

RISING STAR

Treatment

Format: Feature

Genre: Crime Thriller / Serial Killer Thriller

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Logline

In 1985 New York, a burned-out homicide detective and his idealistic new partner investigate the overdose death of a young escort tied to a rising designer drug, only to uncover a web of political corruption, mob protection and a theatrical revenge killer whose victims are the men responsible for her destruction — while a separate monster from the detective's past waits, unnoticed, right next door.

Overview

Rising Star is a dark, character-driven crime thriller that unfolds in a bruised, sweat-slick 1985 New York where politics, vice, police corruption and organised crime exist as part of the same ecosystem. At its centre is Detective **Logan Ford**, a once-formidable homicide cop now visibly worn down by drink, age, cynicism and the emotional cost of the job. He is teamed, against his will, with **Malik Edwards**, a younger, more disciplined and more emotionally open detective whose intelligence Logan initially mistakes for naivety. Their investigation begins with the body of a young woman and leads them into a city where seemingly respectable men have built a private economy on drugs, exploitation and impunity.

The dead woman is **Lucia Blinkley**: a struggling young mother doing escort work, recently pregnant, and caught in the orbit of rising synthetic drug **Rising Star**, gangster **Giacomo Pulcinella**, and reform-minded politician **Robert Sanderson**. But Lucia's death does not stay buried. One by one, the men connected to her destruction are murdered and staged with grotesque theatricality — eyes removed, bodies rigged like marionettes, cryptic blood messages written across walls. Logan becomes convinced the killer is a ghost from an old Philadelphia case, and his suspicions settle on his new neighbour **Peter Denton**, a man whose props, puppets and Philadelphia roots seem too pointed to ignore. But the truth is more layered and crueler: the present-day killer is **Richard Evans**, Lucia's social worker and the father of her unborn child, taking revenge on the men who killed her by neglect, appetite and corruption. Denton, meanwhile, is something else entirely — the actual Philadelphia killer Logan never caught, still alive, still hidden in plain sight.

Tone and Style

The tone is muscular, bleak and psychologically charged — a mix of police procedural, urban noir and revenge-driven serial-killer thriller. The New York of the film is filthy, overlit, nicotine-stained and morally degraded. Crime is not exotic here; it is woven into the fabric of the city. The murders are theatrical but never campy. Their ritualistic presentation expresses not madness for its own sake, but a furious need to expose corruption as spectacle. Against this darkness, the Logan/Malik partnership gives the story its emotional ballast: one man deeply damaged by the job, the other still trying to do it without becoming spiritually dead.

Treatment

1985. New York is all steam, sirens, sweat and shouted insults. Detective **Logan Ford** lumbers through the city after a fleeing suspect and gets to the arrest late enough to be mocked by younger officers for being out of shape. It is a funny scene with a sour edge: Logan is still a working detective, but the city is beginning to see him as a man past his physical prime. Back at the precinct, the jokes continue. A giant "Get Well Soon" card on his desk has had "Well" scratched out and replaced with "Fit." Logan absorbs the ridicule with his usual mixture of weariness and aggression, then leans back into what he still does best: forcing information out of frightened street dealers. One of them tells him about a new pill moving through the city — **Rising Star** — a euphoric synthetic making users feel invincible and loved until it turns on them. The trail leads toward gangster Giacomo Pulcinella.

At home in Queens, Logan slips into a different role: husband, father, half-present provider. His wife **Audrey** is still there, still trying, but tired of his performative promises to change. Their son and daughter treat him with a mixture of love and caution. On the surface, the family house offers a respite from the city's rot, but even here Logan is compromised by

habit — reaching for beer before plates, bringing the job home in silence if not in words. Next door, new neighbour **Peter Denton** seems like easy suburbia: friendly, practical, a man from Philadelphia who fixes bikes, drinks on the porch and seems grateful for conversation. He tells Logan he works in props in the entertainment business. He appears harmless enough to belong.

The next major change in Logan's life comes at the precinct. Captain Hanley introduces him to **Malik Edwards**, his new partner. Malik is younger, better dressed, college educated and calm under insult — everything Logan instinctively distrusts. Logan immediately labels him “college boy” and assumes he is another fast-track detective who sees the badge as a stepping stone. Malik gives little away. He is polite but unbending, making clear that he neither wants Logan's approval nor intends to fold under hostility. Their early exchanges are sharp, almost comic, but they establish the central tension of the film: Logan thinks Malik represents an overeducated, bloodless future of policing; Malik sees in Logan a relic of the old department — brilliant, compromised, and one drink away from irrelevance.

