

In Proximity
Season 3 Episode 6
Steve Gehrke
Final Transcript

Steve Gehrke: 1988, '89, meeting Chris, 30-year-old little punk kid. There, I said it. Sorry, Chris. Read Memento. I was floored by it. So, when I met with Chris, he asked me how I liked the script. And I said, "It's the best script I've ever read." Explained to him just like I explained to you, "The story starts here. The story starts here, and it goes like that."

[BELL DINGS] And he hired me on the spot.

[00:23 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today, we're talking to the Sinners script supervisor. Better take some notes. [PENCIL SCRATCHING] Steve Gehrke is a veteran script supervisor. He's been in the business a long time, working with the likes of Christopher Nolan and Ryan Coogler. In fact, his first project with Christopher Nolan was Memento. His most recent, The Odyssey.

On this episode, Steve walks us through his career, things he's learned as a script supervisor, and the craft of what he does. And he'll also walk us through a scene in Sinners, specifically the scene where we first meet the twins, Smoke and Stack, played by Michael B. Jordan. In the film, you know that there's quite a bit of continuity to keep track of with those two characters played by the same one actor. So Steve's going to walk us through his process for keeping track of that in his script.

So we'll see his script. He's going to bring it out. And he also takes notes with a pencil still, which is super interesting and cool to see exactly how he marks up his script.

And for those who don't know what exactly a script supervisor does, again, we'll get into it on the show, but at the very basic level, let's say you have an actor and they pick up a mug like this. [PAOLA PICKS UP MUG IN RIGHT HAND] Steve's job is to keep track of that action and make sure that across every take, they pick it up with the same hand so it doesn't look like this. [CUTS TO SHOT OF PAOLA HOLDING MUG IN LEFT HAND]

So we'll get into it on this episode. Get your pencils out, even your scripts, take notes. Here's my conversation with Steve Gehrke.

[PAOLA SIPS FROM MUG IN RIGHT HAND, CUT TO PAOLA SIPPING FROM MUG IN LEFT HAND]

[CROWD OOHS AND AHS]

[BELL DINGS]

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Paola Mardo: Steve Gehrke, welcome to In Proximity. Thanks for being here today.

Steve Gehrke: Thank you very much for having me.

Paola Mardo: You've just shared some really fun stories with us before we started officially rolling. I'm sure we'll get to more of them as we go. But before we start, we have a little surprise for you. We asked someone in your work life, I guess, to send a surprise question. So I'm going to play that.

Steve Gehrke: Oh, boy.

Paola Mardo: And we'll find out who it is.

Steve Gehrke: No pressure.

Paola Mardo: And then we will ask you to answer the question. You ready?

Steve Gehrke: As I'll ever be.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO]

Emma Thomas: Hi, Steve. It's Emma Thomas here. We've gone from seeing you every day for months on end to suddenly not seeing you for a couple of weeks, and I miss you! I hope you've managed to put your feet up. Anyway, I have a question for you.

So every film seems to have its own challenges for different departments, but I'm really interested to know what challenges you when you read a script? What are the things that make you quake in your boots, or maybe excited for the challenge? You know, you immediately see as red flags in the script that are going to be challenging to you as a script supervisor. I'm very interested to hear your answer and to—to hear all your wisdom. Bye.

[CLIP ENDS]

[LAUGHTER]

Steve Gehrke: That was a surprise.

Paola Mardo: Yay! For listeners—and viewers, we'll throw the image up and name—but can you say who that is?

Steve Gehrke: That is Emma Thomas. She is the producer of all of Chris Nolan's films and the producer of his four children. As people will find out, I've had 40 years in the business, and nowadays, things don't upset me because I kind of think I've seen it all. But early on, it's like, you're just happy to be in the game. It's like, okay, give me the script. Yes, I want to read it. Yes!

And then you try to read every single word and every single thing, and you just try to get familiar with it. And as you get on, there's more things to just knowing the script. I don't need to know the words. The words are important to the story, but now, when I read a script—spoiler alert—I don't care about the words, so to speak, because I know that during the filming and during reading, I will know the words. But I use the words just to see if there's any continuity that I need to go back and forth.

