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## DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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<b>TITLE:</b>	TANGO	<b>FORMAT:</b>	Screenplay
<b>WRITER:</b>	XXXXX	<b>GENRE:</b>	Historical Romance
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Buenos Aires, Paris	<b>PERIOD:</b>	1976 - 1984
<b>BUDGET:</b>	US \$8-10 million	<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	25+ yrs (primarily female)
<b>ANALYST:</b>	The Script Connection	<b>DATE:</b>	October 2006

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**Logline:** During Argentina's Dirty War, a young, naïve tango dancer is falsely imprisoned, where she endures physical torture and a devastating miscarriage before escaping to Paris with the help of a young military guard. Once the military junta is defeated, she returns to Argentina and, through the help of the guard, who is now her lover, learns the shocking truth about her baby prompting her to search for her among the "disappeared" in order to put the past behind her for good.

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### Development Summary:

There is something quite engaging about this screenplay, which is full of excitement, passion and suspense. The concept is appealing and Graciela's struggle for survival is exciting; the danger and complexity of her world is richly drawn. While there is a lot to praise, the biggest challenges facing this screenplay include the following: focusing the narrative in the second half of the story and further developing the central protagonist's emotional arc so that the resolution of the plot brings her character journey full circle as well.

While the loss-of-innocence theme is a common element in many political/biographical dramas, TANGO's premise offers a glimpse at a lesser known period of history through the eyes of an intriguing female protagonist, thereby offering a potentially fresh perspective on a familiar story. With a more defined central character journey and a streamlined story design, this project offers a contemporary resonance amidst recent box office offerings such as Rabbit Proof Fence, Hotel Rwanda or Catch A Fire.

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### Structural Breakdown:

#### First Act

- Establish: The backdrop of Argentina's Dirty War where state-sponsored violence against dissident citizens is carried out between 1976 and 1983 by the military junta.
- GRACIELA, the central character, is a naïve, young tango dancer who is newly wed to student political activist, JUAN CARLOS.
- She spends much of her time dancing and teaching at Gardel's, the local Tango club, which is run by the avuncular ESTEBAN, a surrogate father-figure and famous tango dancer.
- Juan Carlos is arrested for setting fire to a government building; he is shot dead while trying to escape. Graciela is rounded up and thrown in jail by military police (inciting incident).

#### Second Act

- Military guards use torture to force Graciela to give up information about her husband's activities and co-conspirators; she claims innocence.
- Shortly after arriving, Graciela gets sick and discovers that she's pregnant; her condition gains the attention of a military commander ARAGON, who insists that she be moved to a "more comfortable" wing and assigns her a new prison guard, JORGE, a young apologist for the military regime.
- Fueled by guilt and anger, Graciela spars with Jorge over his complicity with the military junta. As the months pass, Jorge gains sympathy for Graciela's plight and begins to question his own blind allegiance.
- After a painful labor, Graciela is told by the nurses that her baby did not survive the birth.
- No longer of any use to the regime, Aragon orders Graciela's execution; Jorge is assigned the task.

#### Third Act:

- With Jorge's help, Graciela escapes to Paris where she and Jorge join other Argentinean exiles.
- After the Junta is defeated and civilian elections are held, Graciela and Jorge return to Buenos Aires and try to pick up the pieces of their lives.
- Graciela begins working with Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and the plight of the "disappeared"; however, she is unwilling to consider that her baby was one of many who were kidnapped and raised by military families.
- Through Jorge's support she finally decides to search for her daughter.
- She finds her daughter, who has been raised by the barren wife of a military officer. Though difficult, she makes peace with her past and teaches her daughter to tango.

### **Concept:**

The concept of this coming-of-age political drama features the lead character's traumatic journey into adulthood against the backdrop of Argentina's Dirty War. We watch her journey from innocent dance teacher, with no real concern or awareness of the growing civil unrest, to political prisoner to passionate campaigner for the rights of others as she finds her "disappeared" daughter. Through the climax of the story, Graciela experiences the final test of her character's journey. By confronting the truth about her daughter she is finally able to resolve her emotional turmoil about the past.

### **Structure**

The screenplay follows a linear pattern of events within a three-act narrative structure covering approximately eight years in the life of the central character, GRACIELA. Her story is central and her p.o.v. fuels the narrative for most of the story. The inciting incident and causal events of the first half of Act II are quite compelling; however, the narrative weight of Graciela's experiences in prison, her years as an exile in Paris, and her return to Buenos Aires is currently out of balance.

