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Letter from the Editor

Have you submitted your screenplay to the [2016 PAGE Awards](#) competition yet? Our Late Entry Deadline is now just two weeks away (Tuesday, March 15), so submit your script today for a shot at winning one of 31 Awards in 10 different genre categories. The PAGE Awards contest has launched countless careers over the last decade, and you could be next!

As always, the **LOGLINE** eZine is here to prepare you for life as a professional screenwriter. In this issue, 2015 PAGE Grand Prize winner Gareth Smith explains how evaluating scripts for Everest Entertainment made him a better writer. PAGE Judge Heidi Hornbacher reveals how breaking down your favorite movies and TV shows will reveal their hidden secrets. Genre guru John Truby makes a case for *Veep* and *Game of Thrones* as the gold standard for TV writing.

Our in-house format expert, Dave Trottier, discusses montages, hyphens and cross-cutting. Industry insider Marvin V. Acuna informs us about a writing team that successfully navigated a difficult situation. And to put a cap on this issue, we share the latest leads from InkTip!

Happy reading,



Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ The 2010 PAGE Bronze Prize-winning drama *About Scout*, written and directed by Laurie Wetz, will open in New York and L.A. on March 11. Produced by Brownbag Pictures and Decipher Entertainment, the movie stars India Ennenga, James Frecheville, Danny Glover and Ellen Burstyn. It is being distributed by Reel Red Films and Breaking Glass Pictures.
- ◇ The TV One drama *White Water*, based on the 2005 PAGE Bronze Prize-winning short film script by the same name, was nominated for two 2016 NAACP Image Awards. Our own Michael S. Bandy and Eric Stein were nominated for Outstanding Writing in a Motion Picture for Television, and Rusty Cundieff was nominated for Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture for Television.
- ◇ 2009 PAGE Gold Prize winner Rob Sudduth (*Red Band Society*, *The New Normal*) wrote an episode of the NBC comedy series *Telenovela* this season, entitled "Evil Twin." Rob is represented by MetaMorphic Entertainment and UTA.
- ◇ 2008 Gold Prize winner VJ Boyd (*Justified*, *The Player*) co-wrote the new ABC drama pilot *The Jury*, which is now in pre-production. *The Jury* is the story of a single murder trial as seen through the eyes of each of the individual jurors. VJ is also executive producing the show with Carol Mendelsohn (CSI). He is represented by WME and Plattform.
- ◇ 2015 Bronze Prize winner Steven Canals has been hired as a staff writer on the new Freeform horror series *Dead of Summer*. Shortly after winning his award, Steven wrote to us: "I'm still in shock over my win. Since the awards were announced, I've been on several meetings scheduled by my management company. *Hope Projects* is being read, and most recently has been used as a sample for staffing (fingers crossed)." And a few months later, this is the happy result! Steven is represented by PAGE Judge Jarrod Murray at Epicenter.

2016 PAGE Awards Late Entry Deadline: Tuesday, March 15

My Journey From Script Reader to Screenwriter

by Gareth Smith

I have a confession: I used to be on the other side. I was the guy reading and rejecting scripts, helping decide which films my company would finance. From 2009-2013, I worked for Everest Entertainment in New York. With just three people, we all straddled creative,

Gareth Smith won the 2015 PAGE Grand Prize for his drama *Immaculate*, which was optioned by PAGE Judge Mitchell Peck of Peck Entertainment. Gareth is currently working on his next screenplay, a sci-fi/thriller. A British expat based just outside Knoxville, Tennessee, you can find him on Twitter @garethps.

development and executive roles while producing the films *Mother and Child*, *Win Win*, *127 Hours* and *Mud* over those four years.

Our mandate was somewhat unique: to find important stories with a strong message and a philanthropic angle. We sought quality writing above all else, considering the script the most

important factor. And we were prepared to take our time to find the perfect convergence of story, package and timing.

Needless to say, this created an incredible opportunity for me to learn firsthand about the journey from blank page to silver screen. I have always loved film, and storytelling has been a part of my life ever since I was able to construct sentences. But it was with Everest that those passions converged into a love for the art of screenwriting, specifically.

I devoured every script I could find. I scoured the Internet for material that the bigger companies might have missed: amateur submissions on ScriptShadow, writing forums, back-channeled PDFs through friends of friends. I found sharing sites where hot scripts were uploaded on the sly, and trawled the annual Black List for anything interesting. When we were between projects, I could easily get through 30+ scripts a week.

The thrill upon finding that rare standout was incredible. I would eagerly share the script with my colleagues, passionately extolling its virtues, and I tried to find the source of my colleagues' passions when they lauded something else.