Elsewhere in the city, the machinery that will destroy **Lucia Blinkley** is already turning. Lucia is introduced not as a corpse but as a living woman: 22, a mother, trying to survive, meeting with social worker **Richard Evans**, who knows more about her life than a bureaucrat should. Their scene contains a quiet intimacy that initially reads as familiarity but later reveals itself as something deeper. Lucia jokes about “extra-curricular care ongoing” in a way that hints at a sexual arrangement conducted under the cover of institutional concern. She is also pregnant, trying to cut down on cigarettes, and making her way through a life in which men alternately use, judge or fail her.

Around her moves a world of men who appear respectable and are anything but. Politician **Robert Sanderson** performs reform and family values on television while privately taking envelopes, approving mob-linked construction schemes and maintaining a relationship with Pulcinella built on mutual profit. Pulcinella himself operates from the Chelmsford Hotel, laundering vice through an atmosphere of faded luxury, using corrupted police officers **Bernie Hillcroft** and **Jim Kershaw** to keep the streets clear and the Rising Star pipeline protected. Hillcroft and Kershaw assault black street dealers, steal their cash, pocket the pills and hand the product back to Pulcinella like disciplined subcontractors. The city's institutions are not failing. They are functioning exactly as designed — just not for the people they claim to serve.

Lucia's death occurs almost casually inside that system. After a public day of media management and political positioning, Sanderson goes to the **Chelmsford Hotel**, where Lucia has been arranged for him as a reward by Pulcinella. The room is expensive, the lighting soft, the drugs plentiful. Lucia and Sanderson drink champagne, take pills from an open box, have sex and drift off. Sanderson wakes first and finds Lucia dead, froth at her mouth, eyes fixed, the night's performance instantly turned into panic. He calls Pulcinella, who arrives with men, removes anything incriminating, orders Lucia washed down, bagged and dumped, and assures Sanderson that tomorrow will look like any other day. The body is disposed of. The room is cleaned. The city's machine closes its jaws and prepares to move on.

The next day, Lucia's body is found near the Williamsburg waterfront. Logan and Malik catch the case. At first it looks like a simple overdose dump: female victim, no obvious trauma, body moved after death. But details gather quickly. Lucia is identified when her mother, **Agnes Blinkley**, reports her missing at the precinct almost as the detectives return from the scene. Agnes reveals that Lucia had been getting picked up in a black expensive car by a driver who looked like a bodyguard. In Lucia's apartment, Logan and Malik find a baby monitor gift set, a congratulatory card and her black diary containing the mysterious note “CH. Eight p.m.” A business card for the Chelmsford Hotel falls out. The shape of the night begins to form.

The coroner deepens the tragedy and the mystery. Lucia's death is drug-related, but not accidental in the simple sense. Her system contains **PMA/PMMA**, a more dangerous chemical often passed off as MDMA. On the street it has rebranded itself as **Rising Star**, a euphoric pill with a delayed, catastrophic edge. Lucia had also been drinking champagne, and she was around six weeks pregnant. For Logan, the unborn child is not just another detail. It changes the emotional geometry of the case. Lucia is no longer a disposable “escort OD” in the department's eyes. She becomes the centre of a moral crime, and Logan — despite all his bluster and bad habits — feels that shift immediately. Malik feels it too, but expresses it differently, with quiet rather than rage. Their partnership begins to find the first fragile thread of shared purpose.

At the Chelmsford, the detectives meet denial at every level. The front-desk staff claim ignorance. The ledger shows no trace of Lucia. Hillcroft and Kershaw arrive too quickly and defend the hotel too smoothly. Logan senses rot; Malik notices patterns. Later, Logan tails Kershaw from the station and watches him visit Pulcinella directly, confirming the existence of a relationship no honest patrolman should have. When Logan corners Kershaw at home, Kershaw admits

just enough: Hillcroft was more involved, they were pushing competing dealers off Pulcinella's turf and handing Rising Star over to mob hands. It is a confession of complicity, but not yet of murder. The detectives now know Lucia's death sits inside a web of drugs, police corruption and political protection, but they still do not know who is moving against that web from the shadows.