But if you learn the words, directors are just going to change them on the day. So I focus on the structure and the integrity of the story. You know, what is the intent? A to B to C to D. In Chris Nolan world, it's F and Q and R and L and P and A and B. So I was very blessed, I want to say 1988—1988, '89 meeting Chris, 30-year-old little punk kid. There, I said it. Sorry, Chris.

And read Memento, and I was floored by it. Yes, it's out of order. Yes, it's a structure unlike anybody had seen before, and it was so engaging to me that I understood it because in film, everything is flat and linear, and we have to tell the story so that people will understand it. In real life, we have three dimensions. So I know where everybody is in the room, and I don't have to worry about screen direction or story or, or anything.

But with Memento, it's like the movie starts here at the beginning, and the movie starts here at the end, and during the course of the story, it goes like that. [POINTING A FINGER ON EACH HAND AND BRINGING THEM TO CROSS EACH OTHER]

Paola Mardo: And for listeners just who aren't watching this, basically Steve's got one finger up on one side, one on the other, left and right, and then he crosses them over like the story kind of does in the movie.

Steve Gehrke: And people watching it the first time are like, "This is crazy! What's going on? I'm, I'm so confused. Oh, I'm in a movie to be entertained, but now you're making me think." And I think that's the—the lasting impression that people will have of Chris Nolan, that every movie that we do makes you think.

In Inception, there's like five or six different levels of dreams. Those are all different places and time in life. Dunkirk had three different stories: land, sea, and air. Each one, we'd see differently, and as a viewer, you would know, "Oh, yeah, this is what I'm watching. This is now from a different perspective." So it's the same event, three different places, and it converges.

So every movie has a different structure. You get a romantic comedy, it's like, okay, boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, girl dumps boy, whatever. You know, we—but that's popcorn movies, and that's what we love, action movies. But it's like, movies that make you think. That's—that's what I like.

So I don't think I've answered any question, but—

Paola Mardo: No, it's okay. I have—I was following the timelines here.

Steve Gehrke: But so, when I met with Chris, he asked me how I liked the script. And I said, "It's the best script I ever read," and I didn't say that just to get a job. But I explained to him just like I explained to you, the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

Steve Gehrke: And...

Paola Mardo: So you did that, and you explained to him that's what you saw in the script.

Steve Gehrke: And he hired me on the spot.

[8:18 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about your collaboration with Christopher Nolan? When you guys work together, like, at what point do you jump on board, and what's your process for getting ready for production?

Steve Gehrke: I know that the projects happen like every couple of years, and they usually start in January. So I always kind of keep my schedule clear as much as I can for these moments. I just listen to crew members going, "Oh, we're starting up," or, "Oh," you know—I knew about *The Odyssey* while we were filming *Sinners* because we used IMAX cameras on *Sinners*, and Christopher Nolan uses IMAX cameras, and there's only six cameras in the world.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Steve Gehrke: So it's kind of easy to keep track of where the cameras are. And while we were filming, I had heard, "Oh, Chris is reserving the cameras." Well, that tells me that, okay, they're going to do some camera tests.

Paola Mardo: Okay, January!

Steve Gehrke: They're going to do some filming. Okay, maybe I'll keep a block open. Luckily, I've never had a scheduling conflict. I've always been available. But, you know, I don't want to

think of a world where I don't work on a Chris Nolan movie. I know that time will come, but I don't want that to—that time to come.

Paola Mardo: Well, when we first met before this conversation, actually, you mentioned Memento was you guys' first project, but there are at least two films that you guys didn't work on together, and then you came on board. Could you talk about that?

Steve Gehrke: Chris went and did Insomnia in Canada. And so he was only able to bring the DP and the editor along. And then he did Batman Begins in London, and again, they had to use mostly, you know, British crew.

Paola Mardo: Local.

