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Letter from the Editor

This is always a very exciting time of year for us here at PAGE Awards H.Q. We've just named this year's top ten Finalists in each of our ten genre categories, and those scripts are now in the hands of the Final Round judges. On October 1st, we will be announcing this year's Winners.

Meanwhile, as we await the contest results, I hope you'll enjoy reading our new issue of *LOGLINE*. This month, Anne Reilly continues her discussion on how to craft a great logline. (Make sure you vote for your favorite!) Our 2007 Grand Prize Winner John Arends gives advice on finding champions for your work. And PAGE Awards judge Kenneth Ong explains how to overcome the problem of the passive protagonist.

In his column, screenwriting expert John Truby explores the crime genre through his analysis of *The Dark Knight*. In Spec Writing Tips, Dave Trotter teaches you how to format those tricky email conversations and text messages. And in the Hot Leads column, InkTip offers a list of producers who are currently looking for new screenplays.

Finally, make sure you check out my column. If you're not yet living the life you want, I've discovered another great way for you to use your writing skills and talents to build a successful future.

Happy reading,

Jennifer Berg

What Makes a Great Logline?

by Anne Reilly

In our last issue, five of our judges wrote loglines for a well-known movie ([read them here](#)). And our readers responded...

One reader guessed the name of the movie was *Fried Green Tomatoes*. That's incorrect. Several people guessed *Hannibal* or *Red Dragon*. That's a bit closer. Over 90% of our readers thought the movie was *Silence of the Lambs*. Closer yet. Only 31 people correctly answered *The Silence of the Lambs*. (Which raises the question: What makes a memorable title? But we'll save that for another issue.)

How did our readers respond to the judges' loglines? Numbers 1, 3 and 4 each grabbed 25% of your votes – a dead heat. Number 5 received 15% of your votes and number 2 received 10%. Which just goes to prove, there are no "right answers." There are many ways to craft a great logline, and different approaches may interest different people. But the more you can maximize that interest, the more effective your logline will be.

Analyze which element in each of the top three loglines really grabs your attention. In the first logline, a young FBI trainee must "enter the mind of an infamous cannibal serial killer." Makes you stop and think, doesn't it? What would that be like? Similarly, in the third logline, the FBI trainee is "chosen to probe the dark mind of a brilliant and violent psychopath." Creepy. And very compelling. The fourth logline takes a different approach. The FBI cadet "gets more than she bargained for when she enlists the aid of a criminally insane ex-psychiatrist." The idea of a psychiatrist who's criminally insane—there's food for thought! And the logline also poses an implicit question: In exactly what way will this young cadet get more than she bargained for?

Note that it's not the serial killer who is most interesting here. Nor is it the Senator's daughter. They're important to the plot, yes, and they may need to be mentioned in the logline in order to convey the essence of the story; however, what's most fascinating about this movie (and most movies) is that unique, compelling, conflicted relationship between the protagonist and antagonist – the hero and the villain.

Now, take a look at some of the loglines our readers wrote. Let's see if you did a better job than the judges: [Vote now!](#)

We'll continue our discussion in the next issue...

The Writer's Perspective: Finding Champions

by John Arends

When the folks who run the PAGE Awards asked me to reflect on the year since I won the 2007 Grand Prize, one word came to mind: champions. It's been 12 months of seeking and discovering new champions.

John Arends won the 2007 PAGE Awards Grand Prize for his action-adventure epic *Solomon's Whale*. He is currently finishing a rewrite assignment on a sci-fi-action script for Fortune Films prexy Ernst-August Schnieder. He is also readying two new specs for the marketplace, an adventure-drama titled *Shepherd's Moon* and a biopic.

A champion is something we all need. Someone whose judgment and reputation in the industry you respect, who says, "I love this! I want to be a part of this story! I want to help get this made!"

And then they set out to help you make that happen.

The first champion of the script that won the 2007 contest was my daughter, Allie. (Well, she was only seven at the time, so I guess she was more of an

inspiration than a champion.) She had just seen *Free Willy* and was totally fascinated with whales. I was fascinated with writing movies, but the only whale story I knew was *Moby Dick*. Not many third graders can handle Melville, so I set out to write a modern-day take on his classic—a big popcorn tentpole that would play to the eight-to-80-year-old crowd.