Then the city answers with a new body. **Bernie Hillcroft** is found dead in his apartment, tied into a chair, throat cut, eyes removed, a packet of Rising Star stuffed in his mouth, and the words "**LITTLE PIGGIES**" sprayed on the wall in blood-red paint. The killing is not just brutal but staged. Thin cord runs through Hillcroft's limbs to nails in the ceiling, beginning the film's recurring puppet imagery. Logan recognises the signature before he wants to. Six years earlier in Philadelphia there were two unsolved killings with the same missing eyes and throat-slicing. He immediately starts thinking not just about revenge, but recurrence — about a killer who has returned, evolved and chosen a new city.

From there the murders become a coded language. Councilman **Fred Wilmot**, the civic operator facilitating Pulcinella and Sanderson's development interests, is found displayed at Manhattan Municipal Building, his body rigged upright, his eyes removed, and the words "**NO SHOW WITHOUT PUNCH**" carved into his back. The theatricality is undeniable now. Malik identifies the marionette pattern more explicitly, connecting the messages to **Punch and Judy**, to performance, to puppets controlled from above. Logan, meanwhile, feels himself being dragged back toward his old Philadelphia ghost — a killer who was never caught and whose signature may now be wrapped around the present case.

This is the section of the story where Logan and Malik truly become partners. Malik digs into the old Philadelphia case and finds that the earlier victims, like Hillcroft, had criminal records. He realises Logan had once worked that case and withheld it. Logan eventually admits he had a suspect back then and was wrong. Malik, for his part, brings a different kind of intelligence to the investigation: he sees the theatrical symbolism, follows the paper trail around Wilmot's development approvals, and studies people rather than just evidence. At home, Audrey meets Malik and immediately grasps what Logan refuses to say — that this is a good man. In one of the film's most humane scenes, she gently draws out Malik's history, learning that he lost a partner to AIDS and carrying the conversation without discomfort or pity. The result is not sentimental but restorative. Malik stops being "the rookie" and becomes part of the Ford household's emotional orbit, which matters when Logan later begins to unravel.

As the investigation widens, **Richard Evans** remains in view but not in suspicion. Malik interviews him as Lucia's social worker and hears the expected outline: single mother, unreliable ex, occasional escort work, "party stuff maybe," and a warning that Lucia's ex **Michael Reardon** could be violent. Reardon, however, proves a dead end — a heroin wreck barely coherent enough to say her name. Evans appears helpful, saddened, professionally detached. It is a perfect place to hide. The script smartly positions him as a source of information rather than a person to be looked at too closely, even though the opening meeting with Lucia and the recurring emotional charge around her already suggest something more intimate.

Logan's attention is turning elsewhere — toward **Peter Denton**. The neighbour is from Philadelphia. He works in props. He speaks about madness with a knowing chill. He owns marionettes with blackened eye sockets. One night Logan uses Denton's bathroom and glimpses a puppet and a Philadelphia Orchestra poster in an open room upstairs. The connection feels electric. Logan's suspicion intensifies, especially after Pulcinella's office is found to be bugged and the killer's precision implies someone methodical, patient and theatrically minded. Denton seems to fit the old wound too well. For Logan, it all starts collapsing into one answer: the Philly killer has resurfaced, moved in next door, and folded himself into his life.

Meanwhile the revenge campaign continues. Pulcinella meets Sanderson in the unfinished **Excelsior** office development to discuss the killings, convinced they are dealing with an angry boyfriend or husband connected to Lucia. He thinks he can still contain it. He cannot. A masked figure steps from the plastic sheeting and shoots Pulcinella in the chest. Later, when the detectives arrive, Pulcinella is found suspended high above the floor, throat cut, eyes covered, body spread like another marionette. On the wall is the phrase "**HALF-MOON FOR A SON.**" Again the symbolism is opaque on first glance but connected to lineage, inheritance and paternity. For the audience, the pattern is closing in around Lucia's unborn child, even if Logan is still reading the crimes through the old Philadelphia case. Pulcinella survives long enough to whisper the word "**Blinkley**" before dying, confirming that Lucia is the root of everything.

The break comes with science. Becker's long-awaited **RFLP DNA** result on Lucia's unborn child finally lands, and it points not to Sanderson, not to Reardon, but to **Richard Evans**. The polite, grieving social worker was not just handling Lucia's file. He was sleeping with her. He was the father of the child. In that instant, the murders reorganise themselves. The

killer is not the faceless, city-wide phantom Logan has been obsessing over. He is a man moving through a much more intimate logic: avenging Lucia and their unborn child by killing the men responsible for her death and exploitation. The puppet staging, the eye removal, the theatrical blood messages — all of it now reads not as arbitrary signature but as fury made ritual. Evans is not killing at random. He is forcing a corrupt city to look at what it has done.

