

SERPICO (1973)

Screenwriters: Waldo Salt and Norman Wexler

Based on: Peter Maas' non-fiction book, *Serpico*.

Screenplay draft: <https://cinephiliabeyond.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Serpico-1973.06.18.pdf?x39906>

*****Act One*****

Pages 1 to 10:

New York, February 1971. The script opens in a flashforward. The protagonist, Frank Serpico (with long hair and beard – an important character note), lies bleeding in the back of a speeding police car. We can guess that he's a cop because in the next scene, a police station desk sergeant relays the news that Serpico has been shot. Someone asks if a cop did it. The reply indicates that half a dozen cops would like to.

Commentary: *Less than a page into the script, look how much we know already. This includes setting up the question/hook of why six cops would want to shoot one of their own.*

The sequence returns to the speeding cop car, as Serpico clings to life. The deputy chief inspector (DCI), Green, is called at home by a *New York Times* (NYT) reporter. They, along with Serpico's parents, head to the hospital.

We jump back to May 1960. A graduation ceremony for newly qualified police officers is taking place. The Serpico family is in attendance. The police commissioner is speaking about integrity and officers' lives and

characters being on the line. This foreshadows what is to come for Serpico.

Commentary: *Note the hefty paragraph of description inserted here (and there are other examples throughout this draft script). As a general rule, description in screenplays should be kept to four lines maximum. In fact, large chunks of text are usually off-putting for readers, who may use this as a reason to tick the dreaded 'pass' box (i.e. reject a script). Always be asking – how can I cut this passage of description down without losing impact? Likewise, Serpico's screenwriters add camera movements that you should not include – that's the director's job! The script we're using is a later draft, when additional details, such as scene numbers and omissions, are added prior to shooting.*

We flash forward to the hospital in 1971 as Serpico is being treated. Green wants to know who was with him when he got shot. A lieutenant gives him two names that we can assume are fellow cops. The way he says it suggests this was not an accidental shooting. Green calls for them to be interrogated and for a 24-hour guard on Serpico.

Next, we return to the 1960 ceremony. A fresh-faced, clean-cut Frank Serpico proudly graduates, watched equally proudly by his parents.

Commentary: *Look at how this is building and at how much information we already know. The first four pages of the script have pretty much laid out the whole story – an eager young cop graduates from the academy and 11 years later lies wounded in a hospital bed, presumably shot by cops. Did he turn criminal? Did he dishonour the department? Or maybe he uncovered wrongdoing by his fellow officers? We are already hooked*

into the story and want to have the blanks filled in about why Serpico had a target on his back.

In the next scene, we join Serpico on his first day at the 82nd precinct.

Commentary: *Note how, in another lengthy description passage, the screenwriters foreshadow what's to come by highlighting the 'broken' city that Serpico notices on his first day, including a run-down building and hanging licence plate. While interiority generally has no place in a screenplay, the writers' comment that Serpico feels 'responsibility' for the city is apt and provides important motivation that is translated into action (this is omitted from the produced film).*

Serpico is given short shrift by Casey, the desk sergeant, who sends him up to roll-call without a second glance.

Commentary: *Serpico's character arc from idealistic, naïve young beat cop to cynical, disillusioned plainclothesman is stark. These opening scenes are important to establish who he was when he entered the police service. This interaction with Casey is a good example, which also shows us a level of apathy displayed by Serpico's superiors to what he considers an important event.*

The next scene shows Serpico enthusiastically embracing his job, checking the bulletin board for wanted criminals, straightening notices and eagerly lining up to hear announcements.

Starting on page 8, we get two key developments (inciting incident) that propel the main story. Sent to assist with crowd control at an eviction,

Serpico is handed five dollars by the marshal – seemingly standard procedure so officers do ‘whatever’s necessary’ to get the residents out. In this case, the residents are a distraught woman and her young children. Serpico is handed a sledgehammer and told to break down the door. He refuses. The marshal breaks down the door, as Serpico looks sympathetically at the young, now homeless, family.