By the time *Solomon's Whale* found its first true champion in the PAGE judges, Allie was 21. Those 14 years weren't all spent rewriting the script. But I had a lot to learn, so I "home schooled" myself. I devoured McKee, Field, Campbell and Croasmun, read countless screenplays and kept writing new material. Then, in early 2007, I went back to the whale script, did a page-one rewrite and entered it in a handful of contests.

When I got word that it had won the big enchilada at PAGE, it capped one of the most perfect days in my life. Pure elation! The PAGE folks are remarkable champions, providing valuable contacts, insider advice and boundless enthusiasm.

Then, last winter I found another champion in legendary Hollywood agent Barry Perelman. Barry's reputation for taste and tenacity is now opening numerous doors as we seek to land that most demanding champion—the exec who can greenlight a major feature for a Hollywood studio.

How does a script win over a champion who can get it read, sold and produced? I'm no expert, but if the past year has taught me anything, I'd say three things are essential:

1. **Passion.** Make sure the core fascination at the heart of the story is vibrantly evident on every page and in every meeting you take.
2. **Craft.** As cool as it is to win a major contest, your script can always be improved. The pros' advice is very consistent and boils down to this: Rewrite and rewrite again. Make sure when your script goes to market, every word, action and idea on the page is perfect, assuring the reader: "I'm in the hands of a professional."
3. **Story.** Choose your concept well. The producers who champion your script will invest literally years of their lives, plus millions of dollars, to bring it to life. It must be absolutely fascinating, fresh and commercial.

One year later, I'm still working on a daily basis to get those three things right, along with a hundred other moving parts. And yeah, it's gotten a lot harder to get something down on paper that I'm happy with. I've got a tougher "inner champion" now to deal with. But I think that's a good sign...

The PAGE Awards were a godsend, as I'm sure all of this year's semi-finalists, finalists and winners will soon discover. For me, it provided the validation and confidence I needed to continue the quest we all share as screenwriters: to win over the most important champions of all—that audience of total strangers sitting in the dark, waiting to be entertained.

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The Judge's P.O.V.: On the Passive Protagonist

by Kenneth Ong

During the past few years working in development, I've read far too many lackluster scripts featuring lead characters who, despite being chased by assassins, criminals, aliens, ghosts, monsters and ex-girlfriends, never have a clear objective or make any character-revealing decisions. They simply react to the chaos happening around them. This is what's known as the "passive protagonist," and it's one of the most common problems I see in scripts by novice screenwriters.

Kenneth Ong has worked in a variety of development positions, most notably for Disney/Touchstone Films & Network Television, Scott Rudin Productions, The Bubble Factory, Imagine and Miramax. Additionally, Kenneth has been a freelance script reader for Original Artists Agency, Lynda Obst and Brillstein-Grey. He claims to have learned more from Second City Television's Writing Program than from his MBA studies at UCLA. He also proudly mentors elementary school students in the WGA's Young Storytellers Program.

Active protagonists have a clear and demanding goal. On their way to achieving that goal, they confront opposing forces and must find ways to overcome obstacles. An active protagonist changes and evolves based on the conflict that he/she faces across every plot point.

How do you avoid the problem of the passive protagonist? I normally explain it with an easy-to-picture analogy using a lifeguard at the beach. Imagine your protagonist as a lifeguard who swims into the ocean to rescue a drowning victim (*the ultimate goal*).

Do we really need to read tons of narrative and exposition to establish why he chose to be a lifeguard, how he struggles to pay the bills on a lifeguard's salary,

and how he got sunburned the day before? Ho hum.

Instead, early in this story, your lifeguard/protagonist hears the initial cry for help (*the inciting incident*, or *catalyst*) and, willingly or reluctantly, responds to this **Call To Action**. But it's not enough for him to make the conscious decision to jump into the ocean (*the act one break*). An interesting rescue is never that simple.

It takes purposeful action and sustained effort to reach the drowning victim in time (*the hurdles in act two*). Strong waves crash down on him, cresting bigger and bigger as he approaches the rescue (*the climax*).

