

November 23, 1967

To: Mr Hector Crawford  
Miss Dorothy Crawford  
Mr Ian Crawford  
Mr Ian Jones  
Mr Robin Boyd  
Mr ~~Tom~~ Howard Griffiths  
Mr Terry Stapleton

From: Harold Lander

HUNTER - Planning Meeting

This is to confirm that we will be holding a planning meeting in the boardroom at 4 p.m. on ~~Monday~~ <sup>Tuesday</sup> next, Nov ~~27~~ <sup>28</sup>.

The aim of the meeting is to have an informal discussion about the programme in general, and to compare ideas on certain specific aspects of our scripting and production.

There will be no rigid agenda but I thought it might be helpful if I ~~wrote~~ put down on paper some of my own preliminary thinking on various topics. These are not in any particular order.

Spy Dramas

Is the public tired of spy dramas? There's been a hell of a lot of them. THE MAN FROM UNCLE is ceasing production. Towards the end of its run they ~~were~~ spending a fortune on Hollywood guest stars, lavish sets etc in an attempt to keep it going. If HUNTER is to be the exception what does it need to make it stand out from all the others?

World Trends

What's happening to the market for TV drama generally - especially in America. Is the public growing weary of drama? Or merely of formula drama? Is part of the decline in viewing figures in America due to the fact that many American series are scripted too rigidly to formula?

I wonder sometimes whether part of the success of HOMICIDE has~~It~~ been due to the fact that our writers have been given a relatively free hand and that no two weeks have ever been quite the same.

It seems to me that the public needs to know what type and level of entertainment it can expect from a TV series,



but to be surprised and pleased each week by the unexpected and novel way it turns out. To write to a ~~fixed~~ formula while maintaining freshness and variety is extremely difficult but I think we need to bear this question of contrast and difference constantly in mind.

#### What do the Australian public want from TV drama?

What do the most successful programmes - HOMICIDE, McGOOLEY, and YOU CAN'T SEE ROUND CORNERS, have in common?

They are down to earth and unpretentious. They have a complete lack of sophistication. Their principal actors have warm and likeable personalities.

#### Fiction versus realism

If we can't afford to make spectacular outdoor programmes like some of the earlier ~~series~~ episodes, what can we put in its place?

I've been saying that people are perpetually interesting, and have infinite variety, and that possibly we should look a little more closely into the human situations.

But is realism compatible with spy fiction? We get away with HOMICIDE because there are, in fact, a fair number of actual murders each year. But attempts to blow up the Snowy Mountains Scheme don't really happen. - and people know it.

How fictional can we afford to be? How realistic?

#### Suspense

Anticipation is frequently more exciting than the event itself. This also applies to physical action. How can we exploit this - especially in live scenes?

#### HUNTER clichés

We must be alert for situations and pieces of business which were excellent in their day but which have been overdone?

Would anyone agree that there has been too much drinking in HUNTER scripts? Taking a drink can be quite dramatic



but if the reason for the drink is purely social it seems to me that it carries too many relaxing associations of ideas. The tension is ~~reduced~~ reduced and the show slows down.

Every so often I find the HUNTER fights as boring as the HOMICIDE chases. The story stops for what seems like hours while we have a fight. On the other hand I found Kragg's rapid and expert disposal of four or five people in the power station (in episode 21) most exciting.

Poor old Tony getting shot in the leg and hobbling off into the sunset. He must be the most nobbled actor in the business. I suppose it has been necessary because he could never actually catch Kragg but it might be an idea now to have at least a three month ban on Hunter receiving slight wounds.

#### Stock opening

It runs 1 min 25 seconds. Does anyone else feel that it's too long? And accompanied by music that is too strident and repetitious?

#### Titles

We've been using the names of the principal character - TOLHURST FILE, FELBURG FILE etc. Sometimes we've had THE MIRAGE FILE or THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS FILE.

Although a title is possibly comparatively unimportant in a series drama I think it should do at least something to arouse expectation. A title with somebody's name doesn't do anything at all and I think we should try to make every aspect of the programme make some contribution - no matter how small - towards the total impact.

#### Technical standards and Transitions

In storytelling technique, use of film, use of TV cameras, special effects etc. we copy overseas practice. I hope the day will come when overseas programmes will copy their ideas from us but this may be a year or two away.



Meanwhile how close are we to world standards?

In this connection I think we should give special attention to our transitions. All the writers should be in general agreement on when we should use cuts and when - if ever - we should use dissolves. If these are indicated in the script by the writer they should be considered of equal importance to the lines of dialogue and not changed without reference back.

