

# RISING STAR

## Film Bible

**Format:** Feature Film

**Genre:** Crime Thriller / Serial Killer Thriller

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## Logline

In 1985 New York, a burned-out homicide detective and his ambitious new partner investigate the overdose death of a young escort tied to a rising designer drug, uncovering a web of political corruption, mob protection and a revenge killer targeting the men responsible for her death — while the detective's true unsolved monster has been living right next door.

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## Short Pitch

*Rising Star* is a dark, character-driven 1980s corruption thriller with serial-killer theatrics, acidic wit and a strong visual metaphor system. Set in a filthy, politically compromised New York, it follows Detective Logan Ford and his new partner Malik Edwards as they investigate a young woman's drug-linked death and stumble into a world where cops, gangsters, politicians and developers are all feeding off the same rotten machine. But as the body count rises, the case transforms into something more unsettling: a ritualised revenge campaign rooted in the dead woman's life — and a final twist revealing that the killer Logan thought he'd found is only half the truth.

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## Project Overview

At its surface, *Rising Star* is a gripping homicide thriller: a dead escort, a new synthetic drug, bad cops, a mob-controlled hotel, a reform politician with secrets, and a detective partnership forged under pressure. Underneath, it is a story about performance, corruption and misdirection. The city is full of men pretending to be something they are not — family men, reformers, protectors, carers, neighbours — and the murders force those disguises into the open.

The title carries a double meaning. "Rising Star" is the synthetic drug poisoning the city, but it also describes how Logan initially sees Malik: a polished fast-track cop he distrusts on sight. By the end, Malik proves to be the moral and investigative counterweight Logan needs, while the drug itself becomes the chemical emblem of the city's false promises — euphoria sold as escape, corruption sold as progress, respectability sold as truth.

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## Why This Film

*Rising Star* offers:

- a rich 1980s urban setting
- a strong detective pairing with conflict and heart
- a commercial serial-killer hook
- a politically charged corruption story
- a double reveal ending that lands both emotionally and psychologically

It plays as a muscular crime thriller, but it has the layered finish of prestige noir: one case solved, one evil exposed, another still alive and watching.

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## Story Engine

## Core Premise

A young woman dies after being used by a network of powerful men who assume her life can be erased without consequence. Her death triggers a revenge campaign that begins stripping away the masks of the city's corrupt elite. Detectives Logan Ford and Malik Edwards must solve the case before more bodies fall — and before Logan's past mistakes blind him to the truth in front of him.

## Narrative Shape

The film moves through three linked modes:

### 1. Procedural:

Lucia's death, the drug trail, the hotel, the bodyguard, the political and mob connections.

### 2. Ritual murder thriller:

Hillcroft, Wilmot and Pulcinella are murdered in increasingly theatrical ways, staged as marionettes with cryptic messages.

### 3. Psychological noir:

Logan becomes convinced the present killings are linked to his unsolved Philadelphia case, only to learn he is wrong about the current killer — but right that the old killer is still out there.

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## Main Characters

### Logan Ford

Logan is 37, ruffled, instinctive, abrasive and fraying at the edges. He is a very good detective whose flaws are no longer cosmetic: the drinking, the temper, the clutter, the bullying interview style, the sense that time is starting to win. Logan's arc is about being forced out of certainty. He starts the film believing experience justifies instinct, even when it curdles into arrogance. By the end, he survives because Malik sees what he cannot and because the case exposes how much Logan has been living inside an old wound he never healed. He is not a broken man, but he is closer to broken than he wants anyone to know.

### Malik Edwards

Malik is the film's moral and emotional counterweight. Educated, composed and quietly resilient, he initially reads as everything Logan distrusts: polished, careful, upwardly mobile. But Malik is not soft. He is observant, emotionally intelligent and professionally serious. His grief over a former partner lost to AIDS deepens his empathy without making him sentimental. Malik is the one who sees the symbolic logic of the murders, follows the institutional paper trail, and ultimately saves Logan's life. He begins as the man Logan doesn't want in his car and ends as the partner who keeps him alive.

### Lucia Blinkley

Lucia is the dead centre of the story. She is a struggling young mother, pregnant, doing escort work and living inside a network of male exploitation that treats her as expendable. She is not on screen long, but she must feel fully alive — funny, tired, aware, compromised and still trying. The story works because Lucia does not feel like a device. She feels like a real woman whose life has been turned into a convenience by the men around her.

### Richard Evans

Evans is the actual killer of the present-day murder chain. On the surface he is Lucia's social worker: quiet, helpful, restrained, professionally sympathetic. In truth he is the father of her unborn child and a man whose love, guilt and rage have transformed into ritualised vengeance. Evans is not a random psychopath. He is a grief-driven avenger, hunting the men he believes killed Lucia by greed, corruption, appetite and cowardice. His motive is personal, but his method is theatrical because he wants these men seen for what they are. He is the moral wound of the film made violent.