Steve Gehrke: They did a small unit in Chicago for a month, but they took a lot of the British crew with them. And then, after that, I got a phone call that, hey, Chris wants me to work on The Prestige. And I've been with him ever since.

Paola Mardo: Incredible.

Steve Gehrke: So, as of now, it's a 25-year relationship, so.

Paola Mardo: Wow. That's incredible. That's like—

Steve Gehrke: Yeah. So, until he says “no” on the next one, I guess I'll have a 27-year relationship.

Paola Mardo: Fingers crossed.

Steve Gehrke: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So The Odyssey marks 25 years of you guys' working collaboration?

Steve Gehrke: Yes.

Paola Mardo: I guess, besides Emma Thomas, are you the longest collaborator of Chris Nolan's or—

Steve Gehrke: Yes. Emma and Chris were dating at the time of Memento, but, yeah, I'm the longest crew member. We do have one or two other crew members who've done the same amount, our helicopter DP and our dolly grip.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Steve Gehrke: But Chris loves keeping the same people around as much as he can.

Paola Mardo: I'm curious. What's a Christopher Nolan set like and similar?

Steve Gehrke: Well, it's like, most films, let's say there's a 7:00 call time. You show up around 7:00, 7:05. You park your car. You know that there's just going to be "good mornings" and pleasantries, and it's going to take a while to set up. Then the actors come, and then they do a rehearsal, and it may be 7:30, 8:00, 8:30 before people really get ready to work.

On a Chris Nolan film, when you have a 7:00 a.m. call time, you're filming by 7:15. You know this, you learn this, and you park your car a little bit earlier. You come to work a little bit earlier. You go to breakfast on your own time. They're not paying you to eat. 7:00, you're ready, you're on the clock. 7:00 AM, you be ready.

Paola Mardo: Your process for preparing for the film—I think before we chatted, you said, like, you get called on board usually about two weeks before. Is that typically what it is?

Steve Gehrke: I may get called in a month ahead of time.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Steve Gehrke: But I don't have to start breaking down the script until two weeks in advance.

Paola Mardo: Why is that? Because things change or—

Steve Gehrke: Somebody decided that that's all it takes, I think studios and stuff. But they obviously never met Chris Nolan. His movies take longer to digest. When I read *Tenet* for the first time—

Paola Mardo: Okay, yeah. Tell us about that.

Steve Gehrke: It's like, I read the script. I set it down. I closed it. And I walked around the Warner Bros. lot for about 45 minutes to just understand what I just read. And I didn't understand a lot. I walked back, I read it a second time, and I learned less. Every time I was reading it, I was learning less, and less, and less about what the story was.

And it wasn't until I talked to a couple of people, and they said, "Well, this is what we're going to do, and we're going to film in the camera backwards, and we're going to have actors walking backwards sometimes," or they have actors walking forwards. And so, again, it goes back to Chris's time manipulation and filmmaking prowess. So, of course, I understood it by the time it took, but the first day, no.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Steve Gehrke: It's like, I don't think anybody can understand something the first day they read it.

Paola Mardo: I appreciate you saying that because I feel like, especially in, in, I think, the film industry, entertainment industry, people don't like to say, like, oh, they don't understand or they don't know. But it's like, sometimes you just don't. Sometimes you need to read it a couple times and talk to people, like you said, to really fully digest.

Steve Gehrke: I think that's why they gave me two weeks to get ready.

[LAUGHTER]

[13:57 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So what is your process for breaking down, like, a nonlinear script from Christopher Nolan or whoever? Like, how do you actually keep track of all those little details so that you're ready on set.

Steve Gehrke: A lot of reading. A lot of writing down, if this happens, then this happens, and if this happens, then this happened. But what I'll do is I'll, I'll take the script, I'll type everything up, I'll change each script into, like, one sentence, what that scene is about.

Paola Mardo: When you say, "I'll type everything up," what are you typing? Like, the scenes or—

Steve Gehrke: So I'll type down my breakdown. So I'll start with Scene 1.

Paola Mardo: Gotcha .

Steve Gehrke: I'll go, "Exterior farm, day, the characters walk out of the barn," let's say.