#### Personal Lives of the characters

I don't think that the personal lives of the characters should be introduced unless they are strongly integrated into the main plot so that they affect it and are affected by it. Otherwise I think they only get in the way of the action and slow down the programme.

The business of the hero who is always having to put his private life on one side because of the exigencies of his career is a very old one. It was used very effectively by Francis Durbridge in the PAUL TEMPLE radio serials before the war and has been used by a great number of writers since. Unless it's given some really original twist I think it's a tired old thing and should be avoided.

We need attractive young women in the show. Should Hunter be attracted to them? A slight - one-sided-situation is developing between Julie and Hunter. I think we should give this some thought.

At one time I had a scheme to prepare a monthly digest of viewers' comments on HOMICIDE. This fell through because of pressure of other work but it was just after the Terry McDermott changeover and ~~amongst~~ amongst the large number of letters I read were a surprisingly high number of adverse comments on the Hudson/Tink relationship. They all pleaded that we should not bring women into it. Most of these comments came from women.



### Permanent villains

I think we are all agreed that these were a source of weakness in the early scripts. We're taking care of Kragg but how should we use Smith?

If he ever comes face to face with Cosmic agents we are back to the old situation where he must win and get away. This weakens our heroes.

However, is it possible that we could use him as a shadowy figure, directing operations, but always on the move, always in the background? This would enable us to bring back Vargon who is extremely strong and effective.

### The Council

We have planted the idea that this organisation has been taken over by people like Smith and Vargon who are really in it for no other reason than money. Kragg, the idealist, has been used by them.

I feel that we should definitely avoid references to communism and make the Council a corrupt and destructive world organisation, without getting involved too deeply in its motives.

This might enable us to widen the scope of its operations and provide the opportunity for further variety in our stories.

### Initiative

Because Cosmic is a counter-espionage organisation it seems always to be reacting to something initiated by the baddies. Perhaps this doesn't matter. It happens every week in THE AVENGERS. But it might be good if our heroes could be dictating the course of events occasionally.

Is there any chance that they could mount an active espionage mission in some ~~mythical~~ mythical foreign territory? This would be simulated, of course. Perhaps a raid ~~on~~ on a secret research ~~organisation~~ station on some remote Pacific island. The object to seize vital information but not to



engage in sabotage.

This type of idea has the advantage of getting our permanent characters into a hostile environment. Australia is a bit short of country mansions with high walls etc but we should look around for possible places which could be penetrated in this way.

#### Character of Blake

Does Blake need to be more active? More concerned about what is happening? At present he strikes me as a bit lacking in bite; a little too relaxed.

He has a warm likeable quality which is lacking in some of the other characters. How can we turn this to advantage without making him even more of a big, cuddly teddy bear figure?

#### Hunter/Blake/Kragg relationships

I have an instinctive distrust of friction situations. Think there is a danger that it could be bad for Tony's image because it would come over as petulant.

In any case this inbuilt friction ~~is~~ has developed into a pretty stock thing now. Z CARS handled it superbly but I don't think we're ready to compete at that level just yet. In any case, because of the difference in rank, and the more rigid discipline of the British police force, there is an in-built friction which falls into place very naturally.

CONTRABANDITS has the odd disagreement and grumble. It takes these on the run without making too much of a meal of it, but I'm not sure that it adds all that much to the programme. As a viewer I'm getting a little tired of it now.

I don't think Hunter should be against Kragg personally. He should at least respect Kragg's professional competence even if they were on opposite sides at one time. Opposing generals in wartime have no personal animosity. It's a job of work for all of them.

It's right for Hunter to treat Kragg with great



caution. But I think that any doubts he expresses should be professional and unemotional. What is Kragg up to? Is he a double agent? Is it all a gigantic plot to infiltrate Australian security?

If viewers have a slight doubt themselves this could be a useful line of retreat in case our gamble doesn't come off.

### Publicity

We need to arouse the maximum amount of anticipation and interest if we are to succeed with the Kragg switch.

I was going to suggest that we should take great care not to permit the thing to go off half-cock by premature release. In view of last week's TV WEEK we are now faced with the situation where it has already ~~been~~ dribbled out.

It would be in character for a counter-espionage programme to put up a massive smokescreen to confuse the issue. We could leak stories about biggest security precautions ever ~~being~~ taken in a TV programme. Scripts being issued to the actors will be switched at the last moment. Even a suggestion that a complete episode has been made which will have a key film scene replaced just before screening so that the press is thrown off the scent.