Obviously, with just four films in as many years, we passed on a lot of screenplays. The reasons were innumerable: budget too big/small; timing not right; genre not what we were looking for, etc. Sometimes we loved a script but had to pass for reasons a writer could never anticipate. For example, there was one project we absolutely loved, but the subject matter conflicted with a charity the company's founder supported. The film went on to win multiple awards and we were delighted for the filmmakers.

There were also, inevitably, screenplays that I simply didn't like. There were some, even by seasoned pros, that I thought were poorly written. But reading is utterly subjective, and many of those scripts were later bought, produced, and turned into successful films, regardless of the fact that they once received scathing

coverage from some bloke in NYC.

That is why perhaps the most valuable lesson I take from my time on "the other side" is the simple fact that not everyone will like everything I write. **And that's okay.** I am fully prepared for the fact that my scripts will be rejected by some – perhaps even most – of the people who read them. But all it takes is one person who connects with the material and feels that buzz. One company with whom the convergence is just right.

For the scripts produced by Everest, we were that company. The fact that others had passed was just "the process," the path most films must take to reach that one champion who can guide a script on the next steps of the journey.

And oh, what a journey it is! I was privileged to work with some incredible directors, producers and crew. I drafted contracts and budgets, helped with casting, worked on location and in studios alongside exceptional artists. Of course, these experiences inform my writing, too, but more than anything, I am simply excited for the day one of my own scripts is on that path.

When I get there, it will be in part due to the lessons I learned simply from reading scripts while wearing a producer's hat. You don't need to get an industry job to share those lessons, though. There are several things any writer can do to study the art exactly as I did:

- 1) Read **everything**. Read produced screenplays to learn what the industry is buying and figure out why they worked. Read unproduced scripts and figure out why they haven't yet found their champion. Even read **bad** scripts. There are lessons on every page.
- 2) Become an expert on your genre, but read other genres, too. If your knowledge is too one-dimensional, it can show in your writing.
- 3) Consider budget, because your readers definitely will. Producers see dollar signs in every slugline, location, special effect, stunt or crowd scene. Every film is a gamble for the financier, so keeping the budget appropriate to your story and genre can help mitigate a potentially huge obstacle.

My job helped me to develop innate instincts in my writing, but I was trying so hard to find strong voices and stories (and playing my small part in bringing them to life) that my own voice became hard to discern amidst the noise. My stories were dormant – seeds left unwatered while I tended other gardens.

But my experience was telling me "I can do this." Set against all the screenplays I'd read, I felt confident that with enough work, my stories could stand on their own merits. My voice would be strong, if I gave it a chance to develop. That's when I knew I had to leave my job.

Now, **my** script is crossing desks. Execs are reading, considering, and recommending/passing on it just as I once did. And when my work reaches that one person – the one who reads it and feels the same thrill I used to – I know exactly how special that is.

Story Got You Stumped? Have a Breakdown!

by Heidi Hornbacher

We've all been there. You start off with an idea that you know has legs. You have captivating characters, fun twists, and maybe an original set piece (no one has driven a

Lamborghini onto a helicopter yet!) or a deep emotional moment or two.

Heidi Hornbacher is a producer, director and writer with features, shorts and music videos to her credit. She was recently hired to write two features and has a series of novels in the works. A graduate of UCLA's screenwriting program, Heidi is co-founder of [PageCraft](#), a script consulting company that runs retreats, workshops and classes in L.A. and Italy.

But something's not working. You've hit a wall. Maybe you've even gotten notes from trusted readers, and either you disagree with them or you can't figure out how to integrate them successfully. Those idea legs have gotten shaky and tired. But that doesn't necessarily mean that your script has to sit out the next round of contests.

Last week, I worked with a client on a TV pilot she's creating. It's a procedural with a fun twist. The problem was that the procedure itself was too flat and too easy. As viewers, we've become really sophisticated in solving TV crime and woe to the writer who doesn't stay a step or two ahead of our inner Sherlock.

For a start, I asked, "Have you seen *Elementary*?" She hadn't, so she watched a few episodes. "Do a breakdown," I suggested. She'd gotten the basic idea, she said. "No," I countered. "Watching films and TV that really work on a script level is fun and enjoyable, sure. But solid entertainment is also a free education just sitting there at our fingertips. We can take advantage of it with a more active watching approach: a story breakdown."

"That will take a long time," she sighed. "Yes, yes it will." I said. "But creating an amazing script takes time. Why not invest a little in your ongoing education?"

