense in the seemingly ordinary world of Stringers Creek, over time raising the contrast between the unnatural and the natural until the first season reaches its climax. Outside of these moments of heightening tension through the soundscape, the story is intended to embrace quiet as an element to deepen the narrative through added subtext.

Throughout the series our protagonists find themselves rapidly outpaced by events around them and the plans of the antagonist. With no promise that the denouement is anything but a momentary reprieve before the conflict rushes ahead again.



# I'm Leaving

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## 4 x 15 Relationship Drama

**Logline:** After she's almost killed by her boyfriend's highway attempt on his own life, 19 year old Sarah flee's to Melbourne and finds shelter from her past in music.

**A Rekindling:** Grieving her recently lost partner, Sarah pulls herself a thousand kilometers from home and settles into a share house in a city full of strangers. She finds her safety net in the local music scene and the people she meets; especially Aari. As the two bond, social boundaries are crossed and Sarah's unprocessed past resurfaces, and despite her distant family's attempts to help her the recurring pain pushes outwards into the untouched parts of her life. Driving her to finally come to grips with her loss. This only comes as she recognises the flaw within herself and comes to terms with it without necessarily needing to fix it. Separating from the people around her as she moves onwards.

Glimpses into the more mundane lives of those around Sarah heighten her experiences, where her life is touched by the magic of music, their lives are far more grounded.

**Personal Connection:** I'm Leaving mirrors my own experience of what it's like to move across the country and the slow realisation of my own underlying issues with anxiety. Loneliness forces Sarah to confront her mental trauma, and like me, she'll have to learn to live with her changed mental health. It's just up to her to determine how well.

**Built by Music:** Key to the series throughout is that, while this is definitely not a musical, music forms the spine of the story. Moments highlighted by music create a kind of melancholy magic, emotion synesthetically projected outward as sound. It's within these that Sarah can bask in music only she can hear, captured in a way that doesn't touch the world around her. They reflect an isolating sensation we all know too well, the feeling of the world falling away from us.

These are the moments in a musical where you're left with only the lead singing, no background singers, no surrounding dancers. They're built slowly, treated as rewards both for Sarah's and the audience's persistence.



# Departure

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## Short

**Logline:** Two rural high school girls leave their graduation, their car packed for a weekend away. But their choices quickly divide them and impulse soon splits the friendship.

**The Last Moments of a Friendship:** Two rural high school students, Ella and Cassie, leave their graduation in a car packed full for a weekend away. However, the results on their transcripts quickly drive a rift between the two close friends; Ella will not join Cassie in Melbourne as planned, but Cassie later admits her boyfriend and their mutual best friend will be coming with her. Upset, Ella pulls into a general store to grab snacks, and while inside comes up with an impulsive plan to rob it and trap Cassie with her in their town. Cassie realises what Ella has done, the two struggle inside the car and Ella is accidentally stabbed with her own knife, leaving Cassie to deal with the aftermath.

Departure emphasises the significance and intensity of deep friendships in teenage development, particularly in the confines of rural areas where these friendships are often the only support system. The contention between Ella and Cassie isn't that a boy has come between them, but that Ella is watching her core support pull away from her and lashes out as a result. Emotional turmoil and Ella's lack of understanding feed into each other in a vicious cycle, and her final marks confirm years of pent up worry about their friendship and her own social standing. It all comes to a head on what should be a joyous, celebratory day with her best mate.

**Tone:** This film addresses the sorts of emotional turmoil which transitional times heighten in the lives and relationships of young women, whose experiences are often ignored and/or trivialised in broader media and film. Recently, films such as Booksmart, Skate Kitchen, and Eighth Grade and Banana Split have highlighted stories in this demographic, and our short is similar, while concentrating on girls in rural Australia rather than suburban areas.

In turn the story is driven by experiences common to youth all over Australia through the lens of rural teenagers, and the additional problems that strain their relationships. In these areas with fewer resources and programs, teens often lack the same support systems, role models and ways of getting out. As they approach the end of school these barriers, and the stress thereof, loom larger driving wedges between friends, particularly with those who seem to have found an outlet whether through academics, a certain skill, relationships, or luck.

In showing a narrative snapshot of a young woman caught in a spiral, it also says to the viewer "we see you, we understand, you aren't alone in feeling this way, but there are better ways to handle your emotions."



# How to Radicalise

## 8 x 20 Narrative Podcast

**Logline:** Party to a brutal stabbing, a young protester retreads the path that led him from disaffected good intentions into the arms of the alt-right.

**The Project:** Alex is witness to a brutal stabbing at a protest turned violent, and days before he's due to appear in court he retells the story of how he found himself there. The subtle changes that led a disaffected kid in his twenties to the alt-right. The neo-nazi banner that his friends made out to be his fault, and the job he got with the outspoken, right leaning boss he had to appease. All of this culminates in a men's group where Alex found shared values, and was polarised, distanced from his friends, and finally twisted into the man bellowing at a rally as an innocent was cut down.

**Personal Connection:** We live in a time of intense polarisation, from our basic political views to the way we interpret and understand facts. It's never been easier to get a message out into the world, to be exposed to misinformation, or targeted with propaganda younger than ever before. Growing up during the birth of this era, I've been exposed to all of it, I had the voices of strangers half a world away in my ears. Thankfully none of them spouted the kind of hate that now feels so prevalent, but what if they had? What if my frustrations at life we're supported and someone had pointed the finger towards who was to blame?

If you introduce someone to that, and send them into an echo chamber, how much will their views twist to match the noise around them?

That is why this story exists, to explore the subtle changes lead someone vulnerable into the arms of hate. Particularly now, in a world of alternative facts, there might be less separating us all than we think.

**Tone:** How to Radicalise first and foremost focuses on voices, and the advantage of the audio narrative format is that it brings this naturally to the fore. The series is told through isolated glimpses into Alex's life, where the voices around him change and his voice changes along with them. Key moments of change are punctuated by more than just drama, but also a kind of comedic incredulity springing from the more rational characters that Alex was originally surrounded by.

**A Note:** It's important to acknowledge that the intent of this project is not to treat our lead as a kind of 'victim', regardless of any of the lead characters perceived good. Nor is the intent to lay blame at the feet of the real victims of these actions in our world, or imply that they are somehow to blame for our protagonist becoming who he does. This is an exploration of the power of subtle coercion, and above all, the weaponry of lies.