

Under My Skin

The following are selected scenes from a television script written as part of a university screenwriting unit, for an episode of a horror themed mini-series entitled *Under My Skin*. The mini-series is inspired mainly by Stephen King's *Under The Dome* and the ABC series *LOST*, in that it is based around a large cast of characters and explores their relationships with each other while they struggle to cope with a hostile force that threatens them all.

The miniseries consists of eight hour long episodes, which form the overall plotline of the series. The series revolves around a small American mid-western town, Greenwood, which has been plagued by a series of cannibalistic murders committed by otherworldly shape-shifting creatures of unknown origin. The storyline follows notable citizens of the town (with each episode focusing on a different character) and shows how they cope with the danger of this threat whilst simultaneously having to brace the hysteria that has gripped the town, in addition to their own ongoing feuds and relationships.

Eventually, it becomes known that the creatures laying siege to the town are malevolent extra-terrestrials which have emerged from an abandoned network of coal mines outside the town. Recent attempts to reopen the mines have uncovered them in an underground cavern and now the town is under attack.

The citizens of the town eventually discover the weakness of these aliens (they can only survive on Earth by maintaining the form of people they have killed, and if deprived of fresh victims, they are forced to assume their true forms) and mount a brave attack, saving themselves from these eldritch creatures.

This episode of *Under My Skin* is the pilot episode, which sets the tone for things to come and chronicles the beginning of the alien attacks. It focuses primarily on Russel Danford, the town sheriff, who must try to solve the murders while dealing with a marriage that has deteriorated after the death of his son six months earlier (which, it is revealed later, was the very first murder instigated by the shape-shifters).

As this was a spec-script written to a specific word count, not all of the scenes of the full, hour long episode are present. However, where a removed scene would reveal more about the storyline, interludes have been placed into the script that summarise the missing scenes in narrative prose.

A black screen. Country music plays faintly in the distance, competing with the sounds of the wilderness at night (crickets, owls hooting, rustling branches etc). Distant, happy voices can be heard.

FADE IN:

EXT: A forest clearing at night. In the distance, a caravan can be seen. Lights are on inside, and the immediate outside is illuminated by a small campfire. This is the source of the music and the voices from before; the silhouettes of a man and two children can be seen in front of the fire.

The flames of the campfire are shown. This shot cuts to an image of a rough looking, weathered hand affixing a marshmallow to a metal poker. Switch to a close up of the face of a smiling young boy then to the image of a much younger girl. The flames are reflected in their eyes, and both seem entranced by the campfire.

Mid-range shot of the campfire. Its light is cast upon three people sitting around it - a father and his children. The back end of the caravan can be seen in the background, and beyond it, nothing but dense trees and darkness. A small radio sitting on a plastic crate beside the father plays country music, but the reception is bad and static mixes in with the song.

MAN:

What do you think, kids? Wanna roast a couple more?

BOY:

(excited)

Yeah! But me first!

GIRL:

(indignant)

No, me!

The children begin to quarrel but their father raises a hand.

MAN:

Settle down or you'll both go without.

The children fall silent and sit still.

The man hands the boy the poker which he attached the marshmallow to, and begins to prepare another as the girl watches on impatiently. As he reaches for the bag of marshmallows, the sound of a door opening resonates from behind.

Close up view of a middle aged, yet still attractive woman in a summer dress standing in the open doorway of the caravan.

WOMAN:

I've got hot chocolate inside! Finish cooking those marshmallows and come in and get it while it's hot!

Both children eagerly watch the flames while the father turns to the side to address his wife.

MAN:

Hey, bring 'em out here and join us! Nothing like hot chocolate and roasted marshmallows on a night like this!

GIRL:

Hey! Where's my marshmallow?

Camera changes. The caravan can be seen in the distance, being watched by something hidden in the thick trees. Heavy breathing can be heard as the intruder watches the mother bring a tray of hot chocolate from the caravan and join her family by the fire.

