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## Letter from the Editor

Congratulations to the winners of the 2011 PAGE Awards! We hope that this is the start of your story as a screenwriter whom Hollywood has on speed dial. And for all the writers who didn't win a prize, don't despair – almost every success is preceded by a string of not-quite-theres. We hope that disappointment will fade but pride in your work will continue to grow.

Have you checked out [eMeetings: Writers & Reps](#)? Screenwriters join the Production Arts Group, our new online community, to gain exclusive access to participating industry professionals. Our first two series were a big success and we're now beginning our third. We've already had two writers signed through the program and everyone is learning a lot about the manager's perspective, what reps are looking for, and how to write compelling queries.

In 2011's final installment of *LOGLINE*, we end the year with an issue we're very proud of. Leading the way is 2010 Grand Prize winner R. Scott Shields, with a frank and truly illuminating account of his journey as a writer over the course of two successful scripts. Next up is PAGE Awards Judge Collin Chang, who discusses the elusive "writer's voice" and why the industry is always seeking to discover it. Concluding his two-parter on blockbuster films and what they have in common, genre expert John Truby introduces story techniques you'll want to master.

The Fabulous Dr. Format, Dave Trottier, gets back to basics to explain why a screenplay's format matters. Industry insider Marvin V. Acuna asserts that being prolific is essential to being a working writer. (His case in point is someone you're probably familiar with...) Finally, check out three hot leads from InkTip. Are these companies looking for YOUR script?

Happy reading,



## Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ 2011 PAGE Award winner Laurelei Ballard has been signed by PAGE Judge Sammy Montana, and Laurelei's Bronze Prize-winning TV Drama pilot *This Town* has been optioned by Fox Studios, with Paul Schiff and Tai Duncan attached as executive producers.
- ◇ Sidney Kimmel just bought the feature spec *Paper Trail*, penned by 2010 Gold Prize winners Louis Rosenberg and Joe Rosenbaum, and Echo Lake has picked up their spec *Mindplay*. Louis and Joe are repped by PAGE Judge Eric Williams of Zero Gravity Management.
- ◇ The comedy feature *Knight Knight*, written by 2008 Gold Prize winner Nicholas Horwood, is now filming at Allington Castle in the U.K. Nick's most recent short film, *Funday*, premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in London on September 30, 2011.
- ◇ The hysterical new British sitcom *Spy*, created and written by 2008 Gold Prize winner Simeon Goulden for Sky TV, is now available here in the States on Hulu. [Check it out!](#) Simeon is repped by the Curtis Brown Agency in London.

The [2012 PAGE Awards](#) begins accepting entries on December 1, 2011!

## “I Don't Know What I'm Doing!”

by R. Scott Shields

Every screenwriter feels this way at some point, right? I've even taken it a step further and told producers that very thing during pitch meetings. Exec: “Scott, tell me about your writing process.” Scott: “I don't know what I'm doing. Please don't tell anyone.”

R. Scott Shields won the 2010 PAGE Awards Grand Prize for his family comedy *Supercat!* and a Bronze in 2009 for his sports drama *Strawberry Mansion*. He recently completed a high-concept sci-fi adventure screenplay for Hydraulx Entertainment. Scott is represented by Brent Travers of Ascend Entertainment.

It always gets a laugh. It never gets me hired. But it's true.

I get so excited when I come up with a new idea. I imagine the characters, the conflicts, the climax. So many possibilities. But then comes the work of putting it all together. There are a zillion ways to screw up a good idea. That's when the thought comes creeping into my head. “I really don't know what I'm doing.”

Maybe that's not such a bad thing. Let me explain why...

A few years ago, my colleague Kurt brought me research material for a great sports drama. It was about a very dangerous neighborhood in Philadelphia called Strawberry Mansion where young people operate stables right on the street. Surrounded by turf wars and extraordinarily high murder rates, they train and race their horses in the park as an alternative to street life.

