



The Hitchhiker, The Sorceress and a Homicidal White Rabbit Among Other Things



A CINESPACE ANTHOLOGY
OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE
URBAN MYTHS

Urban legends are not just stories circulated as being true. They are morality tales, a dark mirror of a society's soul reflecting its prejudices and phobias.

This Cinespace anthology is by emerging writers from culturally diverse backgrounds. It is a collection of six short film scripts based on urban legends set in the Australian context.

In comedy, musical, action, and drama, these writers give us a dramatic (pun fully intended) reworking of the urban myths upending traditional stories and turning stereotypes on their heads.

- The compliant Indian wife trope gets a violent, vengeful revision in Sher Li Tan's *Pontianak*.
- Any expectations about Asian women drivers gets a knife to the gut in Victoria Lu's action epic *In Dandenong*.
- Thavy Thongkham's *Red Room* turns an ordinary Lao Australian family man/office worker's attempt to save his wife's life into a very dark odyssey featuring a malevolent White Rabbit.
- An elderly Chinese couple's hobby of Big Cat hunting takes an unexpected and decidedly comedic turn when ex Family Feud host Grant Denyer gets involved in William He's *Big Cat Hunters*
- A confused, supposedly vindictive Indonesian ghost gets his mojo back in Theresa Gunarso's musical take in *Pocong*.
- If home is where the heart is, Karl Fernando's *The Ride Home* brings it right back to where we live. Two racist men get a taste of their own medicine and wake up to themselves courtesy of a sharp lesson from a mysterious, elderly Indigenous hitchhiker.

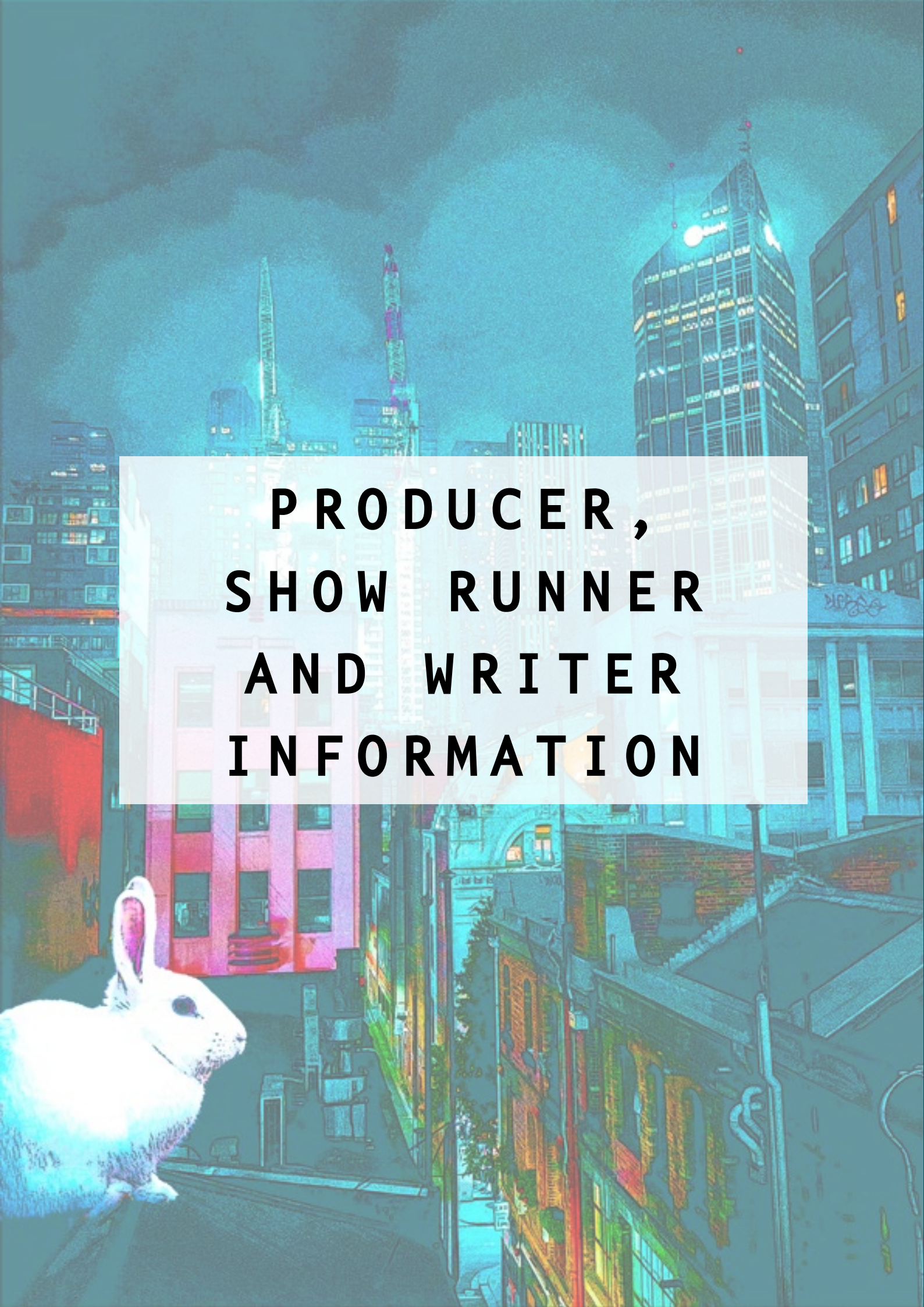
This exciting collection of new Australian voices are a visceral, entertaining response to our social anxieties told through contemporary takes on urban myths.

