

WRITTEN BY MATTHEW MACKENZIE DIRECTED BY YVETTE NOLAN FROM APR 7-26, 2026

STRIFE



TARRAGON THEATRE



A PUNCTUATE! THEATRE PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH TARRAGON THEATRE

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Please Note: icons highlighted in light blue may be of particular interest to educators.

About the Playwright

Matthew MacKenzie is a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta and proud father of Ivan (Eevan, Vanya, Vanichka). Artistic Director of Punctuate! Theatre, Matthew is also the founder and an Artistic Associate with Pyretic Productions, a founding member of the Pemmican Collective, as well as Canadian Liaison of the Liberian Dance Troupe. Matt's plays include *First Métis Man of Odesa*, *Bears*, *After the Fire* and *The Particulars*.

[You can learn more about Punctuate! by clicking here.](#)

Cast

Jesse Gervais (Métis) - Eddy

Grace Lamarche (Cree/Métis) - Sarah

Tracey Nepinak (Cree) - Great Grey Owl

Valerie Planche (Métis) - Eleanor

Michaela Washburn (Métis) - Andrea

Teneil Whiskeyjack (Cree) - Monique

Creative Team

Matthew MacKenzie (Métis) - Playwright

Yvette Nolan (Algonquin) - Director

Jackie Chau - Set, Costumes & Props Designer

Za Hughes - Lighting Designer

Richard Feren - Composer & Sound Designer

Skye Grinde - Assistant Costume & Props Designer

Daniel Tessy - Assistant Sound Designer

Andraya Diogo - Stage Manager (Rehearsal)

May Nemat Allah - Stage Manager (Performance)

Andy Cohen - Producer

Trent Crosby - Production Manager/Technical Director

About the Play

Synopsis

Monique, a tough and tenacious oil patch worker, is reeling from the brutal murder of her brother Nathan, an Indigenous climate activist. His violent death leaves Monique at a crossroads.

As she wrestles with her grief, Monique is plagued by a recurring dream in which she reconstructs Nathan's bones from an owl pellet. This enigmatic vision is guided by the Owl, a spectral presence that is both a harbinger of sudden change and a conduit for spirits with unfinished business. Tense, poetic and deeply visceral, *Strife* is a powerful reflection on loss and resilience.

Playwright's Note

I am deeply grateful to Elders Jo-Ann and Jerry Saddleback for their teachings, guidance and support while I wrote this play. I am equally grateful to their daughter and my mentor, Christine Sokaymoh Frederick, for helping me to try to always move forward in a good way—both personally and professionally, and to navigate an industry that sometimes commodifies identity.

From its early beginnings with treasured friends Russell Keewatin and Patrick Lundeen in Edmonton, to being commissioned by the late Darcy Evans at Alberta Theatre Projects, I am thankful to the many Indigenous artists and allies who have helped me to craft this story.

I also wish to recognize the artists who are helping premiere this new work. Each of them could have taken other gigs that paid more and were less complicated, so I thank them for their commitment and their courage.

We live in fraught times, on the global stage and within communities, that lead us to attack the ambiguous and dismiss nuance. I want to believe that by endeavouring to deepen our conversations about that which divides us, real progress can be made.

Director's Note

We live in dangerous times. The climate is changing, the population is divided about almost everything - jobs, the cost of living, who gets to live on this land, who is responsible for our safety. We are watched and we are watching, judging each other on our politics, our consumption, our identities.

Matt's play challenges the received notion that communities are monolithic. The characters in *Strife* were already divided before the death of the young man who connected them. Monique and Eddy work in the oil patch, Sarah protests for climate justice, Eleanor lectures on Indigenous histories... all of them loved Nathan. Now that he is gone, who has the authority to speak for him?

In the rehearsal hall, we often said, "All of this is true at once." These characters, who could be our mothers and brothers, our partners and sisters, our teachers, speak their own truths, about protecting the land, about feeding our families. They fight assumptions about who they are because of the colour of their skin or the work they do. They are all right and yet often "diametrically opposed." They challenge our ideas about power and responsibility, about what binds us together and what tears us apart.

The Tar/Oil Sands



1

CANADALAND - COMMONS: CRUDE

If you don't understand oil, you can't understand Canada.

2

Toll of the Tar Sands on Indigenous Communities Grows

Canada continues to fail in its obligations to UNDRIP.