By placing her prison escape at the end of Act II, with a large part of the narrative yet to explore, the writer has created a crisis point in Graciela's physical journey that doesn't coincide with her emotional transformation that comes much later in her story. This imbalance creates an uneasy tension between character journey and plot.

### **Plot (including dramatic stakes, twists, reversals, subplots and pace)**

The dramatic stakes in this story are established early on and resonate at various levels throughout the plot: the civil crisis in Buenos Aires is immediately established in the opening sequence; the murder of Graciela's husband brings the crisis closer to home; and, the dramatic stakes rise even further with Graciela's arrest, physical torture and miscarriage. The reveal of Graciela's pregnancy (by her husband) creates a strong twist in the narrative and propels the story in a new direction thereafter. With the later news that her baby died at birth the plot reverses, thereby establishing the emotional dynamic that will mirror Graciela's physical journey. However, the dramatic stakes lose their intensity after she escapes from prison and her story feels less motivated and urgent because it's not entirely clear what she wants/strives for until she receives news that her daughter may still be alive.

The first half of the story moves at a fairly appropriate pace; however, after Graciela's prison escape the pace becomes sluggish and slightly unfocused as a result of the narrative imbalance mentioned earlier.

As the story focuses solely on Graciela's plight, the lack of any well-developed sub-plots is a short-coming of the project, diminishing the opportunity to explore parallel story lines and bring some of the main characters into sharper relief.

### **Genre**

TANGO shares many elements with similar-themed political dramas set against the backdrop of 20<sup>th</sup> conflicts, such as: VERONICA GUERIN, IMAGINING ARGENTINA, and HOTEL RWANDA. The opening new footage sequence lends the story an added air of authenticity.

### **Tone**

The tone of the story remains dramatic throughout. The nature of the subject matter is inherently dramatic; the fact that it's based on actual events adds to the somber tone of the piece. Finding a way to bring some levity or light relief into the project would go a long way in expanding its potential audience.

### **World of the Story**

This period in South American history is riveting and dynamic. The writer does a great job of setting up the world of this story, both in its setting and design. The added use of opening news footage creates added texture. However, descriptions could be more vivid, especially when it comes to the world of tango dancing.

### **Characterization**

#### **Graciela**

Her coming-of-age journey is compelling and we are immediately pulled into her perilous adventure. She is a likable character, but she's not yet a memorable one. Yes, we're concerned for her safety during the second act of the story, but never really understand how these events have shaped her emotionally and psychologically. We can guess what she's feeling, but the writer needs to dramatise this further. Graciela's emotional journey should be just as rich and developed as her physical journey to survive prison and return to Buenos Aires. In fact, her emotional journey should motivate the necessary personal transformation that makes the resolution of the story possible.

#### **Jorge**

His story is also potentially quite intriguing for different reasons. A soldier who willfully allows himself to be used by the repressive junta, only to find himself falling for one of his detainees is certainly dramatic, if not a bit clichéd. The initial antagonism between Jorge and Graciela lacks believable antagonism. Rather than being overly naïve (like Graciela), giving Jorge a deliberate counter opinion will create the basis for more plausible conflict and represent alternative attitudes about the political situation.

### Esteban

This is a fabulous character that lacks any sort of real definition, but which could play a substantive role in the narrative. He's the voice of reason and wisdom who understands the impetuosity of youth and has channeled his own frustrations and aspirations into Gardel's. He understands the restorative and redemptive power of tango, and his words of advice and guidance could be much more pivotal in Graciela's story.

### Dialogue

In general, the dialogue is clear and is mainly used to advance the plot. While certain characters have distinct speech patterns (i.e. Aragon, Pilar, etc.), there is not enough differentiation between characters – they each need a specific “voice.” Additionally, the dialogue needs to convey more emotion and less plotting.

### Marketability

Even though small “political” movies traditionally have a tough time at the box office, there seems to be a slight wind-change about stories that take place against the backdrop of 20<sup>th</sup> century civil unrest. Recent films like SYRIANA, CATCH A FIRE, HOTEL RWANDA, RABBIT PROOF FENCE or BABEL show that there is an audience for this type of film and that audiences are more receptive to movies about “social issues.” However, the real test for these films is whether they feature an engaging, emotional character journey at their core – someone audiences will relate to and cheer for regardless of political or personal ideologies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In consideration of the above analysis of your project according to industry standards, here is a list of recommendations generated specifically for you to aid the development of your screenplay.