Commentary: *There it is in a nutshell. The story laid out plainly. Serpico refuses a bribe his fellow officers at the 82nd would have taken. The exchange opens Serpico’s eyes to the reality of being a cop in that neighbourhood and also gives us an idea as to why he ended up shot by his own. Note that this is omitted from the final film, with the following scene at the café used as Serpico’s introduction to the culture of corruption.*

This bribe culture is underlined straight away in the next scene. Serpico and officer Peluce go for lunch at a regular cop haunt. Serpico turns down the owner’s recommendation of creamed chicken and opts for a sandwich. When the food arrives, Serpico turns his nose up at the fatty roast beef. He wants to complain but Peluce tells him it’s free, adding that they give the owner a break on his delivery drivers double-parking.

Serpico is torn between what’s right and the unofficial protocol. He tells Peluce that he’d be happy to pay for his food. Peluce tells him that cops generally just take whatever the owner gives them.

Commentary: *Now on page 10, we see how things work at the 82nd and we also see Serpico’s reluctance to participate in something he sees as wrong. Again, while the script includes elements that writers are usually*

discouraged from adopting, such as interior thoughts and bracketed suggestions for how dialogue should be read, these inclusions certainly help to bring the story to life. Notice, for example, that the café owner frowns when Serpico turns down the creamed chicken at the end of the scene, while Serpico's attitude is made clear when his surprise turns to 'disgust'. Overall, at the end of this opening section, we are in no doubt who Serpico is and what he stands for, setting up the escalating conflict and fight against corruption within his department that will be amplified over the rest of the screenplay.

Pages 10 to 38:

The next scene takes place at night, with rain lashing down (maybe prefacing the metaphorical storm that Serpico is walking into?). Serpico is on duty when a sergeant drives by and tells him he's relieved until morning. Serpico stays where he is to finish his shift. The sergeant then returns and tells him to go and dry off at the 'factory'. Serpico arrives at the factory to find all the beat cops who are supposed to be on duty instead hanging out, sleeping and generally slacking off from their duties as the radio crackles with calls requesting police presence.

In the next scene, Serpico wants to arrest a driver who has tried to bribe him into not giving him a ticket. Serpico's fellow officer, Kimmel, takes over. He accepts the bribe and sends the man on his way. Back in the car, Kimmel tries to give Serpico his share of the bribe. Serpico declines the money.

Commentary: *The earlier scenes have shown us that the 82nd precinct cops routinely take bribes. Now we know they're also derelict in their*

duties, leaving residents without police protection. This all serves to build up a picture of what's going on at the 82nd and to show us Serpico's increasing disgust and anger at the situation. The writers skilfully build the 'world' of the story and set the rules of that world. Again, this sequence is omitted from the film.

In the next scene, the cops' general corruption and dereliction of duty is escalated when Serpico and another cop, Becker, hear over the radio an urgent call for assistance in dealing with a rape in progress. Serpico and Becker are on the borderline of their sector and Becker wants to ignore the call. Serpico knows the area and drags a reluctant Becker to the scene. Three men are assaulting a woman. They scatter when the police arrive. Becker half-heartedly gives chase and two get away. Serpico catches the third.

Back at the precinct, one of the detectives viciously beats the suspect. Serpico declines the offer to participate.

Later, Serpico takes the suspect out of the precinct without cuffs. Over coffee, Serpico tries to get the suspect to give up his accomplices.

It works, and in the next scene, Joey takes Serpico to a yard where the two other suspects are playing basketball. However, when Serpico calls for back-up, so he can arrest them both, he's told no-one's available. Serpico is dumfounded.

He arrests both of the suspects by himself and takes them to the precinct, only to be told he won't get credit for the arrest. When Serpico protests, he's told he could be brought up on charges for being off-post and for

entering the yard without permission. At the end of the exchange, one of the detectives tells him he's getting a reputation and that maybe he'd be better off at a different precinct.

The next scene introduces a subplot. In a Spanish class (Serpico adding to his skills as a cop), he is smitten by Leslie, an actress and dancer. He follows her to the Greenwich Village coffee shop where she works. Serpico feels out of place but stays because he wants to talk to her. He orders an espresso. He breaks the ice, and they share a little joke.