Even so, Logan reaches the endgame still partly blinded by Denton. When Sanderson panics and flees home, the race to stop the next killing begins. Logan arrives first at Sanderson's house and walks into a trap. Sanderson is bound to a chair. A warning flickers across his face. A gunshot tears into Logan, sending him tumbling down the stairs. The killer removes his goggles and mask: **Richard Evans**. The revelation is clean and brutal. Logan crawls bleeding through Sanderson's kitchen while Evans methodically follows the blood trail, fires into the pantry, attacks him and finally stands over him with a gun. When Logan asks why, Evans answers with a single word: **"Retribution."** He is not interested in escape or psychotic self-expression. He is exacting judgment. Malik arrives in time to shoot Evans dead and save Logan's life.

The immediate case collapses into clarity. Sanderson's career is over. Pulcinella is dead. The corrupt patrolmen are exposed. Lucia's avenger is stopped. Logan, wounded and exhausted, admits the truth: **"I got it so wrong."** Malik does not humiliate him for it. Instead he helps him to his feet — literally and professionally. This moment completes the real emotional arc of the film. Logan began by dismissing Malik as a passenger. He ends alive because Malik stayed in the fight and saw clearly when Logan could not. The title's second meaning finally resolves: the real "rising star" of the film is not the drug poisoning the city, but the younger detective who may yet redeem the work Logan no longer knows how to carry alone.

But *Rising Star* does not end there, because the script is too interested in unfinished evil for neat closure. In the aftermath, on a bright school baseball field, Logan, Malik and the Ford family sit together watching Callum at bat. There is light, normalcy, domestic relief. Malik even jokes that Logan was lucky Denton did not press charges. Logan's suspicion of his neighbour appears to have been the paranoid misfire of a wounded detective seeing ghosts where there were none. The film seems, for a moment, to be allowing him partial peace. Then it cuts back to Denton's house. Alone, calm, he hangs the Philadelphia Orchestra poster back on the wall, concealing a hidden glass jar full of preserved human eyes. The truth clicks into place with ice-cold precision: Logan was wrong about Denton as the killer of Lucia's revenge murders, but not wrong about what Denton is. **Peter Denton is the original Philadelphia killer — the one Logan never caught.** He has been living next door all along, smiling over beers, fixing bicycles, and watching the detective live beside him in ignorance.

That ending is what gives the film its deeper power. The city's present corruption case is solved, but Logan's older failure survives. One monster is dead, but another remains untouched, hidden behind suburban manners and neighbourly charm. Lucia receives a form of justice through the revelation of the men who destroyed her and the death of the man who avenged her too violently. But Logan is left with something more unsettling than defeat: the knowledge that he was wrong in the particulars and right in the nightmare. Evil was nearby all along — just not the version he was investigating.

Themes

At its core, *Rising Star* is about **corruption as performance**. Sanderson performs morality. Pulcinella performs business respectability. Hillcroft and Kershaw perform law and order. Even Evans performs professional care while carrying an intimate secret and a murderous agenda. The killer's use of marionette imagery literalises that idea: these men are puppets being exposed as puppets, manipulated by greed, appetite, cowardice and illusion.

It is also a story about **who gets treated as disposable**. Lucia Binkley is poor, female, a mother, an escort, pregnant, and entangled with powerful men who believe her death can be cleaned up and filed away. Evans' revenge is monstrous, but it grows out of the script's moral insistence that Lucia was not collateral. She was the axis around which this whole city of male power turned — until someone refused to let it keep turning unnoticed.

Finally, the film is about **misrecognition and unfinished evil**. Logan solves the case only after misreading it, projecting an old ghost onto a present crime. Yet the script does not punish him by making his instincts entirely wrong. It punishes him more cruelly by making them partly right. Denton really is a killer — just not this one. The result is a noir ending in the purest sense: justice is achieved, but incompletely; truth is uncovered, but not exhausted.

Closing Statement

Rising Star is a dark, muscular crime thriller with urban rot, serial-killer ritual and a strong emotional spine. It begins as a vice-and-corruption investigation, transforms into a revenge-driven murder mystery, and ends on a double revelation that leaves the audience satisfied and unnerved in equal measure. At one level, it is about a city of corrupt men finally being dragged into the light. At another, it is about a detective who stops one killer only to discover that the ghost he has been chasing for years has been drinking beer on the porch next door.