I loved the idea. I envisioned a grounded personal story of a kid caught between good and bad. But how could I bring subtle details to characters whose experience is so different than mine?

I spent days wrestling with that question. Finally, I adopted a mantra that carried me through the first draft. People are people. Everyone cares about their friends and family. They want to feel pride in what they do. They are flawed but capable of redemption. I need to write the characters as people I understand.

With that in mind, I dove in and finished the first draft in six weeks. The result was okay, but still needed something. It needed danger and authenticity.

Nine months later, Kurt and I flew to Philly to visit the neighborhood I'd known only through research. We walked into a tourist shop, bought a nice street map and asked the lady behind the counter to point out where Strawberry Mansion was located. “You sure you wanna go there?” she asked. “Yep, that's the place.” It was time to meet the horsemen of Strawberry Mansion.

At the stables, we were greeted with suspicion. People saw us but pretended we weren't there. It was odd. Finally, a group of teenagers agreed to let me interview them. I broke out my recorder, and before long their suspicion melted away. Their anecdotes and attitude were pitch perfect for the tone I was trying to develop.

I finished the script and it did very well in several top

contests in 2009. But what made me proudest was when it won Best Screenplay at the Peachtree Village International Film Festival in Atlanta, one of the largest African American film festivals in the U.S. (Did I mention that I'm very white and *Strawberry Mansion* is 100% African American?) I'd love to say that the auditorium reacted with stunned silence when I walked onto the stage to accept the award, but the truth is that nobody cared about the color of my skin. That prize, more than any other, validated my mantra. People are people. I can write for any character I choose.

Which brings me to my next example.

I was walking to my car in the pre-dawn hours when I saw something amazing. Beneath a lone streetlight, two cats were engaged in an epic fight. A big bad bully versus a dainty little thing from down the block. Somehow that dainty little cat beat the holy hell out of the bully. I'll never know what inspired it to fight like that, but I thought if I could fill in the blanks it would make a fun story. The good guy, the bad guy, the girl they were fighting for. It would be a family comedy with an underdog vibe and I'd call it *Supercat!* I felt I really had something.

Having learned my lesson from *Strawberry Mansion*, I knew that I had to understand my characters' world. I decided to pull a Jane Goodall before writing anything. I literally laid out in my alley where local cats gather and did my best to fit in. The neighbors thought I'd lost my marbles. This went on for days. Then a funny thing happened. The cats accepted me. And I began to understand the world from a height of six inches. The neighborhood is a sprawling kingdom. A crow on the phone line is like a fighter jet waiting to strike. In the cat world, territory is power.

But about 60 pages into the first draft, I realized that I was paying too much attention to the “cat world.” My lead character was passive and dull. As a result, so were his choices and so was my story. I was in a rut. I walked away from the script and wasn't sure if I'd get back to it.

Several weeks later, I was watching *The Break Up* on TV when I had a “Eureka!” moment. Vince Vaughn spoke with exactly the same attitude I had imagined for my lead cat. He has a charming cockiness that hides a vulnerability. What if my protagonist's every line sounded like it came from Vince's mouth? It worked. My cat's new swagger and heart blended perfectly with the “cat world” and the underdog vibe. There was still a long way to go, but I had a story, a style and a main character I was happy with.

My little cat story went on to win the 2010 PAGE Grand Prize and, along with *Strawberry Mansion*, got me hired to write a feature for an aggressive young production company here in L.A. It made all that time rolling around the alley seem worthwhile.

And that's my point. When I'm excited about a new idea, I don't know exactly how I'm going to put all the pieces together. I just know something about the idea inspires me, and with time and effort, I'll find a way to figure out the rest. So it's okay to say “I don't know what I'm doing!”

But seriously, don't say it in a meeting.

## Rise Above the Din

by Collin Chang

Have you ever seen those documentaries where thousands of Emperor penguins go waddling around on an iceberg? Did you know the babies hide between the male parents' legs while the females go off looking for food? The animal kingdom is amazing, isn't it?