Paola Mardo: Got it.

Steve Gehrke: And I'll do that for every scene, and the description, so it's the scene number, location, interior/exterior, what the location is, description of the scene, how long the scene is. Some scenes can be two pages long. Some scenes can be four-eighths of a page.

Paola Mardo: Right.

Steve Gehrke: And then, so I'll do that for every scene. I won't think of the story. I'll just mechanically do the breakdown. Most shows start with Day 1, and they go into Night 1, and they might go to Day 2 and then Day 3 and Day 4. So it's a linear representation watching the script in order, how a scene goes. But in a Chris Nolan movie, you might start with the middle of the movie. But I don't know that the first time I read it.

So I'll do the scene breakdown in linear form. And then what I'll do is I actually make paper dolls. I cut each strip, and then I just move the strips around to where they fit in the story. So, at any moment, I can have just the whole script all over the place in like hundreds of little strips. And I will move the strip: this happens first, this happens second, this happens third.

Paola Mardo: And this is on a desk, on a wall. Like, what are you—

Steve Gehrke: I've done it on walls.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Steve Gehrke: You know, I've also done index cards, you know, just figuring out where everything is. So once I'm familiar with the order of the story, now I compile that breakdown together, and now I have a story order breakdown. Now I know what Day 1 is, now I know what Day 2 is, now I know what Night 4 is.

Paola Mardo: Right.

Steve Gehrke: That helps costumes, makeup, hair to let everybody know the real story if we were filming it in—

Paola Mardo: In story order.

Steve Gehrke: In conventional order, this is what happens first, which is invaluable, you know? So it's an extra level of breakdown.

Paola Mardo: And it's important, just for folks who are maybe not as familiar, because like, for example, for costumes, you know, oh, they're going to wear this outfit here, but, you know, by this point, they're changing. And even though, in the screenplay, maybe that first scene happens in the middle. This other scene happens at the beginning. At least I know the order of the clothing—

Steve Gehrke: Right.

Paola Mardo:—and can kind of plan around that.

Steve Gehrke: So I'm filming, in my mind, the story order breakdown, whereas Chris is filming and will edit the version that is in the script, which is pieced together in various flashbacks or memories or, you know, his storytelling. And then my breakdown is, well, what came first, the chicken or the egg?

Paola Mardo: Right. Right.

Steve Gehrke: You know, and everything's up for interpretation. So I'll do the breakdown. Then I'll go to him, and I'll say, you know, "This is what I think." You know, it's like, we're both looking at the same material, but it's like, I just want his blessing that, yes, this happens before this, this happens before this. And there's still always going to be interpretation. In his mind, he knows—he already knows what he's doing.

Paola Mardo: Right. It all makes sense and thne—I mean, you wrote it.

Steve Gehrke: Yeah. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: But it's your job to basically—and I actually want to get into this because the script supervisor—I just produced my first short film. So I learned, like, very much how closely and how important a script supervisor and director should be working, right? Because the director has that vision and the story, but it's your job to really make sure the story is told correctly. And also, the team can kind of film things in a way that makes narrative sense. Is that right?

Steve Gehrke: Yeah.

[18:42 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Script supervising, for those who do not know, what is your job on a film set? Like, how would you describe that to someone who just doesn't work in filmmaking or entertainment?

Steve Gehrke: Yeah. No, that's a good question. I like to consider myself the on-set editor. So I take notes of every shot, how long each shot is, when an actor has something in their left hand, when they have it in their right hand, when they have body contact, when they hug each other, when they kiss. Do they kiss to the left? Do they kiss to the right? And when you shoot the other side of the coverage, does the kiss match, you know?

A lot of times, actors will know all this stuff. They do—they match their continuity. But there's many times when they go, "Oh, did I lean over to the left side or did I go to the right side?" You know?

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Wow. I'd never thought about keeping track of kisses onscreen. That's detail.