Close up shot of the family, seated around the fire and enjoying themselves. As they converse, the silhouette of a lone man emerges into view from the trees behind them.

INTRUDER:

Hey there! It's a nice night for camping!

The entire family turn to face him as he steps out of the shadows.

The intruder's face is shown - gruff, bearded, wearing a trucker's cap; a stereotypical Hillbilly in appearance. A long, ugly scar runs vertically down from the man's left eye to his chin.

Camera switches to show the family again, seated around the campfire. The radio splutters. The music is instantly drowned out by a burst of static and then the radio dies. Switch to a wide shot of the family from behind, with the intruder visible, in full, standing just beyond them. Four more men, similarly sinister, emerge from the trees and stand behind him. The camera sweeps over their faces one by one; they all look identical, with the same gruff beard and nasty scar. Finally, the camera switches back to the original close up of the intruder's face.

INTRUDER:

(menacingly)

Don't you think, boys? Isn't it cute that these folks came all the way out here to roast marshmallows and stare at the stars all night?

Nods and murmurs of agreement from the other INTRUDERS.

Side on view of the family and the INTRUDERS, facing each other. The campfire separates the two groups, its flickering flames both illuminating and obscuring them in turn.

The father reaches for the poker next to him and holds it warily by his side.

MAN:

(cautious)

Good evening, there. I suppose you're out camping tonight as well?

The INTRUDER flashes a cold smile.

INTRUDER:

Actually, we're just coming back from a day of hunting. Haven't caught anything all day, and we feel bad going home empty handed. Wondering if you might have seen any good game 'round here?

The camera pans out to show the immediate area. The campfire briefly illuminates a car parked in front of the caravan. A dead deer is tied up on the roof.

MAN:

There were quite a few deer around earlier this evening. Guess you must have just scared them all away.

INTRUDER:

That so? Well, maybe you can help us out with a late night snack then, right boys?

Nods and murmurs of agreement from the other INTRUDERS.

MAN:

I'm sorry, but we were under the impression we'd be alone out here tonight and-

BOY:

(interrupting)

Why do they all look the same, dad?

Close up of INTRUDER's face. He smiles a wide, cold smile, opening his mouth and revealing teeth caked with blood.

Flash to the father. He turns to his wife and silently motions for her to take the children into the caravan. She nods, but doesn't move.

INTRUDER:

I don't think I ever said we were after deer, did I, boys?

Close up of INTRUDER's right hand. It is in darkness at first, but then a flicker of light from the campfire illuminates it. It is red with dried blood, and long, bestial claws extend from the ends of the fingers.

Close up of the father's face. His eyes have grown wide with fear.

MAN:

Wait a second, what do you think you're-

Frontal shot of the INTRUDERS. With superhuman speed, they descend upon the family, lunging towards the camera.

SCREEN FLASHES TO BLACK:

The hungry roars of the INTRUDERS conflict with terrified screams and blaring static. This continues for five seconds, then everything is silent once more, save for the sickening sounds of flesh being torn from bone.

Title theme begins to play.

CUE TITLE CREDITS:

FADE IN:

A blood drenched hand is shown. The fingers end in dirty, claw-like nails. A single drop of blood rolls down one of the fingers and dangles for a second on the nail before dropping. The camera follows its descent into a puddle of black water below. The water ripples as the drop hits it.

The rippling water consumes the screen and becomes a black void. The camera "flies" through the darkness, stopping to linger on aging newspaper clippings that hover in the nothingness. Grim headlines flash past - FEAR IN MIDWEST! , BODY COUNT RISES, MORE MISSING!, CANNIBALS ON THE LOOSE!, TOWN GRIPPED BY HYSTERIA! - which are accompanied by black and white photographs of dismembered corpses. Each article is increasingly stained with blood, until the final one is just a red shard of paper. The camera lingers on this final paper and then blood bursts forth from it, obscuring the entire screen in a cloud of red.