Comment: *Note the subject of the class – Don Quixote – and its relevance to the themes of Serpico. Indeed, check out the dictionary definition of 'quixotic'. Never miss an opportunity to (organically) emphasise your theme by including subtle details such as these. The 'meeting Leslie' sequence is truncated in the film.*

In the next scene, time has moved on. Physically, Serpico is starting to resemble the man we saw in the opening scenes – with beard and long hair. We also learn he's been with the NYPD's Bureau of Criminal Information for 11 months. He's looking at fingerprints and has a testy exchange with Barto, one of the detectives, who chides him for taking too long on a suspect's prints. Barto calls him a 'weirdo'. Serpico stands his ground.

Commentary: *By now, Serpico is embedded in the NYPD and determined to keep doing his job to a high standard, regardless of what the others say. As well as denoting time passing in a visual way, his change of appearance indicates his character is changing.*

In the next scenes, Serpico moves out of his family's home and into an apartment. He buys a puppy and gets interested in undercover work.

We see more of Serpico's domestic life. As he cooks an Italian meal for Leslie, she learns for the first time that he's a cop. We also see more of them together, going to the ballet and a party in the Village. Serpico is at first out of place in this environment. However, he relaxes and ingratiates himself with the Village crowd.

At the 82nd, Serpico is accused by Steiger of performing a sexual act on a fellow officer. Serpico reports this to Inspector McClain, who tells him the accusation might affect his future with BCI. Serpico wants to become a detective and doubts whether BCI is the right route. He requests a transfer.

Overall: At the end of Act One, things are clearly escalating. Serpico found himself on the radar at the 82nd for going against the grain and for not fitting in with their negligent and corrupt ways. We've already seen that these cops are happy to turn a blind eye to criminal behaviour, have no scruples, and happily assault suspects; all without consequences or accountability. So, we have an idea about what lies in store for Serpico and how he ended up shot. His private life has developed, introducing a minor subplot, and he's now requested a transfer, which will take his involvement with department corruption to a whole new level, as he discovers the extent of the payoffs.

*****Act Two Part 1*****

Pages 38 to 63:

In the next scene, Patrolman Serpico reports to the 21st Precinct. Desk Lt. McGraw tells him to shave off his moustache and get a haircut. Serpico appeals to Capt. Tolkin, who lets him keep his facial hair and assigns him lone burglary patrol. Serpico tells him that he wants to become a detective.

We next see Serpico going after some muggers. Dressed in civilian clothes, Serpico chases down a suspect. Fellow cops Waterman and Block fail to recognise Serpico and shoot at him.

Serpico's relationship with Leslie ends when he expresses reluctance to marry and she tells him she has the chance to go to Texas.

Serpico then talks with Keough, a plainclothesman. Serpico has the opportunity to join the unit and asks Keough whether it can lead to becoming a detective. Keough tells him that 'clothes' is better than detective. Serpico asks about the payoff. He's told to worry about it when it happens.

Serpico heads to plainclothes training, where he befriends Blair, a likeminded plainclothes trainee.

Later, Serpico reveals he's headed for the 92nd Precinct. Blair is headed for Mayor's Office Detective Squad. Serpico is angry that Blair gets to go straight to detective rather than do four years in plainclothes. Blair reveals that he has a chance to 'blow the lid off' corruption in New York. They agree to keep in touch.

Commentary: *While these scenes show us Serpico's professional and personal lives progressing, the central thread of corruption loses a little momentum in this section as he leaves the 82nd, passes through the 21st and moves into the plainclothes unit. However, the introduction of Blair is important as he becomes an ally to Serpico and is, crucially, politically connected.*

Experienced plainclothesman Brown fills Serpico in on the details of his new assignment.

In the next scene, the issue of corruption resurfaces, as Serpico is given an envelope filled with cash, which he learns is from 'Jewish Max'. Serpico is bewildered and numb at being given the payoff.

At home, Serpico grapples with what to do about the payoff. He goes to make a call from his own phone, then thinks better of it and goes outside to a payphone.

Commentary: *Note the simple device of showing time passing – earlier, Serpico bought a puppy and now it's a full-grown sheepdog!*

Serpico calls Blair and the two men meet. There is unexplained hostility between them as they discuss the bribe money. Blair wants to use it to force a wider investigation but Serpico is reticent and suggests he may be on the wrong end of a set-up. Blair wants to take it to Insp. Kellogg, the second-highest ranking officer in the Department of Investigation. Blair helped to get him the job. Blair says he's honest, but Serpico is doubtful.