Steve Gehrke: Yeah, because everybody hugs differently. You know, if you have a partner, you probably always go to one side or the other just out of comfort. But when you have new people, there's always that little hesitation like, "Which side do I go on?" you know, but you only have to do it once. But in film, you may have to do it 6, 8, 10 times.

Paola Mardo: Several times.

Steve Gehrke: So repetition helps an actor, but by the same token, I'm their safety net. You know, I always, you know, liken myself to a trapeze in the circus.

Paola Mardo: Trapeze in a circus?

Steve Gehrke: They have a safety net for those people. They do their job. I'm the safety net.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Yeah. You don't feel like you're the ringmaster? Just, like—

Steve Gehrke: Not at all. I—I am the safety net.

Paola Mardo: Cool.

Steve Gehrke: However, the safety net, by design, has holes in it. So even I mess up sometimes, you know?

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Steve Gehrke: But we're there to catch. And it's important to catch while you're in the same setup. If—

Paola Mardo: You mean camera setup, right?

Steve Gehrke: In the same camera setup.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Steve Gehrke: Like, while we're doing somebody's closeup, if they do something different, don't wait until two hours later and go, "You know, we did that wrong." It's like, you got to be watching every single take, and you've got to notice the imperfections in every single take. And if somebody has something in their left hand, and now they have it in their right hand, or if they don't have something, or now they don't have a jacket on when they should have a jacket on, you have to speak up and say something right away because then you can just do another take. And it's like, "Oh, good, he saved the day!"

Paola Mardo: Right.

Steve Gehrke: But if you don't and—

Paola Mardo: And your camera's set up differently, then it's like—

Steve Gehrke: Then it—then it waits until the editor calls and says, "You know, we're watching the scene, and they're not wearing a jacket in this scene." Oh!

Paola Mardo: Oh, man.

Steve Gehrke: You know, that's the phone call you don't ever want to hear.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Do you have like—you know how, I guess, DPs have, like, a shot list? Do you have sort of a list of things that you look out for with every take?

Steve Gehrke: Don't have a list. A mental list, I have a mental list. But it's like, that's what watching the rehearsals and seeing what the actors do and going, okay, on this line of dialogue, they're walking over to go do this. So then I watch during the takes, and, okay, well, they seem to be matching. You know, it's like, there is a little bit of play in performance, and continuity is not hard cuts, but there are many times when, you know, continuity is a big issue. Table scenes, for example. You got eight people at a dinner table.

Paola Mardo: Oh, yes.

Steve Gehrke: And now, you know, you've got—

Paola Mardo: Like, the water in the cups, different levels.

Steve Gehrke: You've got three people on this side, three people on this side, two people on the ends. And now the camera's just going to go around and just film everybody, and they need to pass the water, they need to pass the rolls, they need to—

Paola Mardo: Yes.

Steve Gehrke: They have to have their own sense of continuity. You know, there's many actors that don't have that sense of continuity, and it makes it difficult in editing. So the key in food scenes is get your master, everybody sees where everybody's looking. You go in, you get everybody's closeups, and you know which side of the camera they should be looking. That's called the, you know, 180 rule. We can get into that or not get into that.

Paola Mardo: Where you're like, all on one side of the camera, right?

Steve Gehrke: Well, people who are on one side of the room have to look a certain direction to the other side of the room. But then when you're at a table, you may look one direction for one actor and then the other side for the other. So it's my job to just keep—

Paola Mardo: Keep track.

Steve Gehrke:—the continuity of, no, in this angle, they look this way, so they need to keep looking this way. So that's a big part of our job, too, is eyelines. They'll constantly say, you know,

hey, where should they be looking? So now I'm involved with the script. Now I'm involved with the making of the show, and I'm involved with the continuity.

What I love about my job is that I get to be involved in every department: hair, makeup, wardrobe, lighting. If a light is turned on in the background and it got turned off, I'm supposed to be the one that says, "Hey, that light's supposed to be on." It's not my job to go turn the light on.

Paola Mardo: Right.

Steve Gehrke: But it's my job to remember.

[24:25 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Let's talk about Sinners. How did you—how'd you end up working on the film?