Collin Chang has sold two scripts to major studios and has been hired on a dozen writing assignments. In 2006, his first independent horror film was made and ultimately distributed by ThinkFilm. Collin currently has projects in active development at Mosaic Media Group and Accelerated Entertainment.

When a baby, inevitably, gets separated from its father among the teeming masses, how does daddy find it? Its voice, of course. Papa penguin is completely attuned to his offspring's singular voice. If only our writing voices could be as naturally unique.

A writer's voice is everything. In fact, it can be the deciding factor as to whether your script succeeds or fails. Sure, you might get read. But if you really want your masterpiece to stand out and be championed,

you'll need to bring a unique voice to the table.

Not fair? Love and war ain't fair. And when you're trying to get ahead in this fickle town, friendo, it's nothing short of trench warfare.

But what, you may ask, is a writer's "voice"? Good question. Boot up that Notebook Ap on the old smart phone, cause you're going to want to save this one. Ready? What's your voice?

### IT'S YOU TELLING THE READER YOU'RE IN CHARGE.

That's it. You're the Caped Crusader of Gotham City. You're Alec Baldwin telling Jack Lemmon to "Put that coffee down." Because coffee, as we know, is for closers. You're... well, you get the idea.

Voices come in all shapes and sizes. But if the voice is right, if it's pitch-perfect, a reader will follow you to Dagobah and back.

Quentin Tarantino's voice is light years from, say, Aaron Sorkin's, yet they're both masters of their craft.

Ever read a Tarantino script? It sounds exactly the way he talks. It's as if you're hearing the ultimate fanboy telling you about the movie he just saw where Bane beats the living crap out of Batman, and you can almost feel those blows across your sternum as you listen to the tale.

Here's an excerpt from Tarantino's classic chop-socky mash up, *Kill Bill*:

**BLACK AND WHITE CU of a WOMAN lying on the floor, looking up. The woman on the floor has just taken a severe spaghetti-Western-style gang beating. Her face is bloody, beaten up, and torn. The high contrast B/W turning the red blood into black blood.**

See what I mean? Tarantino's words just ooze a fanboy's love of those old, grindhouse revenge flicks, don't they?

The writing is visceral, poetic, strangely compelling. It's as if he's pitching his movie to you and you alone.

A writer's voice is very much his or her fingerprints all over the page. A single page can fall out of a Diablo Cody script ("Oh my blog!") and any reader or agent worth his salt will recognize it before it hits the floor.

Some writer's voices flow like smooth jazz, while others' are discordant and staccato, yet both achieve the same thing: they suck you in.

Legendary screenwriter Shane Black was famous for talking directly to the reader and greasing the rails, as it were. He made reading a script fast and fun. Most importantly, he made you feel as if you were a part of the story as it unfolded. And we ate it up like candy.

Check out the top of page two from his ground-breaking action script, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*:

**Peaceful. Serene. It's the town in the glass bubble, the one God shakes to watch it snow.**

**During most of the following, God is elsewhere.**

Show of hands, class. Who's going to stop reading there? Yeah, that's what I thought.

Today, he's still at the top of his game. Here's Black again, with the opening slug line from *The Nice Guys*:

**FADE IN: TV SCREEN - A BUNCH OF DAMN PUPPETS**

That kind of sets the stage, doesn't it? One surmises several things from that opening. This script is smart. It's snarky. And the writer has a definite point of view (he hates puppets).

Here's an example of a charming, original voice from one of the hottest writing teams working today, Scott Neustadter & Michael H. Weber. Following are the first three pages of their masterwork (*500 Days of Summer*):

**Pg. 1)**

**NOTE: THE FOLLOWING IS A WORK OF FICTION. ANY RESEMBLANCE TO PERSONS LIVING OR DEAD IS PURELY COINCIDENTAL.**

**Pg. 2)**

**ESPECIALLY YOU JENNY BECKMAN.**

**Pg. 3)**

**BITCH.**

Are you ready to read this now? The setup is smart. It's snarky. But best of all, it telegraphs the premise of the script, even before the Fade In. You know this movie is about a guy who can't get over a girl. And you just know it's going to be original, because those first three pages are about as off-the-beaten-path as they come.