Enjoy: there are whole new worlds to terrify you.

Steve RE Pereira
Producer (Cinespace)

Cinespace Mission:

Cinespace supports the Victorian screen industry and Australian screen culture in ensuring that it is representative of the broader intercultural community. We work to create greater cultural diversity on screen and behind the scenes.

A vibrant, stylized illustration of a city street at night. The scene is dominated by warm, golden-yellow and orange lights from buildings and streetlights, creating a glowing atmosphere. In the foreground, a white rabbit is sitting on the sidewalk, looking towards the right. The background shows tall buildings with lit windows and a prominent tower with a spire. The overall style is painterly and artistic.

PRODUCER, SHOW RUNNER AND WRITER INFORMATION



SHOW RUNNER

Sabi Paisa

Sabi Paisa is a Romanian filmmaker who has been residing in Australia for the last 20 years. She has built a reputation as one of the most sought after Script Supervisors with over 100 hours of broadcast television and feature films, like Bloom for Stan, Informer 3838 for C9, Secret Bridesmaids Business for 7 Studios, Blake Mysteries, The Warriors, Get Crack!n for the ABC, etc.

Sabi has also been training film students in Script Supervision since 2009 with yearly lectures at the VCA, Deakin University, Sydney Film School and the Open Channel. She has produced and directed the 24 episode TV show Bric-a-Brac which was awarded the Best Multicultural Program and Best New Producer in 2007 and has written and directed short films, music videos and promos under her production name Puzzled Look. In 2015 she founded Euraw Stories, a series of monthly events showcasing the newest cinema from Central, Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Sabi has been on the Committee of Cinespace since its foundation and is an advocate of diversity in the media, helping filmmakers from CALD communities enter the film industry. She was a member of the New Emerging Communities Program through Leadership Victoria in 2018 and is an accredited AMES tutor supporting migrants and refugees with low English skills integrate in Australia.

Sabi is a graduate of Directing and Screen Writing from AFTRS and was awarded The Student Of The Year by Curtin University in WA at the graduation of her BA in Media and Film.



WRITER

Sher-Li Tan

An early-career writer/producer with a multi-platform approach, Sher-Li Tan uses her background in film production, branding and speech pathology to inform the content she creates.