Steve Gehrke: I was working in Atlanta on a show. Got a phone call from Will Greenfield, producer, says that he's got a movie and, you know, he thinks I'd be perfect for it. But I had to interview with Ryan on a Zoom call.

Paola Mardo: Was this your first time meeting?

Steve Gehrke: First time meeting was on Zoom. And—

Paola Mardo: And had you read the script already or not yet?

Steve Gehrke: Yes, I had already read the script. I thought it was a wonderful script, a great, original idea.

Paola Mardo: Can I stop you right there? As someone who's read many scripts and has—you have such a close relationship with it. You just called it a "great, original idea." Yeah, what was it about it that made you think, "Oh, yeah, I'll take this Zoom call with Ryan Coogler? Oh, yeah, I'm interested in this?"

Steve Gehrke: The story's not a book. The story's not historical facts. The story is interpretative, creative, having one character play brothers, you know. At the time when I read the script, I thought that that was the hook of the whole show. But watching the show, Michael was so seamless and, and brilliant, you forget that it's the same person.

Paola Mardo: So you get the script, and you're like, "Interested in this." And then you get on a Zoom with Ryan. And what was that meeting like?

Steve Gehrke: So, so now I've read the script. I understand the story. I haven't done a vampire movie since the early '90s, and I'm just like—

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Steve Gehrke: Wow, this is humor and serious, you know, tones.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Yeah.

Steve Gehrke: And the only way to play this movie is to play it real, you know, and that's how we did. But just talking to Ryan about the script, and I could just tell it was a passion project for him. You know, yes, he's done a couple of, you know, big movies. This was, like, going back to his Fruitvale Station where I was like, you know, "This is—this is a filmmaker. This is back to being just raw and not being a popcorn movie."

As it turned out, I think it is a popcorn movie because everyone has seen it. So there's been a lot of popcorn—

Paola Mardo: Multiple times, apparently.

Steve Gehrke:—a lot of popcorn sold.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Steve Gehrke: But within 30 seconds, I just knew that—that I wanted to work on the project with Ryan.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Steve Gehrke: I knew of him, but I never met him. But he was just so passionate and engaging and honest and real, and I just—I just had to do—I just had to do the movie. And interesting that you bring up Christopher Nolan, and now you bring up Ryan, Ryan is the second person who's ever hired me on the spot.

Paola Mardo: Really?

Steve Gehrke: Yeah. Because most directors, they always—like, their producers tell them, "Wait. Don't just give the job." It's like, "Let's talk about it afterwards." Chris made up his mind, and Ryan made up his mind.

Paola Mardo: Wow. I guess—you said 30 seconds in, you were like, "Yeah, I want this job," but I presume you're, like, not trying to show it too much, right?

Steve Gehrke: Oh, absolutely not.

Paola Mardo: You're like, "I'm just going to take the interview."

Steve Gehrke: I just—I just want to work for Ryan because I believed in him in the 30 seconds of meeting him.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And then at what point in that Zoom call did he offer you the job?

Steve Gehrke: Before the Zoom meeting was over.

[28:04 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: What's in your script supervisor toolkit when you're on set? How do you work, or what are your must-haves?

Steve Gehrke: A lot of Kleenex—

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Steve Gehrke:—for all the tears.

[LAUGHTER]

Most script supervisors these days are digital. Everybody's jumped on the digital bandwagon. There's three or four different script programs out there. Everybody likes a different program.

Paola Mardo: What's your program?

Steve Gehrke: My program is old-school. I like to stay old-school. But nowadays, a lot of people use digital notes. They all like the computers and stuff. I still use paper and pencil to do my notes. I write down everything freehand, write it down, keep track of it. But now that takes too much time for people. Now people would rather type. Well, my feeling is if it's not broke, don't fix it.

