

# LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

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## In this issue:

- [Hold Harmless Agreements and Anti-Theft Strategies](#)  
Gano Lemoine, Esq. 1
- [The Writer's Perspective](#)  
Cracking the Hollywood Code  
Scott LaCagnin 2
- [The Judge's P.O.V.](#)  
The Screenwriter's Social Network  
Alison Haskovec 3
- [What's Your Genre?](#)  
Secrets of Genre: Part 2  
John Truby 4
- [Spec Writing Tips](#)  
An Unbeatable Strategy  
Dave Trottier 5
- [Industry Insider](#)  
The Gatekeeper: A Screenwriter's Friend  
Marvin V. Acuna 6
- [Sell Your Script](#)  
Hot Leads from InkTip 7
- [Recommended Resources](#) 8

## Letter from the Editor

The 2011 PAGE Awards are underway! Visit the [contest website](#) to learn all about it. With more than \$50,000 in prizes and potential options and representation on the line, now is the time to take the initiative in your writing career and see how your script stacks up against the competition.

As we enter our fourth year of publication (we can hardly believe it ourselves!) here at **LOGLINE**, we're pleased to introduce a new contributor in entertainment attorney Gano Lemoine. In this issue, Gano tells us how harmless a Hold Harmless Agreement is or isn't. But that's not all! 2006 Grand Prize Winner Scott LaCagnin shares his experiences trying to break into the biz; PAGE Awards Judge Alison Haskovec provides pointers on presenting yourself to industry professionals; John Truby concludes his two-part tour of top genres; format ace Dave Trottier declares that "beats" are better left to sheet music; and producer Marvin V. Acuna explains how assistants might do more for your career than their bosses. But no issue of **LOGLINE** is complete without the latest leads from InkTip – is your script just what these buyers are looking for?

Happy reading,



## Hold Harmless Agreements and Anti-Theft Strategies

by Gano Lemoine, Esq.

*(This discussion does not constitute legal advice, nor does it create an attorney/client relationship with anyone. You are encouraged to seek legal advice regarding your particular situation.)*

Pre-Pitch, Pre-Submission Hold Harmless Agreements and similar "releases" are often required by producers, directors, or anyone else receiving scripts, story pitches or similar material from writers, particularly if the material is not coming through a trusted source such as an agent, manager, entertainment attorney, script consultant, or the like.

The Hold Harmless typically states, in flowery lawyer-type language, that the writer will not sue the recipient of the story material even if the recipient rejects the writer's proposal, and even if sometime later the recipient produces a similar if not identical story. Language in some of these agreements has the writer **completely waive any right to sue for copyright infringement.**

The **legitimate** purpose of this type of agreement is to advise the writer that the recipient may already have, or may in the future receive, a project similar to the pitch or material the writer is about to divulge. In that instance, the writer holds the recipient harmless and will not sue if the **similar** project gets made.

However, when used for evil, this is basically a written document that makes it easy for a nefarious individual to steal material, leaving the writer little, if any, legal recourse. Immunized by the Hold Harmless, the producer, director, etc., may listen to the pitch, write their own version or hire a work-for-hire writer to do so, perhaps following the same story line – including plot twists and complications – because the writer has waived his or her right to sue for copyright infringement.

**As an attorney, I generally recommend that writers not sign these releases.** Admittedly, without such a release many in the industry will refuse to hear pitches or accept unsolicited material. Ultimately, it's a judgment call that writers must make for themselves, balancing the need to get their material seen against the possibility of immunized theft.

The following suggestions may assist in that decision-making process and help to prevent story theft. For a more detailed discussion of these tips, check out [my website](#).

1. **Register your project with the [U.S. Copyright Office](#).** The WGA does great work, but you get far more protection from the copyright office.

2. **Keep a submission log.** Document the who, what, when, where and how of your script and concept submissions. This can be critical if you ever have to prove that theft occurred.

3. **Submit creative material with care.** Research the people and companies to whom you're submitting material. Trust your instincts – if you get the impression a person or company cannot be trusted, don't let ambition cloud your judgment.

*Gano Lemoine is an L.A.-based entertainment attorney representing creative professionals and businesses involved in film, TV, music, new media and the literary and graphic arts.*

## Cracking the Hollywood Code

by Scott LaCagnin

Sometime during the summer of 2004, I saw a movie – doesn't matter which one – and it hit me. "I can write a better movie than this." And I did. Or so I thought.