### Peter Denton

Denton is the film's final ghost. Friendly, neighbourly, ordinary on the surface, he lives right next to Logan and folds himself easily into suburban life. Logan's suspicion of him during the current case is wrong in the immediate sense — Denton is not killing Lucia's abusers — but the ending reveals that Denton is the original Philadelphia killer Logan never caught. This makes him one of the most unsettling figures in the script: not because he dominates the narrative, but because he barely has to. He survives by seeming harmless.

### **Robert Sanderson**

Sanderson is a polished civic hypocrite: a public man of "family values" privately tangled in sex, drugs, development deals and mob money. He is not the mastermind of the city's rot, but he benefits from it and helps legitimise it. He is important because he embodies the script's idea that corruption often looks cleanest in a suit and lapel pin.

### **Giacomo Pulcinella**

Pulcinella is the mobster at the centre of the city's vice economy: controlled, elegant, pragmatic and completely at ease with political business. He is not chaotic; he is efficient. That makes him more dangerous. His hotel is a transaction hub where drugs, sex, surveillance and leverage all coexist under one roof. He is also central to the script's symbolic system because the puppet imagery ultimately circles back to his very name.

### **Audrey Ford**

Audrey is not just the wife at home. She is the voice that keeps Logan tethered to human reality. She knows his failings clearly, calls them out without melodrama, and immediately recognises Malik's value before Logan can admit it. Audrey gives the film its domestic truth: Logan may be a good detective, but that does not automatically make him a good husband or father.

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## **Supporting Characters of Note**

### **Jim Kershaw / Bernie Hillcroft**

The corrupt uniformed officers who serve as the street-level link between the badge and the mob. They represent how routine police corruption feeds bigger criminal structures.

### **Fred Wilmot**

A civic functionary entangled in land and building deals that benefit Pulcinella and Sanderson. He helps widen the story from vice into structural corruption.

### **Agnes Blinkley**

Lucia's mother, whose grief sharpens the moral cost of the case and prevents Lucia from becoming just another dead body in the system.

### **Ernst Becker**

The coroner whose clinical detail anchors the film's grotesque imagery in forensic reality and repeatedly shifts the investigation forward.

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## **Story Summary**

### **Act One**

Logan Ford, an aging homicide detective in 1985 New York, is assigned a new partner, Malik Edwards, just as the body of Lucia Blinkley is discovered near the Williamsburg waterfront. Lucia's mother reports her missing, identifying her and revealing that she had been picked up by a bodyguard-driven black car. Logan and Malik trace clues from Lucia's apartment to the Chelmsford Hotel, while the audience sees the hidden truth: Lucia died after a night with politician Robert Sanderson in a suite arranged by gangster Giacomo Pulcinella, who then orchestrated the clean-up and disposal of her body. Toxicology reveals Lucia died after taking PMA/PMMA sold as "Rising Star," and that she was six weeks pregnant.

## Act Two

The detectives uncover links between Rising Star, Pulcinella's hotel operation and corrupt patrol officers Hillcroft and Kershaw. Then Hillcroft is murdered in a theatrical, ritualised way, echoing an old unsolved Philadelphia case Logan once touched. Soon after, Fred Wilmot is killed and staged similarly, with cryptic blood messages turning the murders into a symbolic language of puppetry and punishment. Logan becomes convinced the Philadelphia killer has resurfaced and begins suspecting his new neighbour Peter Denton, whose Philadelphia roots, prop work and marionettes feel too coincidental to ignore. Meanwhile Malik digs deeper into Lucia's life, reconnecting with her social worker Richard Evans and learning more about her ex, while Logan and Malik's personal trust slowly deepens.

## Act Three

Pulcinella is murdered before he can fully contain the fallout, but survives long enough to link the killings back to Blinkley. DNA results reveal the father of Lucia's unborn child is Richard Evans. The present case snaps into focus: Evans has been avenging Lucia by hunting the men responsible for her death and exploitation. Logan, however, is still partially fixated on Denton until the final confrontation at Sanderson's house, where Evans reveals himself, nearly kills Logan, and is shot dead by Malik after naming his motive as retribution. The case appears closed. Then the final scene reveals Peter Denton hiding a jar of preserved human eyes behind a Philadelphia Orchestra poster, confirming he is the original Philadelphia killer Logan never caught. The immediate case is solved, but the older evil remains alive next door.

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## Tone

### What It Feels Like

The tone is:

- grimy
- adult
- character-driven
- emotionally bruised
- darkly witty
- ominously theatrical

The film should feel lived-in rather than stylised for its own sake. The humour comes from cop banter, class tension and Logan's abrasiveness, not from undercutting the darkness. The murders are memorable because they feel horrifyingly intentional, not because they are merely graphic.