A passionate emerging writer, she was selected and developed through the assistance of the Story Lab programme in 2018/19 (Film Victoria/Cinespace). Sher-Li was also shortlisted as a writer for 2018's Australian Writers Guild Diversity Showcase competition with her pilot script for her dramedy series, *The Shit List*.

With creation experience in short-form narrative and the highly competitive commercial space, Sher-Li has produced indie features, web content, corporate campaigns and shorts. In 2019, she produced an independent drama feature, *One Punch*, which is currently in post-production. She is a trained speech pathologist and filmmaker by trade, and has on-set experience on multiple and award winning ABC productions.

A first-generation Malaysian-Australian with Mauritian, Indonesian, Singaporean and Malaysian roots, Sher-Li strongly believes in the power of stories and their ability to connect and engage. This has made her hungry for diverse content, which she hopes to contribute to with her work.

Sher-Li is currently developing a slate of projects for Rooftop Film Co with producers Darcy Yuille and Margaret Tillson, as well as her own (Passport Productions).



WRITER

William He

William He is a factual storyteller currently focusing on documentary filmmaking, in his final graduating year at the VCA studying a Masters of Film and TV.

With a background in video production across many genres that has spanned over four years, highlights of his work so far have included two music videos directed, shot, and edited for *Moaning Lisa* – "Good", which was played as part of BIGSOUND 2018, and "Lily", which had its world premiere on Triple J Unearthed.

Additionally, his film "My Cousin's Wedding and Other Life Lessons" reached the shortlist for TropFest 26, and he has been the showrunner head writer, and director for two webseries' that have been selected for Melbourne WebFest 2019 and 2020 respectively – the three-part narrative comedy webseries "The Deep End", and the anthology comedy explainer series, "William Explains".

His most recent, publically exhibited work is his music video/documentary hybrid work, "FOOLS.", playing as part of Canberra Short Film Festival 2020.

He is currently focusing on factual storytelling, and is particularly interested in comedic hybrid documentary filmmaking, short form web content, and data journalism.



WRITER

Victoria Lu

Victoria Lu is a first-generation born Chinese-Australian writer. Born and raised in southwest Sydney, Australia. Victoria also lived in Beijing, New York and London before heading home again to Australia.

Beginning her storytelling career at the University of Sydney with a BA (Media & Communications), Victoria explored careers in public relations, advertising, business consulting and hospitality across four continents before finally realising her calling as a screenwriter.

With a background in improv and stand-up, Victoria often injects comedy and light-hearted moments into her writing, which often tackles issues of prejudice and mental health within diverse communities.



WRITER

Thavy Thongkham

Thavy is a first generation Lao Australian. He has a Bachelor of Film Production from SAE's Melbourne campus. He has written, directed, produced and edited numerous productions. From this work he found his focus as a Screenwriter and a Director and always strives to hone his craft. He has also developed skills in Post Production such as editing and colour grading.

A love of East Asian cinema mixed with a passion for classic and contemporary Western/European auteurs and an appreciation for music and novels have been key inspirations in his work. Thavy's dream is to tell stories from an Asian Australian perspective as well as the diverse international crowd that is both prominent in his life and our ever evolving culture.

Thavy hopes his past experiences and living abroad will allow his work to be enjoyed by people from all walks of life.



WRITER

Theresa Gunarso

Theresa Gunarso is a 23-year-old Chinese-Indonesian writer based in Australia. In 2016, she moved to Melbourne to study at the University of Melbourne. It was then that she began writing and directing plays for her church and performing in them while submitting short stories and poems to student magazines.

Her first screenplay, *How to Cope After Spending 3 Years in Space*, is selected as a quarterfinalist in ScreenCraft Comedy Contest 2020.

She currently runs a YouTube channel. Her next project is a podcast called *Chindo Tea*, a series dedicated to exploring the lives of Chinese-Indonesians.



WRITER

Karl Fernando

Karl Fernando is an Indigenous Australian screenwriter from the south-western suburbs of Sydney, who now resides in Melbourne.