I entered my masterpiece in screenwriting competitions. Nothing. How can these fools not see what a great movie this would be? One contest offered feedback. What an ego-smasher that was. My masterpiece was stripped, clipped and double-dipped. I can be a little slow on the uptake, but I got the point. This screenwriting stuff ain't so easy.

Scott LaCagnin won the 2006 PAGE Awards Grand Prize for his action-comedy *Warmonger, Inc.* The management company Samurai MK picked up another of his scripts and he is now writing a thriller under their representation. A resident of Texas, Scott runs his own technical surveillance counter-measures company and is a reserve police officer.

"I must crack the code for writing the irresistible screenplay," I thought. So I read tons of screenwriting books. Read tons of books on writing query letters. Read tons of screenplays. Watched hours of YouTube interviews with pro screenwriters. Watched hundreds of movies. And for my efforts, I gleaned these jewels:

- There are no screenwriting rules, but you better not break any of them.
- For every book that says loglines must be one sentence, there's another book that says they can be two sentences. Don't even ask about query letters and synopses.
- For every interview with a pro screenwriter who claims he or she reads as many screenplays as possible, there's another who claims never to read any.
- There are a hundred mistakes wannabe screenwriters can make, and I've seen every one them peppered in professional scripts found on SimplyScripts.com, Drew's Script-o-rama, etc.
- Managers and agents claim they can tell if a script sucks by the end of page one. Or is it three? Or is it 10? Or is it by page 30?
- Hollywood is always clamoring for new ideas (just not mine).

Now what? Nobody in the Emerald City of Oz wants to talk to an unknown quantity living in flyover country. I had to learn the language. So, like Antonio Banderas in *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior*, I listened.

Slowly, I began to pick up words, key phrases, sentences, and eventually, complete thoughts. When I shouted out, "I understand what you want. I think!" I heard "Great. Have your agent contact us." So I said, "What agent?" And they said, "Oops. We don't take unsolicited submissions." Well, this just keeps getting better.

Come on! Throw me a bone. At this point, I would even take the much-maligned deus ex machina. And the gods answered, "Oh pitiful one, stop whining. Everything you need is in front of you. Figure it out." And to that I said, "Huh?" So a hand materialized and slapped me upside the head. Suddenly, it all became clear.

It's not about cracking the screenplay code, because there is no code. It's too subjective. It's all about getting the script I'm passionate about in front of the right people and hoping for the best.

***"A hand materialized and slapped me upside the head. Suddenly, it all became clear..."***

Okay, so I believe that my screenplay is an engaging story that will translate well to the big screen. It has pacing. Clarity. Simplicity. But writing is only half of this frustrating equation. If I write the best screenplay in the world and no one knows it exists, so what?

The other half of the equation is marketing. Business 101. I have to advertise my product, selling myself in the process. My product is a script and I gotta get this thing in front of bunches of busy people. No easy task, especially considering I don't live or work in Hollywood.

But I have one advantage: screenwriting is low overhead. All I need is a computer (got one already) and a writing software package. Then maybe I'll join a writer's group. Purchase a bible on screenplay format. Attend writers' conferences. It's all relatively inexpensive in the whole scheme of things. I know a guy who opened an eight bay, do-it-yourself carwash. A pretty simple concept contained in a straightforward business plan. But it cost him \$980,000. At 5% interest, that's a huge loan to pay back in quarters.

The general rule is that you need representation to get your project on the studio radar screen, and that requires an investment. So I decided to enter major, recognized contests that use industry professionals as judges. Sure, judging is subjective, and thus many people consider contests wasted money. But a good script should pass through a few levels anyway and will probably get read by more "professionals" than might otherwise read it based solely on cold queries. Your script may not win the gold, but a judge who reads it might work for a studio looking for the type of script that you wrote. You just never know!

I also figured out how important it is to pay to have your script professionally analyzed by a reputable organization. Again, some folks don't think they should pay for a professional analysis. Why not? You've got this script and (let's be honest) you want to sell it for mid-to-high six figures. In essence, you're asking people who don't know you to give you a lot of money for an unproven product that you yourself aren't willing to invest a few hundred bucks in. I took advantage of PAGE's marketing analysis package and wound up getting representation on my script. That was in no way expected, but who's complaining?