Commentary: *We've reached page 49 of the script and our protagonist still isn't committed to exposing NYPD corruption. So far his 'wants' are to do his job with integrity and to become a detective. While he clearly hates the idea of accepting a bribe, he is yet to take any concrete steps to prevent corruption within the department. Reaching out to Blair is a first step, but at this relatively late stage, he's still reluctant to act. Writer and educator Steve Kaplan has discussed this idea of the protagonist's shifting or evolving desire. While he focusses on the comedy genre, the concept is on display in Serpico.*

(For more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ni2mNiOHYQs&t=8s>)

In the next scene, we meet Kellogg, who is described as 'conspicuously composed'. Blair is confident; Serpico is apprehensive.

Commentary: *It's clear that Blair wants to get ahead as a detective and sees Serpico's problem as a way to make a name for himself as a crusader against corruption. However, Serpico is more circumspect, or pragmatic, realising that exposing corruption means exposing himself to retribution from cops who are corrupt and trigger happy.*

The meeting does not progress how Serpico might have expected. After giving him back the envelope and chiding him for taking it in the first place, Kellogg tells Serpico he has two choices – be forced in front of a grand jury by the Commissioner of Inspections or forget it ever happened. Kellogg recommends the latter. Blair and Serpico leave.

Serpico goes to Brown, who takes the money and tells Serpico that he pushes 'too hard'. He then, with no sense of irony, suggests he isn't cut

out to be a cop (in other words, he's not cut out to be a cop in a corrupt environment).

Commentary: *Even though Serpico is yet to become fully proactive in exposing corruption, his actions show how resolute and consistent he remains in rejecting the idea of payoffs. In the Kellogg scene, he was almost given permission to accept the money, yet his next move is to ask his superior, Brown.*

We get a montage of Serpico as he gives his predicament serious thought.

He then meets Laurie, a nurse, and they make a connection, introducing a second romantic subplot.

Commentary: *The script highlights that Laurie is dedicated to her job. This is important as she becomes a confidante to Serpico as he wrestles with what to do about the corruption.*

Serpico asks McClain for a transfer to the Bronx Seventh Division. McClain tells Serpico he'll speak to Palmer at the Seventh on his behalf.

Serpico discusses his problem with Laurie. She is unsurprised that so many cops are on the take. Serpico recounts an episode from his childhood about watching cops arrive at the scene of a crime and knowing what to do. Laurie counters with a fairy-tale about a witch poisoning a well that has a clear link to Serpico's predicament. The phone rings. Serpico switches on a tape-recorder. McClain tells him that Palmer wants him at the Seventh, adding that the division is clean. McClain adds that he told

Palmer that Serpico would make a good undercover man. Serpico expresses his scepticism to Laurie.

Serpico arrives at the Seventh. He talks with Keough, who is also now at the division. The two men go to see gambler Trollo, who offers them money not to arrest him. Keough takes him in anyway, as Trollo only had \$200, not the \$300 the cop wanted. Serpico's scepticism has proved well-placed. Keough offers Serpico the arrest but he refuses.

Later, Keough tells Serpico that he was tipped off that he 'can't be trusted' because he doesn't take money. Keough reassures Serpico that the system has been worked out to ensure the cops involved don't get into trouble. He also reveals that the cops in the division get around \$800 a month in payoffs. After his first six weeks in the department, Serpico will start getting the payments. Keough tells him to think it over.

Overall: Now on page 62/63, we start to get a real escalation of the situation. Serpico admits for the first time that he could act against the corrupt cops. We also know for sure he's on their radar as someone who's not to be trusted. Keough tries to hook Serpico into taking the money, but we know by now that he won't bite, even though he's seen how deep and wide the NYPD corruption has spread. With six weeks before the payoffs kick in, we also have a ticking clock running.

Act Two Part 2

Pages 63 to 100:

Serpico calls McClain and tells him about his conversation with Keough. Serpico refuses to give him Keough's name but says that in six weeks they're going to hand him an envelope and when he doesn't take it, he'll be in trouble.

Serpico gets a new partner, Rubello, who collects the payoffs for the department. Rubello and Serpico chase down Vernon, who owes the department money. Rubello gets violent with Vernon, who promises to have the money that night. Serpico is described as being 'sickened' at what he sees.