If your lifeguard/protagonist does nothing, those waves will just push him back to shore. He is left no closer to accomplishing his ultimate goal than when he started. Meanwhile, the victim is still drowning (*the ticking clock and story stakes*).

A determined and much more interesting lifeguard/protagonist—relying on intelligence and the experience gained from facing previous waves—devises a clever solution. Maybe he attacks the wave head-on. Maybe he swims underneath it. Or perhaps he makes ingenious use of his floatation device.

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, "But my screenplay isn't susceptible to this passive protagonist problem because it isn't an action-adventure story." Sorry, but you're wrong. Genre doesn't matter.

Successful films have an active protagonist. Period. Even if that protagonist is crippled (*Born on the Fourth of July*), physically challenged (*My Left Foot*), incarcerated (*The Shawshank Redemption*), marooned (*Castaway*), indentured (*The Piano*), or bed-ridden (*Misery*). A character who is "stuck" in some way is not necessarily passive. Think about the movies mentioned above. In each of these stories, the protagonist has a clear and active

objective. He or she has to clear some extremely challenging hurdles in order to achieve that objective, the biggest hurdle often being the very thing that handicaps them in the first place.

Your hero doesn't necessarily have to do heroic things. Not every protagonist is James Bond or Jason Bourne. But you still need to give your main character a clear goal and plenty of complications and obstacles to overcome: physical, mental, emotional and relational. In each scene, ask yourself, "Where is my ocean wave? Is it just starting to crest, or is it about to crash down on top of my protagonist? What should he or she do in this scene in attempting to overcome that obstacle?"

Okay, maybe your screenplay isn't about a literal life-and-death situation, like someone drowning in the ocean. But it's helpful if you think that way on every page you write.

BEFORE YOU SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT, FIND OUT HOW HOLLYWOOD WILL RESPOND...



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JUDGE'S FEEDBACK

(3-5 pages)

The same great Feedback we offer in conjunction with the contest. Your judge will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your script, explain how he or she would score your script if you submitted it to the contest, tell you whether your script would receive a Recommend, Consider or Pass if you submitted it to his or her agency or production company, and offer suggestions and ideas on how to further develop the material.

CONCEPT EVALUATION

(2-3 pages)

Notes on your treatment, outline, or story idea. (PLEASE NOTE: This is not for completed screenplays.) Your judge will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your concept, evaluate your treatment or outline, offer suggestions and ideas on how best to develop the material, and evaluate the script's ultimate marketing potential. Concept Evaluation is designed to help you discover any potential pitfalls and resolve problems before you sit down to write the script.

IN-DEPTH SCRIPT ANALYSIS

(8-10 pages)

A comprehensive assessment of your screenplay. Your judge will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your script, provide you with detailed examples and page notes, and offer suggestions and ideas on how to further develop the material. In-Depth Analysis is designed for writers who have received Judge's Feedback from one of our judges in the past and who now wish to receive more detailed notes from that judge, and for writers looking for professional help with their rewrite.

[Learn more...](#)

What's Your Genre? The Crime Story

by John Truby

For anyone who wants to look beneath its action surface, *The Dark Knight* proves that a movie can be a huge hit because of theme, not in spite of it. *The Dark Knight* is the closest thing to a fictional exploration of moral philosophy to come out of Hollywood in a long time, and that includes *No Country for Old Men*. Amazingly, writers Jonathan Nolan, Christopher Nolan and David Goyer create this complex moral expression on the foundation of the superhero action-crime genre.

The writers begin their elegant construction with the depiction of the main character, Batman, and here they had a tremendous advantage going in. Of all superhero characters, Batman highlights and consistently questions the very concept of the hero and the savior. He is truly a dark knight, concerned with justice but also willing to use illegal and immoral means to achieve it.

In the [Blockbuster story development software](#), we place a lot of emphasis on the “character web,” and *The Dark Knight* uses this crucial technique to perfection. The first character to be compared to Batman is his main opponent, the Joker. The classic crime story is based on a master criminal who believes he is above the law and society itself. The Joker is just such a character, a genius psychopath whose massive intellect is shown not so much in dialogue as in his ability to manipulate. He accuses Dent and Batman of being schemers. But in fact he is the master schemer, a modern Moriarty who acts not out of greed or revenge, but for the game.