And finally, I realized that networking is key. Take advantage of it any chance you get. There are strategies to networking. Behaviors to avoid, like shoving a script in Shane Black's face. Tact goes a long way in standing out in a crowd of thousands. If an industry pro offers the opportunity to contact them later with a letter or email, it's just one more opportunity to show off your writing skills and professionalism.

As an outsider, navigating the Hollywood system often feels like an exercise in frustration. But the rewards can be exhilarating.

And so, we keep trying...

## The Screenwriter's Social Network

by Alison Haskovec

Now that you've put in all the blood, sweat and tears and have several audience-ready, perhaps even award-worthy scripts under your belt, you've taken the first step necessary to becoming a professional screenwriter. But what comes next? How do you actually "break in" to the business?

Alison Haskovec is an independent producer and consultant for Scott Free Television. A Harvard grad, Alison previously worked in feature development at production companies Radar Pictures and Intermedia Films, where she received a co-producer credit on the Japanese horror remake *One Missed Call*, released by Warner Bros. Other major motion pictures she has worked on include *The Hunting Party*, *Breach*, *The Chronicles of Riddick* and *The Last Samurai*.

Taking a page from the online social playbook, you need to start making new friends. For novice screenwriters, finding insiders willing to spread the word about your talent is critical to success. But how do you achieve this, short of stalking the likes of Ari Emanuel and Scott Rudin on Facebook?

Once you've honed your writing skills, you need to hone your networking skills.

While nearly all film and television companies have a strict policy against reading unsolicited material, this should not deter you from trying to get your script on

their radar screens through other means. Don't hesitate to utilize any and all Hollywood-related contacts you may already have, no matter how remote: an old college pal who is now an entertainment attorney, a distant cousin working in an agency mailroom, or a buddy whose SoCal bar is frequented by actor-types.

Websites like [InkTip.com](http://InkTip.com), [TVWritersVault.com](http://TVWritersVault.com) and [VirtualPitchfest.com](http://VirtualPitchfest.com) also provide useful methods to widen your readership. And well-regarded screenplay competitions like the [PAGE Awards](http://PAGE Awards), which are judged by professional readers and industry execs, are a good bet as well.

As you embark on this journey, you'll encounter individuals from all corners of the business: managers, agents, lawyers and producers. It's important to know the different roles and services each provides.

**Managers** usually take the long view on a writer's career potential and will dedicate the most time to growing you as a professional, giving you notes on your scripts and even sourcing ideas for new material.

**Agents** tend to be dealmakers, with a larger network of contacts and job leads to get their clients onto paid assignments. However, most won't take the time to help you develop your script and career the same way a manager will.

Hiring an **Entertainment Attorney** can be a wise move for new writers, particularly since they are better equipped than managers or agents to aid in the intricacies of contract negotiations. Plus, L.A.-based lawyers are well connected and can introduce you to other players in the business.

Working with **Producers** can be extremely helpful, especially if they are well established and boast a strong network of contacts. And of course, once a producer options your script or hands you a writing assignment, it makes it that much easier to land representation because you will be seen as a more valuable potential client.

That said, it is easier to sell a script when you have a good representative in your corner. If you have a personal contact and can get a foot in the door at a top agency (CAA, ICM, UTA, WME, Gersh) or management firm (Anonymous Content, Benderspink, Industry Entertainment, Management 360), these are the companies that carry the most clout in the industry. However, the reality is that these major players are rarely interested in repping unproduced screenwriters unless the writer already has a hot project or deal in the works.

In most cases, you'll have a better shot querying a boutique company that sees new talent as an opportunity. Use references like the Hollywood Creative Directory (HCD) to put together your target list. The [HCD's Online Directory Database](http://HCD's Online Directory Database), available via a month-to-month or annual subscription, offers comprehensive information including credits, studio relationships and submission policies. Other websites where you can find detailed listings for representatives are [SellAScript.com](http://SellAScript.com), which offers a "Writer's Rolodex," and [Screenplay2Sell.com](http://Screenplay2Sell.com), which updates its online directory more frequently than the HCD. Both services are competitively priced.