Commentary: *This scene escalates the situation further, as Serpico is now in the middle of a corrupt department, partnered with a 'bagman' and with the clock ticking. This all intensifies the pressure on Serpico, who can no longer get away with simply looking the other way. He must act to expose the corrupt behaviour.*

On another collection errand, Rubello tips off gambler Lopez that the police have warrants out on some the locations from which he operates. Rubello is 'indignant' that his information doesn't illicit an extra gratuity from the gambler.

Later, Rubello takes Serpico to a studio apartment where he puts the payoff cash into envelopes for the corrupt cops. He asks Serpico whether he's going to take the money. Serpico tells him he doesn't want to get involved. Rubello tells him he'll hold the cash in case he changes his mind.

Commentary: *The introduction of Rubello has pushed the story into a different direction. Serpico sees up close how the corruption works as he is now involved in collecting the very payoffs he has repeatedly rejected. While Rubello and the other cops are ‘encouraging’ Serpico to take the money, there is a constant subtext of intimidation that makes Serpico fully aware that continuing to refuse the cash will result in some kind of retribution.*

Serpico arrives at a secret meeting with McClain. He takes along Blair, who waits in the car. McClain is uncomfortable that Serpico has been talking to someone else about the corruption. McClain tells him that he’s passed Serpico’s information up to Commissioner Delaney. He wants Serpico to continue collecting information on his fellow officers. Serpico is angry that he’s supposed to wait it out, but McClain tells him to be patient and that the commissioner will reach out when the time’s right. Serpico is suspicious.

Back in the car, Blair reassures Serpico that Delaney is a no-nonsense honest man. Serpico feels optimistic that positive action will be taken.

Commentary: *All scenes, sequences and acts are supposed to ‘turn’, and this is a great example, as Serpico shifts from intense and angry to placated.*

The pressure increases further on Serpico when he’s told Rubello is being transferred and he must break in a new bagman, Sarno.

We see Sarno leaving a candy store, of all places, carrying a bag. He joins Serpico in an unmarked police car. Sarno expresses regret at being

involved with the payoffs and what his family would think. He alludes to the response by his fellow officers when he once tried to pull out and concedes that it's easier to just go along.

Commentary: *Until now, we've seen cop after cop taking payoff money without a thought. This is the first time we've met one of Serpico's fellow officers who hates the idea of taking the money. He also underlines what happens to cops who don't toe the line. At the end of the scene, Sarno looks at Serpico 'as though he expects an answer'. This almost challenges Serpico to act, so that weaker cops like Sarno can regain their integrity.*

However, despite his doubts, in the next scene, Sarno collects more money. When he tries to give Serpico his share, Frank answers that he doesn't take money and never did. This makes Sarno nervous and incredulous. He pushes Serpico into the passenger seat and drives them off at speed.

Serpico runs into more obstacles in the next scene as McClain tells him he no longer wants to be the intermediary to Delaney. When Serpico says he'll go to Delaney directly, McClain tells him it wouldn't be advisable. Serpico becomes agitated. For weeks he has been exposed, collecting information, with the others aware that he's not taking money. McClain tells him that he's done all he can, before hanging up. Blair is with Serpico and suggests he goes outside the department to City Hall. Blair knows someone on the inside, Berman. Serpico warms to the idea.

Commentary: *Note how Serpico is getting drawn into exposing the corruption. Throughout, his anger has been rising, as he sees cops on the take and the higher-ups refusing to act (remember the first encounter*

Serpico had with Casey, the desk sergeant, on his very first day – a disinterested superior?). We're now on page 76 and he is considering going outside the department, which will put him at additional risk.

In the next scene, Blair and Serpico meet with an excited Berman, who sees an opportunity to clean up the NYPD. The ticking clock reappears as Serpico tells us he doesn't have much time; a meeting is scheduled with the whole department in a few days. Serpico will be cornered to take the money. Blair reminds us of Serpico's 'dangerous position'. The scene ends with Berman making a call, presumably to the mayor.

Serpico triumphantly tells Laurie that Berman is going to the mayor.

The victory is short-lived, as in the next scene, Berman tells Blair and Serpico the mayor doesn't want to upset the cops. Serpico storms out.