Now, you try it. Opening page – how do you make your writer's voice rise above the din of 50,000 scripts hitting D-Girls' desks all over Hollywood?

Your voice tells us you're in charge. We're in good hands. And we're in for a fun read.

## Five Keys to Writing Blockbusters: Part 2

by John Truby

[Last issue](#), John introduced us to two vital components of a smash-hit film and how to incorporate them into your screenplay. Here is the rest of that discussion...

### Technique 3: The Opponent

As screenwriters, we are taught to focus on the hero, since this character drives the story. That's sound advice. But in blockbuster films, the opponent is even more important. One of the great principles in all storytelling is that the hero is only as compelling as the person he fights. The opponent is the key to plot, and in the last 10 years blockbusters have become more plot heavy.

Make sure you have one main opponent to focus and build the conflict. Then look for ways to intensify the central opposition. Make your main opponent bigger, smarter, more aggressive, more passionate. In writing *Batman Begins*, Christopher Nolan said, "What was important to me in creating a frightening villain is that everything he says is true and at some level reasonable and makes sense." Nolan used this same approach in *The Dark Knight* when he created The Joker, one of the all-time great opponents and probably the key element in that film's huge success.

Next, come up with a secondary opponent or two. At least one of them should initially be hidden from the hero and the audience.

### Technique 4: The Scam

The emphasis blockbusters place on plot leads to another story technique designed to solve a problem that plagues almost all screenwriters – how do you create maximum plot in the middle, where 90% of scripts fail? In blockbuster movies, the hero's plan is often a scam, or at least a plan that involves deception.

The trick here is to make the plan more deceptive for both hero and main opponent. When the hero scams, he becomes a trickster character, which audiences love. When the opponent scams, it gives you more plot and makes him/her a more challenging foe.

### Technique 5: The Story World

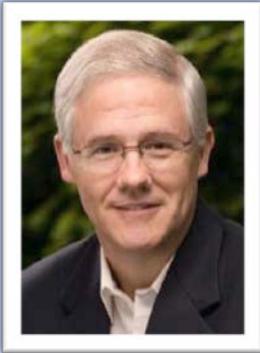
The rise of the videogame along with the ability of special effects artists to realize wholly imaginary worlds has made the story world one of the crucial elements in a blockbuster film. As little as a decade ago, Hollywood didn't care about story world, because it slows down narrative drive. Special effects were designed primarily to heighten heroic action.

But videogames showed Hollywood the power that comes from having viewers immerse themselves and explore a world in all its facets. And there's no medium that can do that better than the big-screen film.

Many screenwriters believe that this aspect of the film is the responsibility of the director and the special effects artists. Wrong. A good story world is written into the script and is intimately organic to the story. That's why every visual element must contribute to the story. In other words, every element should have story meaning embedded within it. How you do that is a major story skill, right up there with character, plot and dialogue.

All of the major techniques for creating a rich story world are found in my [Blockbuster](#) story development software. The first step is to define a distinct and recognizable arena. Then create a map of the world, with as much detail as you can provide, especially when depicting the central community within which the story takes place. *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Avatar* were all written by masters of the story world.

Start with these techniques and you will be well on the path to writing a script that Hollywood is eager to buy.

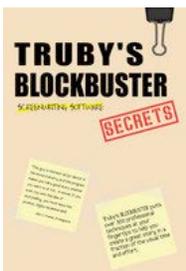


John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his 22-Step Great Screenwriting and Genre courses to sold-out audiences in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Sydney, Rome, Toronto and other far-flung locales. Over the past 20 years, more than 30,000 students have taken Truby's 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.