Try to get as many different companies to read your work as possible. Nothing excites an industry exec more than competition, so the more companies you have vying to sign you, the better! And don't forget, Hollywood is all about "the pitch." It is vital that you become an expert at pitching yourself and your work. Develop strong loglines for your current and future projects so that you can confidently pitch them to the people you meet.

Once you arrive at that fortunate place where one or more companies are interested in representing you, you still need to determine if the relationship is the right one for you. Sit down with the agent or manager, ask them what they envision as your career path and how you'll work together to create opportunities. In turn, you should have a strong sense of what kind of films you want to make. It's of critical importance that your rep "gets" you as a writer and understands your individual talents and strengths.

Ultimately, when deciding whether or not to formalize a relationship with anyone in the business, you need to follow your gut. Signing a long-term representation agreement with someone who is going to ignore you, clash with you creatively or otherwise "not work out" can be disastrous to a fledgling writer.

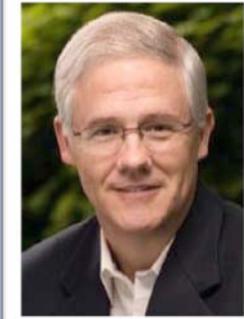
No matter who you sign with, it's vital to find your niche. Production companies and studios base their writer searches on genre; thus, you are an easier sell if you specialize as an action, comedy, horror or thriller writer. When you turn into the next Leslie Dixon or Aaron Sorkin you can write whatever you want, but until then you'll have a better chance of breaking in if you are known for writing a specific type of easily classified, commercial material.

It's been said before but it's worth repeating: relationships are everything in show business. While this may sound like strange advice for a writer, because ideally the quality of the work is all that should matter, it's critical to become the best "people person" you can be. The best way for a writer to get jobs is to work well with others and maintain a good reputation. That not only means being open to new ideas, taking notes well, and turning work around quickly, but also committing to open and honest communication with others.

Once you have proven your writing talent and mastered your Hollywood networking abilities, you'll have more friends than you know what to do with. Just like on Facebook.

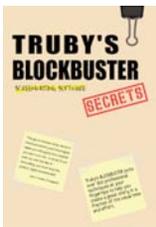
## Secrets of Genre: Part 2

by John Truby



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his 22-Step Great Screenwriting and Genre courses to sold-out audiences in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Sydney, Rome, Toronto and other far-flung locales. Over the past 20 years, more than 30,000 students have taken Truby's 22-Step class and rave about the insights and direction it has given them. He is also the author of [The Anatomy of Story](#). *Booklist* declares, "Truby's tome is invaluable to any writer looking to put an idea to paper." To learn more about John Truby's classes, screenwriting software, and story consultation services, please visit [www.truby.com](http://www.truby.com) today.

### John Truby's "Blockbuster"



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Now available at [The Writers Store](#).

To conclude his two-part overview of Hollywood's favorite genres, John Truby explains the perils and possibilities of each story form. (For Part 1, in which Truby dissects Detective, Crime, Thriller and Love stories, download our November–December issue [here](#).)

Myth and Action are two genres that rule in the summer months. **Myth** (*Lord of the Rings*, *The Dark Knight*) is the foundation genre of more blockbusters than any other form. That's because Myth deals with archetypal characters and life moments, which are recognizable worldwide regardless of culture or nationality. The big problem with Myth is that the story, which usually involves a journey, tends to be extremely episodic. To fix that, Hollywood almost always combines it with one or two other genres that update and unify the Myth story.

**Action** (*Iron Man*, the *Bourne* films, James Bond movies) is one of the genres most often combined with Myth. This form was practically invented for the film medium, which is based on the split-second cut. If **Love** has the trickiest story structure, Action has the simplest. The hero has a clear goal and goes after it with great speed and relentless energy. But don't be fooled by this. Action is much harder to execute well than it looks. Because the form has such a simple desire line, most action scripts lack plot. You can't just string together a few big action set pieces. You need a complex opponent and as much information hidden from your hero as possible.

The second major family of genres is Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction. **Horror** (*28 Days Later*, *Jurassic Park*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*) is about humans in decline, reduced to animals or machines by an attack of the inhuman. It's the narrowest of all the genres, so you may be surprised to know that it has more unique story beats – 15 – than any other form. Horror scripts are often very predictable, with a reactive hero and a monster who is just a killing machine. So one of the best ways to set your Horror story apart from the crowd is to make your hero active and force him or her to go up against the most intelligent monster possible.