### First Act

#### Establish Graciela as a dynamic, three-dimensional protagonist:

What if Juan Carlos is Graciela's brother, not her husband? To address the issue of believability in the Graciela/Jorge relationship and to develop further the emotional stakes for Graciela, try making Juan Carlos her brother and not her husband. This way, you won't risk audience empathy for Graciela as she begins to reciprocate feelings for Jorge. Additionally, this allows you to establish her point of view in sharper relief at the beginning of the story. Perhaps the contrast between siblings is historical, and Gardel's is the only place where sister and brother find common ground. All of this will define Graciela's character more clearly and make her reaction to Juan Carlo's death even more profound.

Develop Graciela's character arc by testing her naiveté early in the story: To do this, we recommend having Graciela picked up by the police in the first act believing that her brother is still alive. Perhaps the military guards promise to release him if she tells the truth. Then, when she tells them all she knows, they cruelly inform her that her brother is already dead. You can shape her journey more powerfully if you show the consequences of her childlike innocence in a world that no longer accommodates such youthful idealism. This will also lay the dramatic foundation for her transformation from childlike innocence to a more pragmatic, even cynical view of the world.

### **Second Act**

Raise the emotional stakes in the story: Graciela and Jorge:

Jorge seems too good to be true – a soldier for the horrible regime with a heart of gold. Instead, give him a belief system that contradicts Graciela's. Though a young man, he believes he is doing the right thing. Give Jorge and Graciela more points of conflict in their initial interaction. Don't make it too easy for them to begin to see each other in a different light.

Graciela's escape is more exciting if she has to flee alone. Consider having Jorge take a bullet during Graciela's escape so that she flees to Paris believing he's dead. This would mean eliminating Jorge from the Paris section and condensing it altogether, as it's not as central to Graciela's journey and Jorge's presence diminishes the mystery and suspense as to whether the lovers will be reunited back in Argentina.

Create a more compelling mid-point and get the story back in balance:

This is the point where the central character usually gets closest to his/her goal, only to encounter further and more difficult challenges in the second part of Act II. For Graciela's story, a natural dividing line occurs once she escapes. Now that the physical danger is over, she must battle the emotional perils that threaten to keep her from becoming a whole person – which hinders her character's transformation. Because the story isn't over when she escapes, there is a natural "before" and "after" element that needs to be reflected in the story structure accordingly.

### **Third Act**

Bring Focus to Act III – Streamline the Paris section:

Even though it's factually consistent that many political refugees fled to Paris, this section of the story doesn't add anything to Graciela's story. It doesn't raise the stakes and it keeps her away from the obstacles/challenges awaiting her back in Argentina. Consider shortening this section to one or two scenes (or delete it altogether) with the specific purpose of giving Graciela a goal for the final act of the story.

Keep Graciela Active in Act III:

Graciela should be the one who searches for Jorge. If this is part of the healing process then she needs to do something about, rather than wait passively for Jorge to find her.

Clarify that Graciela's initial reluctance to search for her baby is not out of passivity, but that it represents the deepest wound she must confront in order to be truly healed by the end of the story. Jorge's presence gives her support, but she must confront this final (and biggest) obstacle alone. By doing so, Graciela will show the audience the depth of her character's growth.

Graciela's return to Argentina should be a journey of self-discovery:

Currently, it's clear that Graciela is a changed woman when she returns to Argentina. However, there is only a hint that she has been so broken by her experiences that she cannot even find solace in tango dancing. There is a terrific opportunity here to use her relationship with Esteban and with her dancing to show us more clearly what she's thinking and feeling. If dancing was such a key part of her life, then dramatize the emptiness more clearly and show her unable to dance – to find herself. This sets up the final leg of her journey back to Jorge and towards the possibility that her daughter is still alive.

**Overall**

Let the beauty of tango dancing be a consistent motif in Graciela's story:

There are wonderful opportunities in this story to elevate the role of tango dancing beyond its current function. Think of how tango can represent the heart and soul of your characters, and how through dancing people express their inner most emotions. Let Esteban be a guide for Graciela, both her dancing teacher and her mentor. His club, Gardel's is a place where the community gathers, supports one another, shares artistic beauty and steels itself against the changing political tide. Tango is the one thing that remains consistent in Graciela's story. Her journey back to Argentina should be her journey back to tango.

Since these scenes work on a narrative and thematic level ('tango is about expressing what you are afraid to say out loud'), the audience wants a more specific sense of what the dance looks like and how it affects the characters when they are dancing.

Enhance the dialogue to create more meaning in the story:

Too much of the dialogue is used to tell the story (exposition), which renders many scenes and conversations inauthentic. The writer needs to have confidence that the audience stay abreast of the narrative, and utilize the dialogue to convey emotion and reveal motivation. Employing more sub-text will allow you to expand character dimension, reveal hidden or unspoken emotions, and bring vitality and realism to character interaction.