When you do a breakdown, I'm not suggesting that you simply write a description of the action: **Joan walks into the kitchen and discovers Sherlock dumping honey down the drain. Then they visit the crime scene.** I'm suggesting that you reverse engineer the story as though you were writing the outline. So an entry for an individual scene might look like this:

B story: Joan wants to get to the sink but she can't because Sherlock is dumping honey down the drain. She confronts him on food waste and Sherlock reveals he's fallen out with his father, who won't be visiting again. They get a call from Detective Bell with new case info and leave.

This was a scene about the characters' personal relationships, thus it's part of a B or C story, not the A story, which in a procedural is always the crime. The writer's goal in the scene was for Sherlock to communicate to Joan that he'd fallen out with his father. The honey was something they had on hand for his father's tea. Thus, Sherlock's action in dumping the honey made that internal goal external and active – it made it visual. Imagine how

boring that scene would be if Joan simply walked in and asked, "Why are you sad?" and Sherlock flatly stated, "My dad and I fought" and Joan said, "Oh. Hey, Bell has a new clue." It transmits the same basic information, but as audience members we're not interested.

The scene started with the character goals in opposition, something that's key to creating a scene with energy and engagement. The fact that Joan's goal was blocked pushed her to take different action, which naturally led her to confront Sherlock. This was a character-motivated action – you want those! The way the scene was executed shows the petulance of Sherlock's character, and it also reveals the subtext that he **does** care about his dad and he's too proud to admit that he's hurting over their falling out. (Writing spec dialogue for a character like Sherlock is a great writing exercise because he never talks about anything he truly feels; it's all subtext.)

Finally, in the overall structure of the show, that scene launches us into the next scene on the A storyline: a new clue in the investigation.

This breakdown training was enormously helpful to my client. Seeing when *Elementary* plots reveal new clues, and how those clues and complications change the trajectory of the characters, helped her restructure her own work. It helped her see how much more substance and how many more turns her pilot's investigation may need. It also gave her some great examples of subtle character development.

Breaking down a show or film can help reveal the overall shape of the story. It throws the execution choices the writer made into high relief, so we can learn and also improve our own writing. We can see character goals and outcomes, A versus B versus C storylines, story structure, and plot twists.

You can probably guess that I recommend doing your own script outline this way, too. For each scene, answer these questions: What storyline does the scene serve? What are the characters' goals and how are they in opposition? What's the obstacle to the protagonist's goal? What's the complication or reveal? What's the outcome?

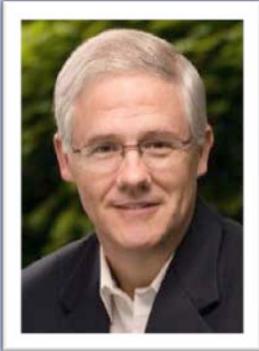
Or, more simply put, for each scene write out: **Character 1 (the protagonist driving your action) wants X (goal) but Y (complication or obstacle), so... Z (outcome).**

Doing a breakdown for someone else's movie or TV show will help you gain facility in answering these questions for your own script. Being able to clearly articulate character goals, obstacles, and outcomes will strengthen your understanding of story structure and character motivations. It's the best way to ferret out those scenes that aren't doing enough to move your story forward.

For a while, doing breakdowns may make your favorite viewing experiences less fun, but I promise you that such suffering for your art is worth it. Not only will it help you get those story legs back up and running, it will also help you articulate why such a little scene is about so much more than just dumping honey down the drain.

Truby's Take: The Best Shows on TV

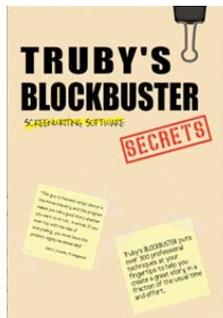
by John Truby



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his Anatomy of Story Masterclass to more than 40,000 students worldwide. He is the author of [The Anatomy of Story](#). To learn more about Truby's classes and screenwriting software, please visit www.truby.com.

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All the best shows in the history of television transcend their genres, which means that they hit the special story beats of their form but also twist them in an original way we've never seen before. *Veep* and *Game of Thrones* both use this strategy to perfection.

In my opinion, *Veep* is unquestionably the best, and best written, comedy on television. It hits all the special story beats of the half-hour comedy, but with much more depth and originality than the standard American sitcom.

Unlike the standard comedy that gives its lead a single identifiable flaw, *Veep* gives all of its characters multiple and serious flaws, and the comedy comes out of these flaws. The show is also quite advanced in how it sets up the comic oppositions among the characters, which not only makes it very funny, but gives it among the best plots in TV comedy.

Best of all, *Veep's* stories are always politically incorrect in the extreme. The comedy is probably the most aggressive in the history of American television, and that is only possible because it airs on HBO.