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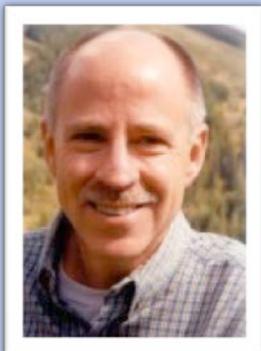


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Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [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)

### Why Must a Script Be Formatted?

by Dave Trottier

#### READER'S QUESTION:

Why must a script be formatted, if the point is to tell a good story?

#### DAVE'S ANSWER:

The short answer is because you want to sell your script. It's possible to sell your story in treatment form, but it will be for a lot less money.

As a developing writer, it's normal to view formatting conventions as a kind of an arbitrary rigid box that you must force the content of your story into, but that's missing the point. It's time to re-frame.

Formatting is the language of screenplays. It's a **flexible** communication guide for expressing your story in a way that other professional collaborators (producers, directors, cinematographers, readers, agents and others) can clearly understand. In reality, formatting guidelines are truly a friend.

#### READER'S QUESTION:

If I am going to produce my screenplay myself, do I need to correctly format it?

#### DAVE'S ANSWER:

You may not need to be as particular, but you will still need to communicate what you want to the director, crew and cast in a language they understand. You will still need a script that can be "broken down" for a shoot.

#### READER'S QUESTION:

Is it true that if you violate screenplay format in any tiny way, your script is immediately rejected?

#### DAVE'S ANSWER:

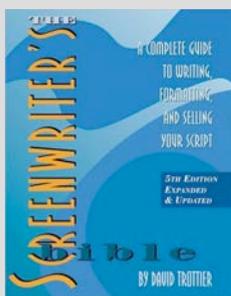
No. If you've written a riveting story, but there are a few minor errors in formatting, the script is not going to be tossed into the round file.

The problem comes when your errors in formatting become confusing or distracting to the reader. When a writer pays insufficient attention to formatting conventions or uses his own inimitable formatting style, the resulting script is usually either confusing or distracting or both.

Your goal, therefore, is to strive for correct format and be consistent in how you apply formatting tools, but not to obsess over it to the point that you buy a handgun. Perfection is not the goal; excellence is.

Keep writing!

#### **Dave Trottier's** **"The Screenwriter's Bible"** Fully updated fifth edition



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## The Importance of Being Prolific

by Marvin V. Acuna

Terry Rossio (co-writer of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise) believes that a trait of successful screenwriters is... Prolificacy.

Here are his specific thoughts:

### PROLIFICACY

Consider this: in the afterward of Stephen King's book *Different Seasons*, he explains how the four stories in the volume came about. Each one was written after he had completed writing one of his novels.

He writes, "...[I]t's as if I've always finished the big job with just enough gas left in the tank to blow off one good-sized novella." So he wrote *The Body* after *Salem's Lot*. *Apt Pupil* after *The Shining*. *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption* after *The Dead Zone*. And *Breathing Method* after *Firestarter*. Now just stop and think about this. Here's a writer who, after finishing a bestselling novel, has the ability to sit down and knock out a masterfully written novella in a matter of days. And three of these "afterthoughts" have been adapted into major motion pictures.

Now that's prolific.

I often meet screenwriters that become obsessed with one screenplay and devote years of their time and energy to it. Some spend more than a decade on one.

Other writers expend precious energy awaiting responses to query letters or submissions. Months go by and the only additional writing done is focused on follow-up letters or emails asking the horrid question: Have you read my script?

In my humble opinion, if you are spending that kind of time on one screenplay, writing is a hobby, not a profession.

If screenwriting is a hobby for you, then it doesn't matter. But if you are truly committed to screenwriting as a professional endeavor, then generating content should be a ritual, a tradition, an absolute must.

Hobby or profession? Only you know the truth.

This is a competitive profession. It requires that you play your A-game even if you are not yet an A-lister.

I've worked with various screenwriters who have written an entire spec and then through the process discovered a character or an idea that was worthy of further exploration. They have no issue discarding the screenplay and beginning a new one based on their new discoveries.