The Joker is literally the author of Gotham City, constructing criminal plots that will remake the city to express his moral vision. Many have called the Joker a nihilist, a man in love with chaos. But this is a serious misreading. If Batman is the Dark Knight, the Joker is the Dark Philosopher. The entire plot of *The Dark Knight* is a series of moral conundrums he arranges to expose what he believes is the true animal nature of mankind. Tracking the beats of a crime story that goes all the way back to its originator, *Crime and Punishment*, the Joker creates ever more difficult versions of the genre's central question: What would you do if forced to choose between two bad options?

Screenwriters and storytellers can learn all kinds of lessons from *The Dark Knight*. Perhaps the most important is placing all story elements at the service of the larger moral argument, and expressing that argument primarily through the story structure. Using the crime genre as its foundation, *The Dark Knight* focuses on whether someone can remain a hero when the opposition becomes increasingly ruthless, a question that is central to our world. But as the cop in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* says about how hard it is being a cop, “It's supposed to be (tough)... A policeman's job is only easy in a police state.”

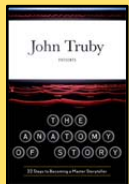
Interestingly, the writers go all the way back to the classic Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, for their ending. When it turns out the hero of a gunfight didn't actually kill the bad guy, the newspaperman refuses to print the truth. “When the legend becomes fact,” he says, “print the legend.” Batman decides to let Harvey Dent die a hero, so the people will have hope in justice, while he accepts his role as the scapegoat. With a subtle flip on the ending of *Shane*, Lieutenant Gordon's little boy doesn't say, “Batman, come back.”

The Dark Knight is a writer's genre movie, even a transcendent one, and screenwriters would do well to study it closely.



Over the course of three decades, John Truby has taught more than 30,000 students the art of screenwriting. Using the knowledge and expertise he has applied as a consultant on over 1,000 movie scripts, he offers an approach to storytelling that has earned worldwide acclaim for his instructional courses and screenwriting software. He is also the author of [The Anatomy of Story](#). Booklist raves, “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, visit : www.truby.com

Learn more from John Truby...



[The Anatomy of Story](#)

In his long-awaited first book, Truby shares all his secrets for writing a compelling script, focusing on plot and premise, themes, characters, moral development, and crafting the kind of ending that brings audiences back again and again.

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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. His book *The Screenwriter's Bible*, now in its fourth edition, 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

Spec Writing Tips

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

How would I format an email conversation between two people?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

My answer applies to text messaging, instant messaging, emailing, and the like. The general principle is you should indent any written dialogue as you would oral dialogue.

What follows is only one of many ways to handle the situation. It assumes the entire scene is in one location, Burt's room. Also, instead of using BURT as a secondary scene heading (as I do below), I could write BACK TO SCENE or BACK TO BURT.

Burt types on his laptop.

ON BURT'S LAPTOP SCREEN

"Jan, be mine."

BURT

stands up and paces around his desk until he hears a little PING. He scrambles to his laptop.

Although the above is the correct method, you can get away with omitting the references to the laptop screen as long as you're absolutely clear. Here's an example:

Burt types on his laptop:

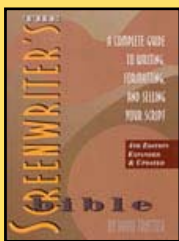
"Jan, be mine."

Burt stands up and paces around his desk until he hears a little PING. He scrambles to his laptop. Jan's words appear:

"I'm yours."

Burt pumps his fist, then types with a flourish:

"Tonight?"



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3. Copy/Paste the corresponding code

Front Row Films

[code: wwjtkrsrja]

We are looking for completed feature-length high-concept romantic comedy screenplays involving a wedding, with a female lead. This will be for television, so please do not submit anything with foul language or explicit sexual situations.

Please note that a high-concept script should have a great title, a strong hook, and shouldn't have an overly complex plot. If your story cannot be described in one short simple sentence, it is not high concept.