The camera zooms out upwards and the cloud of red becomes a speck of blood in a grimy sink. Muddy water pours from the tap and the bloodied hand from before emerges from off screen and submerges itself in it. The blood washes off the hand and trickles into the basin. The camera follows it down the drain hole.

A circle of light appears in the distance. The camera zooms towards it like a train travelling through a dark tunnel and when it reaches the end, it zooms out to reveal that the pinprick of light is a full moon, reflected in a single, glassy (dead) eye. The eye twitches once and blinks. When it opens again, the full moon is gone and the pupil is blood red. The red eye blinks again and then slowly begins to twitch. The pupil seems to ripple for a second, and then the eye quickly

closes. The title logo is written on the eyelid in red: UNDER MY SKIN

FADE OUT as the title music comes to an end.

INTERLUDE #1

The next scene in this spec-script appears a bit further into the episode. Between this point and the next written scene, there is one intervening scene, wherein:

Early the next morning, the local ranger station is alerted by reports of black smoke sighted from the air. A ranger is dispatched to investigate, and he stumbles upon the campsite from the previous scene. The remains of a small bonfire smoulder away in front of the abandoned caravan - the burnt remains of the corpses of the family who were camping there.

FADE IN:

INT: A tiny but very clean bathroom containing a toilet, a shower cubicle, and a small sink with a mirrored medicine cabinet above it. Gleaming white tiles line the walls and the room is dimly lit by the light of the early morning. An open door beside the shower cubicle leads out into a darkened master bedroom. A medium set, middle aged man (DANFORD) leans over the sink, shaving whilst staring at himself in the mirror.

Close up of DANFORD's face in the mirror, staring out at the camera (and at the real DANFORD). He sighs deeply as he guides the razor across his chin. His face wears a tired expression; he is obviously strained.

EMILIE:

(shouting angrily from outside the door)

And you had the nerve to hide that hussy's birthday present in our family home! To think I thought you'd decided to buy me something sentimental for once, and it turns out that all it meant was that you're fucking some young whore from out of town!

DANFORD:

(shouting back)

Damn it, we were separated, Emilie! We hadn't had sex in months! You knew as well as I that we're only still together because of the kids and-

DANFORD cuts himself with the razor. A trickle of blood drops into the sink from his chin. The camera follows it down and then lingers on the speck it forms in the pristine basin.

DANFORD:

(frustrated)

Jesus Christ! You've hated the sight of me for months now. Ever since...

The camera flashes to the doorway, where EMILIE is suddenly standing, looking furious, and holding an empty sports bag.

EMILIE:

(shouting)

We were still living under the same roof! We're still married! It's still a fucking affair! What the Hell are the children supposed to think?

Flash to DANFORD. He wipes the blood off his chin with his brow, angrily tosses the bloody razor into the basin (it bounces off the side and snaps in half) and sighs again.

DANFORD:

(strained)

The kids are old enough to think for themselves. You really believe that they've thought we're a happy family all this time? Even after what happened to Ethan? This family... It's been broken ever since Ethan's death, Em.

EMILIE growls in anger and thrusts the empty bag at DANFORD's chest.

EMILIE:

I don't give a fuck anymore. I don't want to hear it. I've had enough. You get out of this house, and stay with your mistress. You've ruined this family.

EMILIE storms out of the room. Switch to a close up of DANFORD's face. It is worn, tired and beaten.

DANFORD:

(sadly)

I know. I know I have.

EMILIE:

(shouting from outside)

I expect you out before nine. I don't care if you're the sheriff - if you're not gone by then, I swear to God I'll have to you removed.

DANFORD sighs yet again. Suddenly, the opening notes of a love ballad ring out from DANFORD's cell phone, laying discarded on the cistern of the toilet. DANFORD stares at it, pondering it, as the first thirty seconds of the song play.