Other writers submit their completed works and while they await feedback from their representatives or the market itself, they begin work on the next screenplay.

Is it easy? No. It's not supposed to be easy. If it were easy everyone would be doing it.

Being prolific has numerous benefits. Beyond amassing an inventory of material and developing a necessary habit, I believe you hone, shape and refine your skills as a screenwriter.

I know many industry professionals who would agree with literary manager Jewel Ross, who said "I sell writers, not scripts." He expects his clients to generate content, to be prolific. Three to four screenplays a year is the minimum.

With these criteria in mind, let's bring all of this back to you. While not everyone can be Stephen King, are you at least setting the table for your success? I've said this before, but this is an industry where talent alone won't carry you across the threshold to screenwriting stardom.

Instead, it takes that rare combination of talent, passion, and joyful hard work. In other words, being prolific. My hope is that you have already incorporated this necessary screenwriting trait into your writing routine, or you see the value in it and will start applying it immediately.



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

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## 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

## DeWarrenne Pictures

[code: dw13djg4xv]

We are looking for completed feature-length ghost story scripts with clever twists. We are shooting this project in coastal Thailand so it must not depend on any other terrain or environment (no desert, tundra, etc.). We particularly like U.S. Southern Gothic styles such as *Skeleton Key* and *The Gift*.

Budget will not exceed \$500,000. Non-WGA writers only, please.

Our credits include *Soi Cowboy*, an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival, along with other features.

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!

## (Company Name Withheld)

[code: d6uzek8eea]

We are looking for completed feature-length microbudget scripts in the following genres only: action, action/comedy and horror. Groundbreaking, experimental material is ideal, but the action must be intimate (hand-to-hand combat, free running, gunplay, destruction of property) and not "studio" (i.e. no car chases, helicopters, massive explosions). The story should move on action, not dialogue. If it is a horror script, there should be an emphasis on limited-location scares without too much dialogue (e.g. *The Strangers*, *Paranormal Activity*).

Budget has yet to be determined, but this particular project's budget will be low. WGA and non-WGA writers may submit.

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!

## Softcelluloid Films

[code: qn3k5etebx]

We are looking for completed 30 min. or 1-hour character-driven dramedy scripts for television or an online web series. We specifically need material that is sophisticated, yet edgy and should work for TV, so we need material in the vein of *Weeds*, *Entourage*, *Bored to Death*, etc. Please describe the character in the personal message space provided when submitting.

Budget has yet to be determined. WGA and non-WGA okay.

Our credits include the award-winning film *Intelligence*, and we are repped by a major studio management company.

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!



### SOMETHING STARTLING HAPPENS: THE 120 STORY BEATS EVERY WRITER NEEDS TO KNOW

This clever book reveals the minute-by-minute story genome that unites successful films. A catalyst for developing compelling screenplays, it illustrates its principles with examples from more than 50 hit films, including *Star Wars*, *Forrest Gump*, *Being John Malkovich*, *The Godfather*, *Rashomon*, *Halloween*, *Jaws*, *Juno*, *Knocked Up*, *The Matrix*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Spider-Man*.

[Learn more...](#)



### THE SCREENWRITER WITHIN

If you've ever dreamed of writing a screenplay, this is the book for you. Insightful, inspirational and wildly irreverent, it takes you through all the stages of the writing process, using references to hit movies and the author's personal experience to show you how to:

- Turn everyday events into big-screen successes
- Find the best stories to turn into screenplays
- Develop strong characters
- Write compelling dialogue

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### THE FOUR MAGIC QUESTIONS OF SCREENWRITING

This book ends an agony that plagues screenwriters of all levels – how to structure their script. A revolutionary technique helps writers structure, write and rewrite scripts with ease. By asking your characters these four simple questions, you will be able to outline your screenplay like magic.

Author Marilyn Horowitz, an award-winning New York University professor, is also a writing coach whose students are now successful film and TV writers.

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