At home with Laurie, Serpico rails against the whole corrupt system. Blair arrives and tells Serpico that he's behaving like a child. The two men argue, with Blair sarcastically calling Serpico a 'saint' and pointing out that he has unrealistic expectations that someone's going to swoop in and fix the system. Blair gives Serpico a choice. They can end things right there, or they can go and see Foreman at the Commission of Investigations and get in touch with Blair's contact at the *NYT*. The scene ends with Serpico angrily sending Blair away.

Commentary: *We talk a lot about the need to incorporate the counterpoint to social issues stories to prevent them becoming polarised. However, in this case, it's hard to justify cops being on the take. One device employed to muddy the waters is the reality check. Sarno shows*

us how easy it is for essentially good men to get swept up by a corrupt system; Berman relays the mayor's (somewhat understandable) reluctance to have the NYPD revolt against enforcement action; and Blair reminds us that the world is a dirty place with no easy fix.

In the next scene, we see the emotional toll the situation is having on Serpico and Laurie.

Serpico then meets with the other plainclothes officers. The meeting takes place by the Bronx courthouse. Keough says that from now on, everyone will collect their own money. Serpico once again asserts that he won't take payoffs. Sarno counters that everyone in the department would feel better about him if he did. They tell him he could give it to charity or that he could take a token amount for 'expenses'. Serpico still refuses.

Commentary: *Note how the other cops react to Serpico's refusal to take the money. They are outwardly angry at him but Serpico's presence also makes them question their own actions.*

Later, Serpico takes his frustration and growing fears out on Laurie. He reveals that the other cops would kill him if they knew he had talked to anyone. His anger rises throughout the scene, leading to a fight. She threatens to leave. He tells her to go, before realising things have gone too far.

Commentary: *Close to the end of Act Two, the pressure is increasing on Serpico. This scene is a good example of how to express a character's emotions.*

In the next sequence, Serpico, working undercover, busts loan shark Corsaro. The shark automatically starts counting out hundred-dollar bills. Serpico tells him to put the money away and takes him to the precinct.

Later, Serpico finds Corsaro laughing it up with Keough and the other detectives. Serpico gets rough with Corsaro. Keough tells him to take it easy and that he's 'good people'. Serpico throws his collar into a cell, as the other detectives watch with 'open hatred'.

Serpico finds out that Corsaro did fifteen years for killing a cop. He angrily confronts the detectives with the news that they are pally with a cop killer.

In the next scene, Serpico meets with McClain. He tells him he can't take it anymore. He wants out, even if it means going back into uniform. McClain is surprised that Delaney never contacted Serpico. He gets wary when Serpico tells him that he's gone to outside agencies.

In the next scene, Serpico is called in to see Insp. Palmer, DCI Daley and Insp. Gilbert. They try to get him to reveal the outside agencies he's told about the corruption. Serpico refuses. He tells them that he would co-operate with an impartial investigation 'to a point', although he makes clear that he doesn't want to get involved. Serpico also calls out Palmer for calling him to the meeting in front of the whole squad.

Commentary: *Note that even now, Serpico is not exactly committed to the idea of exposing corruption. While his anger has grown, essentially his 'wants' remain to do his job with integrity and to avoid his colleagues' retribution, not to clean up the NYPD.*

Later, Delaney orders Palmer, Daley and Gilbert to lead an investigation. They are reluctant, assuming HQ would take responsibility.

In the next scene, Serpico meets with the investigators. It's clear the investigation is ongoing, with Serpico frustrated at the level of detail they expect him to deliver. Serpico reasserts his desire to be transferred.

At the precinct, Serpico runs into some fellow officers. One of them pats him down and 'jokes' that he's looking for a tape recorder.

At the next meeting with the investigators, Serpico balks at the idea of wearing a wire. The Bronx district attorney is excited to bring grand jury proceedings, with Serpico as his star witness. Serpico once again asserts that he will not testify.

Serpico gets home to find that Laurie has left. He tracks her down and asks her to stay. She leaves anyway.

Overall: We end Act Three with the situation looking bleak for Serpico. He is now brazenly going against his fellow officers and the anger is clearly rising on both sides. His insistence that he won't testify means the investigators and prosecutors can't bring charges against the corrupt cops. Serpico is angry, and doubtful that those in charge will bring about substantive change. Meanwhile, he's still on the street, exposed, scared and vulnerable. Added to this, he's driven Laurie away.