Finally, he reaches for the phone and brings it to his ear. He presses a button to accept the call, and the phone emits an audible beep, but the song doesn't stop playing.

Extreme close up of DANFORD's hand holding the phone to his ear.

DANFORD:

What is it?

EMMET (a deputy):

(through phone speaker)

Sheriff, it's me. You've gotta come down to Suicide Point. It's pretty bad.

SCREEN FLASHES TO BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT: DANFORD's car (a white 1990's SUV, flecked with dust and stains from years of use) drives down a lonely road lined with trees. In the distance, the sun is just beginning to rise and the sky is an ominous pink.

Switch to an interior view of the car. DANFORD's face is visible in the rear view mirror as the camera looks forward out of the back seat. He looks to be deep in thought, and is bothered by the events that have just transpired. Dangling from the mirror is a slightly faded photograph of a teenage boy, grinning to the camera whilst standing in front of a dusty van, where another boy is calling to him to hurry up.

DANFORD:

And in just six months, everything's turned to shit. It's all my fault. What am I going to do now?

DANFORD takes his eyes off the road for a moment and his gaze lingers on the photograph of the boy. A single tear rolls out of his left eye and glistens on his cheek.

FADE OUT

INTERLUDE #2

The next written scene takes place further into the episode. Between this point and the next scene, there are two intervening scenes:

1. DANFORD is called to the campsite where the county police are canvassing the murder scene. Several deputies lead him around the scene, pointing out articles of interest, discussing their theories, and showing him the charred corpses, but he seems preoccupied and despondent. His chief deputy, EMMET, ponders to the other officers that DANFORD's melancholy is connected to the similarity of this murder with "that other one" six months ago.
2. DANFORD is in his office, with EMMET. EMMET asks him if he is okay, and DANFORD tells him that he has been kicked out of his house. EMMET comforts him and notes that the murders are similar to "what happened to Ethan and his friends" and asks if DANFORD would like to hand over control of the case to him. DANFORD assures him that he's fine and says that if the

case is connected to "Ethan's death", then he won't feel as if he has redeemed himself and his family until he gets to the bottom of it. EMMET exits the office, leaving DANFORD in quiet reflection.

FADE IN:

FLASHBACK TO: EXT: Open field, day. DANFORD and four police officers stand in a roped off thicket at the base of a massive cliff that overlooks the locale. The immediate area is shrouded in thick shadow from the cliff. The five men are standing over something concealed by a bush. DANFORD's sobbing can be heard.

Close up of DANFORD's face. His eyes are bloodshot and his face is covered in tears. The camera lingers on DANFORD as he sobs for a moment, then switches to a top down view of a mutilated, burnt corpse discarded in the bush. The corpse is a shadow of its former self, but it is still just barely recognisable - ETHAN, the boy from the photograph in DANFORD's car.

DANFORD:

No... If I'd known... If I'd only thought to go with them!

EMMET takes a step forward and softly places his hand on DANFORD's shoulder.

EMMET:

Nothing you could have done, boss. Who's ever heard of something like this happening in *this* town?

FADE OUT:

DANFORD:

(voice over, shouting)

And to make it worse, I can't stand to imagine the faces of Carl and Johnny's parents when Emmet told 'em, knowing that I'm the one who let this fucking happen.

EMILIE:

(voice over, crying)

A camping trip! At sixteen! And you let them all go on their own? Are you fucking crazy? And now, our Ethan...

FADE IN:

INT: DANFORD and EMILIE's bedroom. Night. The room is in a mess and the bed is unmade. The room is illuminated by a dim bedside lamp, which obscures just as much as it shows and causes DANFORD, who is staring at the foot of the bed, to cast a warped, demonic looking shadow on the wall. EMILIE kneels in the centre of the bed, weeping furiously, obviously in distress.

DANFORD:

Emilie, there's no way I could have known this would happen!