And, you know, 40 years I've been writing my notes. You learn to develop a handwriting that other people can read so you don't have to go back and retype everything. I find that having the, the tangible script in your hand and not a computer screen, "Oh, I hit the wrong button!" "Oh, just a minute!" "Oh, oh, I just erased that." That's not going to happen with me. I've got the pages that I use for the day, put them on a clipboard. I always have the pages there. If an actor says, "Hey, can I see the script?" Boom, I hand them my clipboard. It's got the script right there.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. That's really cool. I mean, it's great—I guess it's—you adapted to modern technology, but you still have your traditional practices. It's like, you've honed your skills for so many years now, like, why change it?

Steve Gehrke: Right. But you—I have found that I've lost a few jobs because I'm not digital.

Paola Mardo: Oh, wow.

Steve Gehrke: Because editorial, they want, you know, the new—the new—

Paola Mardo: Certain programs.

Steve Gehrke: The new fad. But I feel you don't tell a hairdresser what brand of brush to use. You say, "Go get a brush."

Paola Mardo: Or they've got a brush. You know they've got a brush. You don't have to—

Steve Gehrke: Yeah, but it's like, you don't tell them which one they have to use.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

Steve Gehrke: Don't tell me how to do my job because I retain that information. By writing it down, I'm putting it to memory. If I'm just typing, it's just—it's just letters and words and characters, and you don't go back and look at it.

[30:43 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Okay. So Steve, now we're going to go through a little bit more of your process. And you've brought something to show us and talk us through. Can you talk a little bit about what this is and explain, actually, for the listeners who can't even see what this is what we're looking at right now?

Steve Gehrke: I brought the copy of the original script. The original script stays with the editors. But I've got a copy of the script that I keep with me.

Paola Mardo: And it's in a binder. It's, like, a thick script in a binder, lots of lines and numbers. And he's got his notes all over this. So specifically, we're going to go through a scene. And what scene is this?

Steve Gehrke: This was Scene 6. This is when Smoke and Stack are standing outside the lumber mill waiting for Hogwood to arrive. It's an interesting scene because we actually did some camera tests because we wanted one still frame, one master, and two people, who happened to both be Michael B. Jordan, in the frame.

So we had to shoot the frame with Michael as Stack, and then Percy Bell, our photo double, played Smoke. And so they have to interact. They have to pass a cigarette to each other. They have to light a cigarette, play with their guns. They move back and forth, they grab a bag, and then they exit frame. It all seems, you know, like a small little sequence. It's about a minute long.

Paola Mardo: And on the page itself, it's like less than half a page of script, right?

Steve Gehrke: Yeah. It's—it's literally three-eighths of a page of description.

Paola Mardo: And next to this script page are your notes. And can you explain a little bit about what this is and what it is in relation to this three-eighths of a page of script?

Steve Gehrke: Sure. Sure. On the right side of the page, we have the words of the description of the shot, and on the left side are the actual takes that we did. It shows that we did 23 takes. Not every one is complete. Sometimes the cigarette didn't light. Sometimes the eyeline wasn't correct. Sometimes the actor grabs the wrong bag at the end of the scene. So you can get through the whole scene, and you have mistakes, but we're able to redo and select. We selected Take 21, which is kind of nice. We should go to Vegas with that.

But it takes time. Things don't happen in one or two takes, but the actors had to pass the cigarettes back and forth. They had to, you know, match the action.

Paola Mardo: I just want to go back to your script page real quick. Can you talk about the lines and the squiggles? Because I am not a script supervisor, I don't see things like this often. So, like, what do those mean?

Steve Gehrke: The beginning of the scene here, there's 6 and 6A. That represented the shot of Michael and Percy, the two different coverages. Then they walked out of that frame. So the shot starts at the beginning of the scene, and it leaves when they exit the frame. Then we had—

Paola Mardo: And really quick, for the listeners, so basically you've drawn—you've notched, like, the top of that section of the script and, like, made notches at the bottom of that section, and then you draw a straight line.

Steve Gehrke: Yes, and the number at the top of the line signifies the scene and the information on the left side of the script. And then Hogwood character walks up to them, and we did six more setups of walking towards him, meeting him, two shot of Michael and Percy as Smoke and Stack, and then another setup where we changed them in costume.