Act Three

Pages 100 to 129:

At a meeting with Serpico, Bronx commander Green expresses anger that the officer won't testify. Serpico tells him that he's alone and hated. Green counters that, as a Jew, he had to fight his way up in a world of Irish cops, and that he's been putting cops away for thirty years, which means he's hated everywhere. Serpico says that he just wants to protect himself. The scene ends with Serpico agreeing to testify in front of the grand jury.

Commentary: *This is an interesting scene for several reasons. The main 'turn' in the scene is that Serpico reluctantly agrees to testify. However, the conversation sets Green at odds with Serpico, who the commander calls a 'prima donna'. Serpico points out that he's vulnerable, with Green countering that being hated comes with the territory when you go after cops. Both men make reasonable points, and Serpico realises that to bring this to an end, he needs to go before the grand jury.*

The next scene takes place, fortuitously, at a firing range. Serpico and Keough are shooting at the target. Keough asks Serpico what he's going to say when he testifies. Serpico is evasive. Keough tells him that a lot of people could get hurt, including Serpico. He goes on to tell Serpico all the ways he could get hurt, such as his fellow officers looking the other way if a suspect starts firing.

In the next scene, Serpico is at Thanksgiving with his family. Serpico calls out his brother Pasquale for giving a few dollars to the cops to let him stay open on a Sunday. Serpico reacts angrily at the idea that the corruption has spread within his own family.

Commentary: *This scene highlights just how pervasive and workaday paying off cops is in this world. Given how long this has been a part of Serpico's life, maybe the placement of this scene, while working to increase Serpico's anger, might have worked better a little earlier in the story? Note that this scene is omitted from the film, with an earlier scene involving Pasquale inserted much earlier in the story, in which corruption is not mentioned.*

Serpico has a run-in with an informant, who tells him he might be killed by the cop's 'own kind'. 'Italian?' Serpico asks. 'Cops' is the answer.

So, Serpico goes to buy a non-department issue 9mm Browning Automatic weapon with which to protect himself. When the seller asks if Serpico's expecting an army, he replies, 'just a division'.

Commentary: *The climax is fast-approaching and now Serpico has good reason to believe his life is in danger from within the department. Even though we know from the opening scenes what happens, the tension keeps building.*

In the next scene, Serpico testifies in front of the grand jury. One of the jury members tries to ask a question about why Serpico didn't report the corruption sooner. He's keen to answer but is prevented from doing so by the prosecutor.

Later, he expresses anger that he was unable to reveal important details. He realises that the idea is to hang a few lowly cops out to dry with the charges, while protecting the higher-ups. The prosecutor tells Serpico that he'll get his promotion to detective as a result of his actions. He also tells

him that he'll get a transfer. Serpico asks if he means to China. He knows that he's still a marked man and that they'll get to him if they want to.

Commentary: *Note the 'get in late, get out early' rule of writing scenes at play here. We join the scene with Serpico having already been questioned. At this point, we've lived the journey with him, so there's no need to have him sworn in and answer all the questions. The point is that Serpico is angered and frustrated that the questioning did not allow him to reveal important details about the corruption. He is left feeling that the real story has not been told and that he's put himself in danger for nothing. No systemic change is going to come from his actions.*

Later, Serpico is walking his dog. A car backfires and he jumps out of his skin. At home, in a series of phone calls, Serpico reveals he wants to quit to get away from everything.

As he arrives at work, now at the 8th Precinct in Manhattan, Serpico gets dirty looks from all the officers he passes. He's then shunned by the plainclothesmen. One of them threatens Serpico with a knife, possibly in jest. Serpico violently disarms him and puts the 9mm to his head.

Serpico goes to see Insp. Lombardo, who calls him a 'breath of fresh air' and that he'll work with him if no one else in the department will. Serpico relaxes a little – maybe he'll be OK at the 8th?

In the next sequence, Serpico and Lombardo track a suspect. They bust in on a criminal gang. The leader protests that he's already paid off the cops, assuming Serpico and Lombardo are there for a shake-down.