Karl is currently in-development for a black-comedy television series with co-creator and documentary filmmaker Em Baker and the Academy Award nominated production company Aquarius Films. He was a participant in Cinespace's very first Diversity Writer's Lab with Jane Allen.

Karl has Written, Directed, Shot and Edited a variety of media, including a web series for comic book tattoo artist Paul Abstruse called *ABSTRUSE INKORPORATED*, music videos for *BRYAN ESTEPA AND THE TEMPE TWO*, along with a 'MAKING OF' documentary for the bands fifth studio album *Every Little Thing*. He also provides his skills as a videographer making corporate videos for clients such as RMIT Melbourne.

Karl is a trained actor, appearing in *FIVE BEDROOMS* (Hoodlum for Channel 10), *WENTWORTH* (Fremantle for Foxtel), *UNTAG* (Independent Short), the award winning *ALL THESE CREATURES* (Short), and a number of TVCs. In Addition to his acting credits, Karl writes and performs stand-up comedy along with hosting a weekly comedy podcast dedicated to analysing film and pop culture.

He is a life-long comic book nerd and former basketball wizard, and loves grunge music, George Lucas, 90's Pop Culture, Podcasts, and eating his own bodyweight in pizza!



PRODUCER

Steve RE Pereira

Steve is on the board and a project coordinator with Cinespace. He is a queer identified cultural producer and activist. In Toronto he was a producer, associate director for black theatre company Theatre Fountainhead, directed for Actors Equity Theatre, was a founding coordinator of Toronto's iconic multi arts Desh Pardesh Festival, and a programmer with the Inside Out Festival.

He has written, produced and directed over thirty plays including My Kind of Night (Fringe Festival, Toronto), It's a Goan Thing (Theatre Works, Toronto) and The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey a theatrical adaptation of Okot p'Bitek's epic poems Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol (The Big West Festival).

He has published in Fuse, Borderline and ATOM magazines, The Toronto Star, The Jaaa-Roque Literary Journal (winner Best Short Fiction 2018) and Bent St. 2017 and 2018 and ImageOut Write Anthology 2019 and is the founder and director of the Sunshine Short Film Festival.



THE FILMS

Log Lines and Legends



PONTIANAK by Sher Li Tan

Logline: A woman bullied by her controlling husband finds an unexpected escape through an encounter with a malicious spirit.

Legend: The Pontianak (/pon.ti.a.nak/) is a popular Southeast Asian vampiric spirit of a woman who has died when pregnant. On the night of a full moon, she targets men and the helpless as revenge for her death, violently tearing their internal organs out with her long fingernails and drinking their blood. Legend goes that she hunts her prey by their scent from their laundered clothes at night and preys on unsuspecting victims under the trees she lives in. She is also known to disguise herself as an alluring woman to attract potential victims before attacking them in her monstrous form

Synopsis: Jaya Devgan grew up hearing stories about the fearsome Pontianaks - female spirits condemned to a cursed existence of hunting and killing men. Any life, including the one she lives with her controlling partner, Amit, is better than being a Pontianak. However, when her friend Lily becomes a Pontianak, Jaya is forced to confront the reality of her own situation and ask - which is worse? The monster outside, or the monster within?

BIG CAT HUNTERS by William He

Logline: An elderly Chinese couple is on the hunt for the Grampians Panther - but what they ultimately catch is not what they expected.

Legend: For decades, there have been rumours of big cats roaming the Australian wilderness, with sightings reported year after year. In Victoria, in particular, several sightings of large, black cats have been reported all across the state. There is a small but sizeable contingent of believers who are actively on the lookout for evidence of big cats in Australia's wilderness, including TV personality Grant Denyer, who recently claims to have spotted a large cat in the backyard of his property in the Blue Mountains in NSW.

Synopsis: Cindy and Philip, an elderly Chinese couple, Big Cat believers, are out one night in the Grampians laying traps. Philip thinks they are trapping the Grampian Panther. However, a confusion in language leads Cindy to believe they have a different prey in mind, Grant Denyer, the host of the TV show Family Feud which, much to the couple's dismay, has recently been cancelled. When it turns out Cindy gets her prey, the couple seize the opportunity to make a point about the cancellation of their favourite show.