3

Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands

A graphic novel by Kate Beaton



Listen to an interview with the author here.



4

I Can Speak for Myself

An opinion piece from an Indigenous woman who works in Alberta's oil sands.



5

Carney Climate Plan at Risk as Canadian Oil Companies Stress Need to Boost Production

Oil sands companies resist federal carbon pricing proposal.



6

Tailings Ponds and Indigenous Communities

Photo Essay: Life Downstream of Alberta's Tailings Ponds



Indigenous, Environment, Health Groups Reject Tailings Treat-and-Release Guidance



Indigenous Climate Activism



1

Indigenous Climate Action

Indigenous-led organization of knowledge keepers, water protectors, and land defenders.



Read about Indigenous Resistance to Alberta Oil and Gas Development



2

Canada's Partnership with Indigenous Peoples on Climate
From the Government of Canada.



3

Indigenous Knowledges and Climate Change
From Climate Atlas of Canada



4

Indigenous Climate Hub

A database of resources, information, & stories.



5

Companion Articles from The Narwal



Young Indigenous Organizers Bring Together Ceremony and Activism



Alberta Climate Activists Say They're Not Scared

Grief & Death Practices

1

Companion Podcasts About Death and the 5 Stages of Grief



The Queen of Dying - from Radiolab



When Grief Doesn't Move In Stages - from Death, Sex & Money

2

How Your Brain Copes with Grief, and Why it Takes Time to Heal

Grief is tied to all sorts of different brain functions.



3

Where the Fire Still Burns

Métis wake traditions on the prairies.

4

When The Time Comes

A guide for end-of-life planning for Indigenous people.



5

Strong Nations - Grief and Loss

Indigenous written books for young people.

Murder, Industry, & Activism



1

Missing Voices: The Violent Erasure of Land and Environmental Defenders
An in-depth global analysis.

2

Yellow Bird: Oil, Murder, and a Woman's Search for Justice in Indian Country
By Sierra Crane Murdoch



Listen to an interview with the author here



Learn more about Lissa Yellow Bird here



3



Family Still Seeks the 'Truth About What Happened'
Four years after animal rights activist's death.

4

Supporters of Slain Mining Activist Take Case Against Canada to International Body
From MiningWatch Canada.



Owl



1

Métis Superstitions

From the Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture.

NOTE: see page 3 for owl

2

Owls in Mythology & Culture

Short explanations of owl mythology from various cultures (including Cree).



More Points of Interest



1

CANADALAND - Oil For Dummies

What price do you put on Canadian sovereignty?

2

Wisdom of the Ancestors

A 12-film series featuring global Indigenous traditions.



NOTE: *If An Owl Calls Your Name* and *Haida* feature “Canadian” Indigenous nations



3

Modern-Day Bead Trading

“Redwashing” and repression in Canada.

4

Youth-led Climate Change Case Goes Back to Court

The eyes of the world will be on them in April as they advance this landmark case to the next stage.



5

Surviving the City:

Graphic Novel Series and Teacher Guide

For grades 7-12 taking English Language Arts; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies; Global Issues; etc.



6

Indigenous Climate Action Grants

From the City of Toronto



Conversation Starters

What are your thoughts on the meaning of the Owl character?

Do you think Nathan was murdered? Why or why not? What do you believe the factors effecting Nathan's death and the investigation are?

What are your thoughts on the use of Nathan's death by the activists?

Share your thoughts on the current state of the climate and activism in your community.

Are there any practices that have support you in times of grief? Share them.

Activities

Using the resources below, find out what Indigenous group's traditional territories you are currently residing in.

<https://www.whose.land/en/> : Canada

<https://native-land.ca/> : The World

Repeat the exercise for different places you have lived or traveled to.

Follow steps 1 - 9 in the *How to Share Stuff: A Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant* exercise found at the link below.

<https://canadianart.ca/features/how-to-share-stuff/>

*This resource was created by Ange Loft

Learn about the LANDBACK movement

<https://landback.org/>

Take some time with the
[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

Consider what
["free, prior, and informed consent" \(FPIC\)](#)
by Indigenous peoples before economic development projects can take place on lands they inhabit or to which they have a claim would mean for your local area, so-called 'Canada' and for Turtle Island.