"Only six people really know what is being planned and they are either not talking or else leaking incorrect versions. The aim of the whole operation is to ensure that nobody really knows what is going to happen to Kragg until they watch the programme. Even then the final result could be in doubt for several weeks."

A phoney questionnaire might accidentally fall into the hands of a reporter. This would include key questions which would seem to suggest that Kragg was to be killed. Hector Crawford would immediately issue a denial - which ~~was~~ nobody would believe. The press would be told that Gerry's contract had been renewed. They would learn from a leaked



piece of information that this was really for him to be used in a different programme. etc

The above are only suggestions but I think we may well stand or fall by the skill (and discretion!) with which our publicity is handled.

Timing of the publicity is important. The switch won't be on air for about another 16 weeks. We need a continuous flow of general publicity to keep the show alive while it's off-air with a massive build-up in the three weeks preceding the switch.

### Market Research

We need to know very soon after the switch whether we've pulled it off with the public or not. A really competent survey would probably cost the earth. On the other hand we might seriously consider whether it couldn't save us the earth if it enabled us to cut our losses quickly if it proved that we had made a mistake.

I don't think we can rely on friends, relatives etc. These are not normal viewers. Their reactions are modified by their indirect connection with the programme.

### Sets

It's possibly about time we changed the Independent Surveys set. Most of us at a recent meeting felt that it didn't give any real feeling of being the nerve-centre of exciting events. Assuming that the Channel would put up the money what should we change to?

One snag in writing scripts has<sup>b/m</sup> that, because of the necessity to preserve the cover aspect of the Independent Surveys office, we've never been able to bring outside characters into it. This is a serious weakness because we have to have so many scenes in hotel rooms, bars etc. which use up our quota of sets and don't really give us very much.

If we decided to quietly ignore the cover aspect,



and to have a headquarters into which characters can be brought for questioning, we are still left with the problem of what type of room we're looking for.

I think we all agree that an office is too everyday and clinical. Can Robin Boyd help us with suggestions? We need something that <sup>conveys</sup> ~~conveys~~ the sense of drama of the Admiralty Map Room, or the Control Room at Cape Kennedy. Something modern, with-it, exciting. Yet not so gimmicky that it becomes tiresome after a few weeks.

There's an interesting theory that you should play farce against very solid-looking sets. It's thought that the weight of the setting makes the farcical nonsense easier to accept and hence funnier. As there is a sense of unreality about spy dramas do we need something that has a solid look?

#### R.P.

As we have to cut down on film we have to examine every possibility of improving the visual appeal of the show without adding to costs. ~~There is a~~

Ian Jones has some good ideas on the use of still R.P. This was used, of course, to very great effect in a hospital scene during the Singapore File.

#### Models

Could we make more use of model cars, aeroplanes etc? Ian used a model sno-cat in the SNOWY MOUNTAINS FILE.

#### Stock Shots

I understand that very little is available from outside sources and that what there is costs the earth and is frequently not very good.

Have we thoroughly explored our own files? HOMICIDE has staged some pretty spectacular car crashes etc over the years. Could some of these be cannibalised and used as inserts in HUNTER?



### Record of Props

It would be helpful if we could have a list of special props which we have bought or had made. If new additions~~s~~ were added to this list, say, once a month, it might help the writers and also save unnecessary expense.

### Library of Reference Books

I have had two quite excellent books out of the library. These give a mass of information about espionage techniques etc.

I would like ~~x~~ permission from the directors to build up a small reference library of this nature.

If this is approved perhaps writers would let me have suggestions for books which it would be useful to have on hand for reference.

I think we should avoid the general reminiscence type of book unless it is exceptionally good and detailed.

-----

### Continental Characters

We've had a lot of them - Kaufman - Martin Brenzer - Krystina - Jan Lestrovic etc. Have we overdone it?

They have value because it's easier to ~~like~~ believe that some foreign national is mixed up in sinister spy activities than it is to credit that the villainous agent is a tall, clean-limbed Australian.

I know that this is nonsense, and that it is possibly even anti-social on our part to perpetuate race prejudice and suspicion. But will the public accept that the country is full of treacherous and ruthless Australian agents of the Council? They'd believe anything you told them about happenings in some remote mountain village in Ruritania - but in Woop Woop?



Film without contracted artists

How do we construct a script in which the heroes are in only about half the film? Obviously we are going to have to cut away to physical action concerning the guest villains.

This is going to impose its own shape on our plotting and we need to solve the problems very rapidly.