If Horror is about man in decline and society shutting down, **Fantasy** (*Enchanted*, *Big*, *The Truman Show*) is about an individual discovering the hidden possibilities of life, of society opening up. The *Harry Potter* stories have shown us what an appealing form this is, worldwide, partly because the audience gets to explore an imaginary new world. But that's also where the challenge lies. You've got to create a detailed world the audience has never seen, while maintaining the strong narrative drive that Hollywood requires. One way to do that is to establish a deep psychological weakness in your hero that will be severely tested when the hero enters the fantasy world. This grounds the story and makes it personally meaningful to the audience.

**Science Fiction** (*The Matrix*, *Children of Men*) is about human evolution on the grandest scale: literally, the universal epic. Film is the perfect medium for this genre, which is why Science Fiction has become a favorite form of Hollywood. And yet these scripts often fail because telling a personal, emotionally satisfying story on such an epic scale is very hard.

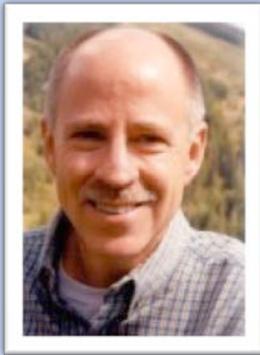
No article on how the major screen genres work would be complete without a mention of **Comedy** (*The Hangover*, *Wedding Crashers*, *Little Miss Sunshine*). This perennial favorite is the most underestimated genre. Whenever someone tells me they're writing a comedy, I always ask, "What kind?" There are seven major Comedy forms in cinema – action, buddy, traveling angel, romantic, farce, black, and satire – and each has a totally unique set of story beats. Failing to know which comedy form you're writing is the single biggest error that comedy writers make.

But many writers also mistakenly believe that a Comedy screenplay is all about the jokes. They jam the gags in from page one and don't understand when the script hits the wall about 15 minutes in. Why does the script suddenly stop being funny? Because the writer forgot the storyline. You don't start with the jokes and then tell a story. You start with a comic story structure and let the jokes emerge naturally and build from the storyline.

So what's the recipe for success in a world that's all about buying and selling genres? Choose the two or three genres that are right for your story idea. Learn their unique story beats so you can hit every one. Transcend your genre by giving each story beat an original twist.

This three-step recipe is as close as you can get to guaranteed success as a screenwriter, but you still have to apply the recipe to your own writing. That's why the **Blockbuster** story development software was created. The Genre screen in the main Blockbuster program shows you which genres are best for your original story idea. Each Genre Add-on explains the 8-15 story beats unique to your form and tells you exactly where they should happen in your story structure. Specially designed Genre maps help you navigate the problem areas of your form.

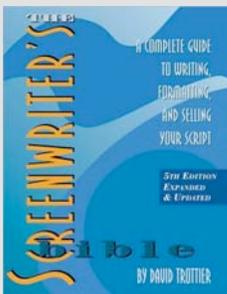
The Help section in each Genre Add-on not only tells you how to transcend your genre for a truly unique script, it tells you all the story beats of the different versions of your genre (like the seven different forms of film Comedy). And each Add-on includes four movie examples that show you the specific techniques story masters used to write classics in your chosen Genre.



Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), Dave's primer for both aspiring and professional scribes, is perhaps the most comprehensive industry guide on the market. To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit: [www.keepwriting.com](http://www.keepwriting.com)

## Dave Trottier's

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## An Unbeatable Strategy

by Dave Trottier

### READER'S QUESTION:

What thoughts do you have on the use of the term "beat" in dialogue? According to Denny Martin Flinn, we should not use the term. He says to write "pause" or to detail the intended beat with a specific action.

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

I am in with Flinn. The term "beat" is a theatrical term and, although you see it in many shooting scripts and Joe Eszterhas's spec scripts, you can certainly find something more exciting than "beat." After all, you are a creative writer!

Which of the following three examples creates more interest and best characterizes the speaker?

```
JANE
Ed Darling, I want you to know...
      (beat)
...how much I love you.
```

```
JANE
Ed Darling, I want you to know...
      (eyes mist up)
...how much I love you.
```

```
JANE
Ed Darling, I want you to know...
      (suddenly sneezes
      all over Ed)
...how much I love you.
```

None of these three examples will win any prizes, but certainly the first is the boring one. The second is dramatic. The third is funny (or disgusting).