IN DANDENONG by Victoria Lu

Logline: A young Chinese woman proves that she is not what she seems, as the killer discovers when he attempts to attack her.

Legend: There might be a "killer in the backseat" is a universal urban myth used as a cautionary tale to keep young women tempted to drive alone at night.

Synopsis: Jess is a young Chinese woman who is underestimated by the men around her. Driving home one night, Jess stops at a petrol station where she encounters George. Though he appears fine, Jess's gut tells her something about him doesn't seem quite right. She is right. Jess soon finds George wielding a knife in her car's back seat, looking to rape and kill her. But George has bitten off way more than he can chew, and Jess proves that she is more than capable of looking after herself.



RED ROOM by Thavy Thongkham

Logline: Desperate to save his wife from an incurable illness, an ordinary office worker enters into a dark cyber world drawn in by a mysterious email that claims to grant any wish.

Legend: The Red Room is a Japanese Urban Legend popularised in the late '90s/ early 2000s. One of its earliest renditions is a story of a Japanese high school student who clicks a cursed pop-up. The ad displays a banner that reads, "Do you like?" Any attempts to shut the ad down would only result in the ad reappearing with a visible crack growing larger each time. The banner eventually snaps, and the boy dies. The urban legend was a response to the pop-up ads and junk mail before internet security was normalized.

Synopsis: In the backdrop in the early 2000s, an office worker is the recipient of a strange email subject titled: The Red Room. An anonymous user named White_Rabbit invites him to join a mysterious game that would grant any wish he desires. Desperate to save his wife from an incurable illness, the office worker enters the game only to discover that he would pay a very high price for saving his wife.

POCONG by Theresa Gunarso

Logline: A vengeful spirit has lost his mojo because he doesn't know what to be vindictive about until he discovers his purpose with a dead man and a family feud.

Legend: In Indonesia, the Pocong is a spirit from the Muslim culture. Its purpose is to haunt people who have left something unfinished. The Pocong is usually depicted as a horrifying creature with a vengeance on his mind.

Synopsis: The Pocong in this story hasn't quite got the hang of being a Pocong yet. He is far more friendlier than he should be because he doesn't know yet what he needs to be vengeful for. However, the Pocong finds his purpose when he gets embroiled in a dispute over a family will between Carissa and her nasty aunts. Oh, yes, and this is a musical.

THE RIDE HOME by Karl Fernando

Logline: A mysterious Hitch Hiker forces a man to confront his own racism in an encounter on a lonely, suburban highway.

Legend: While the myth of the mysterious Vanishing Hitchhiker can now be found in most countries, the roots of the story can be traced back to one source, the oldest living culture in the world, Aborigines and The Dreamtime.

Synopsis: Good mates Andrew and Jason are taking their usual nightly drunken ride in their V8 down the Ballarat highway when a confrontation with an elderly Indigenous hitchhiker turns the tables on their racism fuelled rage. Andrew learns a lesson.

A stylized illustration of a city street at night. In the foreground, a white rabbit sits on the sidewalk, looking towards the right. The street is lined with buildings, some with lit windows. In the background, a tall skyscraper with a glowing top is visible against a dark, cloudy sky. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues and greys, with some warmer tones from the building lights.

THE SCRIPTS

PONTIANAK

by Sher Li Tan



PONTIANAK by Sher Li Tan

BIG CAT HUNTERS by William He

IN DANDENONG by Victoria Lu

RED ROOM by Thavy Thongkham

POCUONG by Theresa Gunarso

THE RIDE HOME by Karl Fernando



Established in Melbourne's West in 2016 as a non-profit incorporated association, Cinespace collaborates with people from First Nations and culturally-diverse and under-represented communities across Victoria through a variety of programs to develop skills, produce work, and build communities and creative careers.