### Visual Language

The city should feel nicotine-yellow, sodium-lit, concrete, stained and overheated. The domestic world is softer but not idyllic. The murder tableaux create a second visual language: cords, hooks, suspended bodies, missing eyes, blood-painted phrases, puppet logic. That theatrical strain should feel unsettlingly controlled, as though someone is turning crime scenes into moral exhibits.

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## Comps

### Comparable Films / Lanes

**Se7en** for ritualised murders and moral architecture.

**Zodiac** for obsessive detection and unresolved evil.

**Prince of the City** for urban corruption and institutional rot.

**Cruising** for dangerous 1980s New York atmosphere and investigative unease.

**Mystic River** for grief-driven violence rooted in intimate pain.

**True Detective** Season 1, tonally, for the collision of procedural realism and mythic-feeling killer imagery.

## Positioning Statement

*Rising Star* is a **prestige neo-noir serial-killer thriller set inside a corrupt 1980s city machine**, with the emotional pull of a great detective partnership and the sting of a double-ending reveal.

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## World of the Film

### New York, 1985

This is a city where:

- vice and politics overlap
- cops are bought at street level
- mob money flows through respectable channels
- drugs are repackaged as pleasure and profit
- the press hovers over every scandal
- families still sit down to dinner while horrors unfold blocks away

The city is not backdrop. It is a functioning organism of compromise. Lucia's death is possible because this ecosystem exists. Evans' revenge becomes possible because he knows how it works.

## Key Settings

**The Precinct** — tired, hostile, male, politically pressured.

**The Chelmsford Hotel** — vice disguised as faded class.

**The Ford home** — warmth under strain; Logan's chance at humanity.

**Denton's house** — suburban calm masking older horror.

**Construction / civic spaces** — where corruption becomes literal structure.

**Crime scenes** — transformed into puppet theatres of accusation.

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## Thematic Positioning

### Corruption as Performance

Almost every powerful man in the script is performing a role:

- Sanderson performs virtue
- Pulcinella performs legitimate business
- cops perform public safety
- Evans performs professional care
- Denton performs neighbourly normalcy
- Logan performs toughness

The murders tear those roles away and restage the men as puppets — figures controlled by appetite, greed and self-deception.

### Who Gets Treated as Disposable

Lucia is poor, female, a mother, pregnant and vulnerable. The whole system assumes she can be erased. The case insists otherwise. Even though Evans' revenge is morally monstrous, the story's rage comes from the fact that Lucia's death is enabled by men who thought they were untouchable and by institutions that would have let her vanish as a statistic.

## Partnership and Moral Inheritance

Logan and Malik are not just detective partners; they are two models of masculinity and police work in collision. Logan is instinct, damage and history. Malik is discipline, empathy and possibility. Their relationship asks whether the next generation has to become hardened and emotionally closed to be effective — or whether there is another way to do the job.

## Misrecognition and the Persistence of Evil

The ending matters because it refuses the comfort of total resolution. Logan solves the present case but misreads it on the way. He is wrong about Denton in the immediate sense, yet right in the larger nightmare. Evil is not singular here. One avenger can be stopped while another, older and colder killer remains alive in the margins. The film's final point is not "justice wins," but "justice is partial, and monsters survive by looking ordinary."

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## Audience and Market Positioning

### Who It's For

This is for audiences who want:

- serious adult thrillers
- detectives with emotional wear and complexity
- a rich period setting
- murder-mystery propulsion
- layered villains rather than one-note monsters
- endings that satisfy while leaving a chill

### Commercial Hook

The hook is clean and strong:

**A detective hunts a theatrical revenge killer through a corrupt 1980s city — only to discover the killer he was truly afraid of has been living next door the whole time.**

That gives the film both strong trailer shape and strong word-of-mouth value.

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## Ending / Franchise Potential

The film is fully satisfying as a standalone. Lucia's avenger is identified, the corruption plot is exposed, Malik and Logan earn each other, and Sanderson's world collapses. But the Denton reveal opens a door to continuation if desired. A follow-up could explore Logan finally confronting the Philadelphia killer with full awareness, though the current ending is strongest precisely because it leaves that horror unresolved.

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## Closing Statement

*Rising Star* is a dark, muscular thriller about a city where corruption wears clean collars and murder becomes the only language some truths can speak. It combines the momentum of a homicide procedural, the ritual dread of a serial-killer film and the emotional payoff of an unexpected detective partnership. Most importantly, it ends on the kind of revelation that lingers: one killer dead, one killer hidden, and a detective left knowing he solved the wrong nightmare first.