Here is the point. The word "beat" is the most colorless, lifeless term you can use to indicate a pause. Instead, use specific words that add to the story or help characterize your character, while implying the pause (beat) you want.

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Marvin V. Acuna is the co-creator and executive producer of *Hitmakers*, a new elimination competition series for Bravo that showcases undiscovered singers and songwriters as they battle through a series of songwriting challenges. He executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Tom Hanks, and Colin Hanks) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

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## The Gatekeeper: A Screenwriter's Friend

by Marvin V. Acuna

In my humble opinion, most aspiring screenwriters assume that an assistant doesn't have the time, judgment, or influence to help them, and therefore simply see them as a barrier to their objective – connecting with the entertainment professional they desire to have read/buy their screenplay.

Huge mistake! After all, the assistant is controlling your access.

Assistants are key and instrumental in any industry, but in Hollywood... a strategic alliance with an assistant has the potential to change your life.

**Listen:** Most assistants don't aspire to be assistants forever.

There are numerous ways for you to build rapport with an assistant. I'll focus your attention here on just a few:

Google their name. See if they blog or tweet. Try to identify something that they are genuinely interested in and may have in common with you.

Always refer to an assistant by name, every time. Always be friendly, polite, and direct. Keep in mind that you are not their highest priority, and being impatient and/or self-righteous will not serve you.

An assistant's time is just as important as the person you are attempting to reach. Believe it or not, the assistant's role is to determine potential value for their executive and/or their company. Be prepared to explain why you feel you can contribute and how you will add value.

The more you can include the assistant in the process, the better. They have an ear to the ground about every aspect of the business and can offer unique insights that can help you refine your pitch.

Assistants have the ear of everyone that will be involved in reading/buying your script. They know who you should be speaking to and can help clarify if you are even targeting the right person/company. Let the assistant paint the internal relationship dynamic for you so you may navigate it more effectively.

Effectively engaging an assistant affords you numerous benefits. For instance, they can serve as an internal champion of you and your work, and they can make introductions on your behalf. I encourage you to view every assistant with the level of respect you would afford their boss and observe the windows of opportunity that magically open for you.

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(revised for 2011)

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[www.TheBOSI.com/masters/](http://www.TheBOSI.com/masters/)



## Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from [InkTip.com](http://InkTip.com)

### IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

Please submit your work only if it seems like a **perfect fit** for these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com) before submitting it. **Do not contact the production company directly.** Thanks!

### HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

1. Go to <http://www.inktippro.com/leads/>
2. Enter your email address
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code

### Johnson Production Group

[code: r6tkem9d8a]

We are looking for completed feature-length or MOW-formatted "female in danger" scripts. The lead female character must be age 25-45 because the network has a specific mandate for this.

Budget has yet to be determined. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include numerous MOWs including *A Valentine Carol*, which was sourced through InkTip.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks!

### 3:1 Cinema

[code: b6sg18ygum]

We are looking for completed feature-length scripts where the story progresses in real time. Examples are *12 Angry Men*, *Rope* or *High Noon*. In other words, a fictional story that takes place in 90 continuous minutes. By its nature, most of the film would probably take place in a few settings or scenes. However, an action thriller similar to *88 Minutes* or *Phone Booth* could work.

Budget won't exceed \$10 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

NOTE from InkTip: This is for a production company with excellent industry references, which we believe gives them the resources necessary to produce a solid feature.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks!

### Category One Entertainment

[code: p13pkmregb]

We are looking for completed feature-length fantasy scripts in the vein of *Stranger than Fiction* or *Big Fish*. Material submitted must be contemporary; no period fantasy, please. We want to reach a broad audience with this project, so the material cannot garner an R-rating (no nudity or excessive violence).

Budget will not exceed \$500K. Non-WGA writers only, thanks.

Our credits include *The Bloodstone Diaries* and *Seven Souls*.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks!

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### MOVIE OUTLINE 3.1

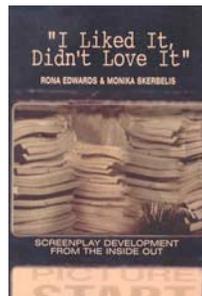


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