Serpico and Lombardo are then frustrated when they try to get an investigation launched into the corruption in Manhattan, which is more sophisticated than in the Bronx.

Serpico calls Blair and tells him he's ready to go to the press. Blair feels the only way their claims would have credibility would be if they were supported by a senior officer – Serpico says he'll ask Lombardo.

Despite plenty of reasons not to – including a new mortgage and contravening official policy – Lombardo agrees to back up Serpico and Blair.

The *NYT* headline reads: *Graft paid to police here said to run into millions*. Blair is sceptical that anything will come of it, but Serpico is pleased that his story is finally in print.

Commentary: *Note the introduction of a last-minute 'helper' for Serpico, as Lombardo proves equally willing to put himself on the line. Also, note another 'get in late' example as we move directly from Lombardo agreeing to go to the press to the papers being delivered. Again, we know the story, so having the men contact the paper and be interviewed would be redundant; not least, because we know from the opening what's in store for Serpico, despite this page 115 'victory'.*

Berman from City Hall faces reporters and vows the government will root out corruption. Drinkers in a crowded bar watch Commissioner Delaney on TV telling other officers they can come forward without fear of reprisal. The mayor's press secretary announces an investigation, the Knapp

Commission. Going to the press has generated attention, forcing those in charge to act, or at least announce that action will be taken.

In a private meeting, Delaney calls Serpico a 'psycho' and says he'll never be made detective as long as he's commissioner.

Lombardo tells Serpico he's being transferred to narcotics in Brooklyn South, though not as a detective. Lombardo warns Serpico that narcotics can be dangerous as it's easy for a cop to be set up.

At his new assignment, Serpico has a run in with Det. Glover, who reveals that the Bronx take was 'chicken feed'. In Brooklyn, the cops get thousands of dollars in graft. He tells Serpico that he knows where he and his family live.

Serpico returns to the firing range. His move to Brooklyn has put him in even more of a tough spot and heightened the threat to his life.

Serpico goes on a drug bust with other cops, where he ends up isolated on a rooftop. He sees the drug deal, rushes to the stairwell and calls for back up. Serpico gets trapped trying to enter the property. A gun is raised. Serpico is shot.

In the next sequence, we're back in the hospital where Serpico is being treated. His parents are there. The doctor tells them he's critical but stable, the bullet having missed his brain and spinal cord.

Serpico is under guard duty. One of his guards tells the other that Serpico is no good. A get well card reads 'die quickly'. It's one of many such cards.

DCI Green visits with an angry and agitated Serpico, who wants the guards removed. Green tells him that some cops volunteered to donate blood to help Serpico when he was shot. Green also tells him that they got the shooter and that the cops Serpico was with have been cleared. The three cops are up for awards. Green tries to give Serpico his detective shield. Serpico asks if it's honour of being shot in the head or for being an honest cop. He refuses the shield. Green puts the shield on the dresser and leaves. Serpico cries.

Serpico is told to take a leave-of-absence for a few months. He leaves hospital.

On TV, Delaney is grilled by reporters about why he didn't launch a corruption investigation sooner. Serpico doesn't want to hear it.

Serpico appears, at Green's request, at a public hearing of the Knapp Commission. McClain, Kellogg, Berman, and Delaney, et al, are there.

Serpico testifies to the packed room and reporters that honest cops are discouraged from coming forward over fear of reprisal or ridicule. He also underlines the importance of police officers serving their community, first and foremost.

Commentary: This hearkens back to Serpico's first day on the force, on page 5, when he looks at the neighbourhood he will be policing, and the script makes reference to him taking responsibility for the city.

After the hearing, Serpico says that despite himself he's started to 'hope and believe'. Green tells him that Gallagher and Delaney have resigned. Serpico calls it 'window dressing'.

Later, Serpico tells Green that he doesn't want to be a cop anymore. When Green asks why he did it, Serpico answers that he did it for himself.

We leave Serpico alone on an ocean liner with his dog, departing New York. (The real Frank Serpico retired from the force after testifying and spent time in Europe.)

Overall: This is a great screenplay to read if you want to learn how to set up a character, develop a character arc, and introduce a central plotline and consistent theme. It is also useful to watch the film to see what changes were made from the draft, and to consider whether and/or how they strengthen the story.

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