EMILIE:

Bullshit. You could have done *something*. You could have sent Emmet to check up on them or something. You're the town sheriff, for Christ's sake! You don't even give a shit about what's happened, do you?

DANFORD struggles to hold back tears. His face trembles and his fists open and close restlessly.

DANFORD:

Ethan is... Ethan was *our* son, Emilie. My fucking son. How can you say that?

FADE OUT

INTERLUDE #3

The next written scene is the final scene of the episode. Between this point and the next scene, three interlude scenes play, wherein:

1. A day or two later, DANFORD and EMMET visit the county morgue, where the corpses of the family are undergoing an examination. The coroner informs the officers that the mutilation of the bodies seems to resemble the work of a

savage animal - the corpses have been partially eaten. EMMET immediately suggests that the murders are the work of a cannibalistic, perhaps cultic, killer, but DANFORD remarks that the damage to the corpses seems intended more to make them harder to identify, rather than indicative of them simply being eaten. He suggests that this may also be the reason why the corpses were burnt. But why do the killers want the corpses to be unidentifiable?

2. As the sun sets on another day of investigation, another deputy (JESSICA) comes to DANFORD in his office with some new information. She has been browsing the county archives for reports of similar cases, and has discovered an unsolved missing persons case reported in the same area. She and DANFORD browse the file together. Inside is a photograph of the missing person, a bearded man with a scar down his left cheek (the INTRUDER from the opening scene); he has been missing for just over a month. DANFORD decides that without any other leads, investigating the case of the missing hunter is the best option available.

3. DANFORD and JESSICA search the woods by night, accompanied by a tracker dog. As they slowly move through the moonlit wilderness, they quietly discuss the situation. DANFORD reveals that his marriage deteriorated because EMILIE blamed him for the death of their son. He knows that he himself is not at fault, and he isn't naïve enough to think that EMILIE will just forget all that has happened, but he feels that if he can solve the mystery of his son's murder, he'll at least feel that he has done all he can to make things right. The dog suddenly starts barking, and DANFORD and JESSICA follow it into a secluded grove, where they find the skeletal, half buried corpse of the missing man. JESSICA examines the corpse and notes that it shows signs of being mutilated and burnt like the other victims. DANFORD begins to call for backup, but he is interrupted by a gunshot ringing out from a thicket at the end of the grove. A shadowy figure stands at the entrance to the thicket, getting ready to fire upon the officers again with a flintlock rifle. DANFORD and JESSICA drop to the ground and roll behind a fallen log for cover. They draw their revolvers and for roughly a minute, exchange shots with the attacker. One of DANFORD's bullets manages to graze the attacker's forearm, prompting him to flee into the wood. DANFORD orders JESSICA to call for backup and then rushes into the wood alone, determined to catch his suspect.

FADE IN:

EXT: *Wilderness, night. Dramatic music plays as DANFORD chases the INTRUDER through the woods, the camera rapidly switching between a side on view of the chase, to a top down view, to a chase camera that bobs between the two runners as they weave through the foliage. The chase continues in this way for thirty seconds, then the camera switches to a view of the night sky, where a vibrant full moon looks down upon the ensuing drama from behind a thick cloud. Finally, the camera "flies" back down to the chase and remains stationary at ground level inside a log as first the INTRUDER's, then DANFORD's feet, scramble past, splashing in a puddle of black, sparkling water, then switches to an over the shoulder view of DANFORD as he closes on the INTRUDER.*

DANFORD:

(shouting)

Stop! Stop or I'll shoot!

The INTRUDER laughs coldly and turns around. Still shrouded in shadow with his face hidden, he raises his rifle and begins to pull the trigger.

DANFORD:

Shit!

DANFORD grunts in exertion and throws himself violently sideways to take cover behind a tree as the INTRUDER's shot rings out. His shoulder slams into the trunk with a loud thunk and he grunts in pain. The INTRUDER laughs again, a cruel, wicked laugh.

