

# THE CONVERSATION

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## Thou Shalt Not Steal: new Stan series is a perversely funny road trip through Central Australia

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Stan Original's newest series is coming to smaller screens, having premiered its first three episodes in September at the [Toronto International Film Festival](#).

[Thou Shalt Not Steal](#) follows Aboriginal teen Robyn (played by the immensely talented Sherry-Lee Watson). She escapes juvenile detention and embarks on a defiant road trip from Alice Springs to Adelaide to uncover a long-held family secret.

Fellow outsider Gidge (Will McDonald) comes along for the ride. He has run away from his dodgy preacher dad Robert (Noah Taylor, clearly enjoying his character's exaggerated grossness, from a perpetually stained singlet to overflowing ashtrays).

In hot pursuit are two incongruous duos. First come detectives Burke and Wills (Shari Sebbens and Darren Gilshenan). Then Robert teams up with the decidedly crooked Maxine (played menacingly by Miranda Otto). Where Robert's deceptions are lazily self-serving, Maxine is an outback madam who poses very real dangers to the young people.

'Some bastards have it coming ...'

### **Thou shalt never go to Coober Pedy**

Each episode begins with a tongue-in-cheek lesson from Robyn's past. These range from the eponymous "thou shalt not steal" to "thou shalt never go to Coober Pedy".

This deadpan humour cleverly introduces significant issues. There are the inordinate rates of incarceration of Indigenous youth, alcoholism, assault, toxic masculinity, bullying and weaponised religion, among others.

These themes are particularly pertinent in the Northern Territory, where Thou Shalt Not Steal was both set and shot. Earlier this year the NT city of Alice Springs initiated a youth curfew and the territory has now reportedly lifted its ban on using "spit hoods" on young people.

This context means some of the laughs in the series are uncomfortable. But comedy is a well-established vehicle for social justice and the show remains focused on the heroes' journey, albeit within an important socio-political context.

Over the first six of its eight short episodes, Thou Shalt Not Steal maintains a balance between acerbic comedy and perilous road trip. Its final episodes revel in a series of over-the-top scenarios that nevertheless tie up narrative loose ends in an enjoyable way.

Indeed the shift to outright absurdity reveals the show's gentler message: about finding a chosen family.

 man and woman lean against car in outback


Miranda Otto and Noah Taylor's characters are dangerous for different reasons. Stan

## Alice Springs (Mparntwe)

If the tone and topic of the show – described elsewhere as “End of the F...ing World meets Fargo” – sound familiar, it's because it draws from director, co-writer and co-creator Dylan Rivers' earlier multi-award-winning Robbie Hood (2019).

In that show, the Robin Hood mythology falls to 13-year-old Alice Springs' local, Robbie (Pedra Jackson). The same desert-dry humour articulates the charming teen's well-intentioned misadventures through a variety of legal and familial landscapes.

Alice Springs (Mparntwe) is not just a recurrent muse for Rivers; it is also where he grew up, as the son of award-winning filmmakers Penelope McDonald and Warwick Thornton. Rivers has noted that, while his family actively supports each other, they are also “competitive”, pushing each other to produce their best work.

 two people hold up a photo of a young girl with dark hair to show a blonde woman behind a bar

The series is set in Central and Southern Australia in the winter of 1980. Stan/Ian Routledge

## Slick and self-aware

Having worked previously with his parents on multiple productions, Thou Shalt Not Steal is also something of a family affair. Co-created and co-written with cousin Tanith Glynn-Maloney, who also serves as executive producer, Thou Shalt Not Steal was developed during COVID lockdowns. The duo slowly developed the premise and the first two episodes over two years, before securing investment and support.

The result is a slick, well-made series with terrific attention to detail. The gorgeous landscapes contrast with the dank, grimy spaces occupied by the antagonists. The soundtrack is its own treasure trove, ranging from Slim Dusty to the Yamma Family and the Warumpi Band, and always in perfect alignment to the scenes. The chorus of “almost the end, almost the end!” is a highlight in the last episode.

Rivers says he tried not to

*[...] shy away from being a bit cheesy, being a bit self-aware, and being over the top at times. Hopefully there's twists and turns that people don't expect. But it was very consciously, like, let's have fun.*

Thou Shalt Not Steal is most definitely a fun ride.

*Thou Shalt Not Steal is streaming on Stan from today.*