Budget will not exceed \$2 million. WGA and non-WGA writers may submit. Our credits include "I Me Wed," (2007 TV movie).

SF-2

[code: q6eqqaf25p]

We are looking for TV sitcom scripts that center around an African-American family. We prefer submissions that already have completed bibles. We also prefer stories that revolve around family issues.

Non-WGA writers are preferred. Budget will not exceed \$100,000/episode. Our television credits include "Exalted," "Family Reunion," and "One Night Only." Our television specials include "Paul Mooney: Jesus is Black—So Was Cleopatra—Know Your History."

Popart Film Factory

[code: jymmeqcv65]

We are looking for completed feature-length western scripts with realistic action. Submissions should be for period pieces, but with stories that do not necessitate elaborate set construction or scenes that require special effects. We're particularly looking for classic Sergio Leone-type characters.

Budget will be around \$1 million. Non-WGA writers only should submit. Our credits include over 250 music videos and the feature films *Aces* and *Fast Girl*.

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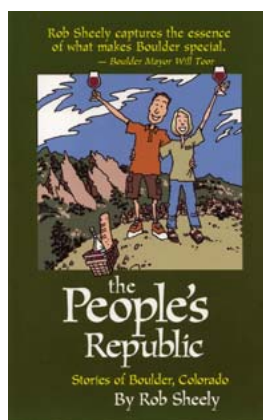
Carpe Diem! Build Your Career

by Jennifer Berg

In our last issue, I talked about how you can use your screenwriting skills as a [travel writer](#). Today I'd like to show you another way to use your unique talents to make a great living right from home -- or from anywhere in the world.

Let me tell you about my friend Rob Sheely....

Rob is a very talented playwright who achieved quite a bit of success early in his career. Despite that, he realized that it was going to be extremely tough to make a decent living writing for the theatre, so he started marketing himself as a freelance writer in the business world. Because of his talent for writing colorful narrative and great dialogue, he very quickly acquired corporate clients who hired him to write their marketing copy, develop training videos, and even create video games. This sort of freelance work is highly lucrative, and it has allowed Rob to build a comfortable life with his wife and daughter in their favorite town, Boulder, Colorado.



Most importantly, this work has given Rob the time and freedom to continue working on his passion projects. His plays have been produced in Chicago, Minneapolis and Denver. He has written for *Salon Magazine* and many other national publications. For two years, he wrote the popular *Boulder Weekly* column "The People's Republic." And he is the author of several published books. All made possible by his freelance work.

How can you achieve this kind of freedom to do what you love? Probably the simplest and most profitable way is one you may never have heard of: writing promotional copy and sales

letters. With the explosive growth of the internet and email marketing, there is an ever-increasing need for good copy, and freelance writers who can create compelling sales and marketing letters are very much in demand. And **you**, as a screenwriter, are uniquely qualified to give these businesses exactly what they're looking for.

Make no mistake, this isn't a minimum wage job. Good copywriters can make six figures a year, often by writing just one letter a month.

And best of all, as a freelancer you're working for yourself, so you have control of your schedule. On any given day, you choose whether you want to work on a marketing project, work on your screenplay—or both. And since the business is all online, you can write from anywhere in the world. Would you like to work from home so you can be available 24/7 for your kids? Would you like to work from your summer cabin by the lake? Or would you prefer to write a couple of hours a day while cruising the Mediterranean? It's all possible. Hundreds of writers are already living this lifestyle, and you can, too.

Interested? There are several online courses that can show you how to get started, but my personal favorite is the American Writers & Artists [Copywriting Program](#). In their comprehensive online program, you'll learn everything you need to know to create the most effective sales and marketing letters, taught by the best copywriters in the business. Most importantly, AWAI helps you get your first gig, then gives you access to an online networking system to keep you working as much and as often as you desire. The program is not expensive. You can try it for just \$39. And the company offers a full money-back guarantee if for any reason you're not completely satisfied.

So if you'd like more freedom in your life, more time to spend with your friends and family, and more time to work on your own passion projects, find out if becoming a freelance copywriter is right for you.

[Learn more](#)