INTRUDER:

(calling out)

You know too much about us, sheriff! If I let you live any longer, our secret won't be safe for long!

DANFORD:

I won't stop until I find out who you are!

DANFORD edges towards the side of the tree and carefully peeks out. He scans the area for a second and then spies the

INTRUDER, standing at the edge of a clearing ahead. He raises his revolver and takes aim at the INTRUDER's leg.

The INTRUDER spots DANFORD's head poking out from behind cover and fires his rifle. DANFORD fires blindly as he pulls himself back behind the tree to dodge the shot. His shot sails uselessly into the ground a few centimetres to the left of the INTRUDER.

INTRUDER:

(laughing)

You can't stop us, sheriff! Not if you don't even have a clue what you're dealing with!

DANFORD:

You killed my son! I don't need to know anything other than I have to end this!

The standoff continues for just over a minute. The two continue to exchange shots, though neither is able to hit the other. As the fire fight ensues, the camera rapidly switches between the two combatants and the locations where the stray bullets pummel harmlessly into the ground or the trunks of trees.

The INTRUDER's rifle suddenly jams. As he fumbles frantically to repair it, DANFORD leaps out from behind cover and trains his revolver on the INTRUDER.

DANFORD:

I've got you! Don't fucking move!

The camera once again switches to a view of the sky, showing the full moon slowly begin to emerge from behind the cloud.

Switch to a frontal view of the INTRUDER. His face looks up from the rifle as DANFORD steps closer, and is suddenly illuminated by the pale moonlight. The camera switches to a close-up of the INTRUDER's face and the dramatic music stops instantly - it is ETHAN, DANFORD's son.

DANFORD begins to say something, but is unable to. He makes a spluttering sound, then falls silent. He lowers his weapon in disbelief.

ETHAN:

(feigning excitement)

Heya dad! How've you been? You've been chasing me all this time, haven't you?

DANFORD is silent for a few seconds, struggling to find words. He stares at ETHAN, pondering what to do next. Finally, he sighs, and shakes his head. He raises his revolver and points it at ETHAN.

DANFORD:

No... You can't be Ethan. I buried Ethan six months ago. He's dead.

ETHAN:

Am I? But if I can appear before you now, can I really be dead? If you can see me and talk to me, how can I be anything but alive?

DANFORD:

You're *not* Ethan. I saw what you had done to him... I've spent the last six months asking myself is what Emilie thinks is true, if it really was my fault after all. I *know* he's dead. I don't know what the fuck you are, but you're not Ethan - you're a monster.

ETHAN:

Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. But if I can appear in the form of people I've killed, how can you tell who's really the monster? A man goes out on a hunting trip for a few days and comes back perfectly fine... But is he really himself?

DANFORD's finger tightens on the trigger of his revolver, as he closes one eye and stares down the gun barrel.

DANFORD:

If I kill you now, you won't bother this town or anyone in it anymore.

ETHAN:

Is that so? So, what's it gonna be, chief? Shoot your own son, or let him live and have even more deaths on your conscience?

There is silence for sixty seconds as DANFORD thinks, still looking down the barrel of his gun into ETHAN's face. The camera slowly revolves around the scene as DANFORD's inner conflict plays out. Somewhere in the distance, a lonely owl hoots softly.

ETHAN:

Come to a decision yet? Either way, you're going to have someone's death on your mind.

DANFORD:

(beginning to pull trigger)

No. I've had enough of blaming myself. I'm sick of beating myself up over something I had no control over. I have the power to finally put an end to it, right now, and that's what I'm going to do.

ETHAN:

Suit yourself... dad. But remember, this is only the beginning.

DANFORD:

We'll see.

DANFORD tenses, trying to stay composed as tears glisten in his eyes. At last, he manages a wry smile and pulls the trigger. The muzzle flash expands and covers the entire screen in white light as the gunshot rings out, echoing loudly.

SCREEN FLASHES TO BLACK

End credit theme begins to play