So we were constantly changing costumes back and forth. It wasn't like Michael B. stayed in one character for half a day, and then we went and did the other character but that we would do wide shots, and we would do closeups. Then we would do the closeup of Hogwood. And then, like, there was a line of dialogue that was added when Hogwood says, "Follow me, fellas." So any adlibs or information, I just put it in, and then they'll use it or not use it. They easily could, you know, cut out of it if they feel the show's too long or they don't need it. But—

Paola Mardo: And what are these squiggly things? Because those fascinate me.

Steve Gehrke: The squiggle is very interesting. That means that that line of dialogue was delivered off-camera. So, like here, you see in the three shot, all lines were delivered on

camera. Now that we do a two shot, Hogwood is off-camera, so he gets a squiggle. So the microphone may not be pointing towards him. So it lets the editor know, okay, his dialogue might not be that good, but we have it in four other takes.

Paola Mardo: Is this, like, old-school scripty technique, or is this something you developed, or how did you learn?

Steve Gehrke: I did a script job once. The director said, "Hey, how'd you like to be my script supervisor." And I said, "What do I have to do?" And I ended up doing the job. I was so self-taught, it was, like, horrible. I looked at my notes later, and I was like, what was I doing?

Paola Mardo: We should've asked you to bring that. We could've compared the two.

Steve Gehrke: Oh, no. No. That one's—that one's burned.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: We will find a way.

Steve Gehrke: So then I went back to doing my regular job, which was craft service. Two completely different jobs.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. You started in craft services, right?

Steve Gehrke: I started in craft service on the—

Paola Mardo: 1984 Olympics, I read.

Steve Gehrke: 1984 Olympics.

Paola Mardo: Incredible.

Steve Gehrke: So I'm now—you know, I've done script supervising, but I go back to my safety, which is buying donuts and making coffee. And one day, they said, "Will you take the notes to the office for the script supervisor? Leave a copy at the office, and then bring the originals back?"

And I said, "Okay." And so what I did is I made an extra set for myself because I wanted to see what a real script supervisor did. And when I saw that, I was like, "I could do that job." And—

Paola Mardo: There you go.

Steve Gehrke: I guess I'm doing it.

Paola Mardo: You definitely are! I have just learned a lot from this.

Steve Gehrke: So totally self-taught. So then I read that there were books about it. And then I looked. I'm like, "Oh, I'm doing that." And it's like, just do it.

[37:11 - "Prox Recs Theme" with Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

Paola Mardo: Before we wrap, I wanted to ask, Steve, we've come to the part of the show where we ask our guest to recommend something for our audience. And it could be anything related to what you do or, honestly, just any recommendation, whatever it is, can be work-related or not. People have recommended books, podcasts, piece of advice. Do you have something that you would want to recommend as your Prox Rec?

Steve Gehrke: Well, as it related to my department, if anybody wants to learn script supervising, the best way is not to just get thrown into it like I did. But if you want to do any job in anything in this industry, find the people who are doing it, and follow them. But learn your craft before getting too deep into it because you may find out you don't like it, or you may go down the wrong hole.

But I tell everybody, you know, I've never had a day at work because I love every day.

Paola Mardo: That's the dream.

Steve Gehrke: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So, cool. That's a great piece of advice. Thank you, Steve, for being on In Proximity. I learned so much about this.

Steve Gehrke: Great. Are you going to take over my job now?

Paola Mardo: I—I don't think that's my department, but I will think about it.

Steve Gehrke: It's not for everybody.

Paola Mardo: No. But it was really cool to see your process, and I'm sure a lot of people are going to learn a lot from this. So thank you so much.

Steve Gehrke: Thank you for having me.

[36:43 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media.

The show is hosted, directed, and produced by Paola Mardo.

Executive producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, and Sev Ohanian.

Theme song and additional music by Ludwig Göransson.

Patrick Epino is our co-director and director of photography.

Ken Nana is our sound designer and mix engineer.

The production team includes Brittani Brown, Isabella Miller, and Alexandria Santana.

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[VOICEOVER ENDS]