Game of Thrones is a serial drama, which means that it weaves multiple characters with season-long arcs. Right away this allows the show much more complexity of character and plot because it has an entire season to play these out. The series uses the fantasy and action genres, but it transcends these forms by borrowing techniques from Historical Drama, the most complex of all story forms in any medium.

In writing a Historical Drama, the writer has two central story challenges: 1) weave the desires and actions of a huge cast of characters within each episode and over the course of the season, and 2) connect the characters to the larger society and the historical forces that are strongly affecting, if not totally determining, the characters' fates.

But the stroke of genius that sets this show apart is the way novelist George R. R. Martin and show creators David Benioff and D.B. Weiss use a tournament story structure to shape the hundreds of characters and events over multiple seasons. The game of thrones begins with seven or more major contestants for the big prize, but it's eventually going to end with one. Notice that this creates a huge vortex that will funnel down to a single point.

This one technique gives *Game of Thrones* both the broadest and most complex plot in the history of television, while at the same time giving it overwhelming dramatic power. Content times impact equals knockout punch.

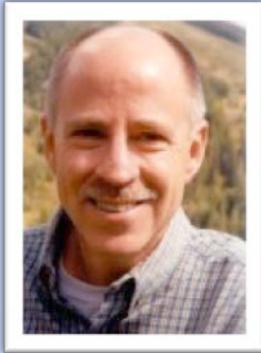
Last season the show was even more guilty than usual of treating its characters sadistically. But that has always been part of the show. One example did provide what was for me the most shocking and dramatic scene I have ever witnessed in TV or film. I should say two scenes, because the first scene was the all-important set-up that made the drama of the second scene possible (**NOTE: Spoiler Alert!**).

Stannis has been desperately fighting to conquer Winterfell, but he is now in a trap. His young daughter, Shireen, worships him and he has shown her great love. He tells her he has a hard choice, but she supports him and wants to do anything she can to help. They hug, and he whispers, "Forgive me."

This intimate scene brings father and daughter closer than they have ever been, and brings the audience into that deep love as never before. And so the shock, for her and for us, is all the greater when Shireen is then led to a pyre where she will be burned at the stake as a sacrifice for her father's will to power.

Notice all the techniques in these two scenes. First, the writers pull from the ancient myths, in this case the Agamemnon story where he sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia so he can make war on Troy. Second, we see how revelation is the key to plot, and a revelation with betrayal is the best reveal of all. Third, a reveal must be set up, and that happens when you lead the audience's expectations in the opposite direction of where you will actually take them.

One more point on the quality of last season. It's instructive that the biggest flaws came from too much plot, a problem almost no other show has. With so many characters and story strands, especially the later episodes suffered from storylines that were resolved too quickly. But given that the biggest problem most writers have in trying to reach the pro level is an inability to plot, this excess of plot is a weakness we would all love to have.

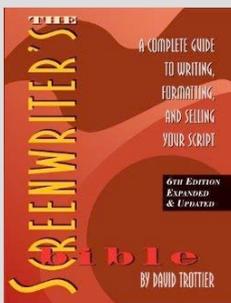


Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), 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. For \$20 off a script evaluation done by Dave, email him at dave@keepwriting.com.

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Questions From Dave's Mailbag

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I actually have three questions:

A) Can I have two consecutive montages?

B) If yes, can I have two consecutive montages in the same location but during different times, like night and the next morning?

And C) Is it okay to format a montage where there is a voiceover along with it?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Yes. It seems odd that you would need two montages, but there's no rule against it.

With question B, just have one montage with a change in time. In other words, separate the first montage from the second with a secondary scene heading indicating the time change:

NEXT MORNING

Concerning question C, yes, you can do that in any kind of scene, whether it's a montage, dream, flashback, or what-have-you.

READER'S QUESTION:

When describing action, I have seen the use of three hyphens in many scripts, as in: "---" Is that the correct format?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

For a dash in narrative description or dialogue, use a space, followed by two hyphens, followed by a space -- like that. Don't use three.

READER'S QUESTION:

Even though it's okay to crosscut or write parallel action in a script, I shouldn't use the term CROSS-CUT in the spec screenplay itself, right?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Right; don't use that term. Just use master scene headings and describe what we see.

Here's a quick example:

EXT. HELIPAD

Jo jumps in the helicopter.

EXT. RESTAURANT

Sue looks up into the sky.

And then keep going back and forth with master scene headings, describing what we see.

Or consider using the INTERCUT, which is essentially the same as CROSS-CUT:

INTERCUT - HELIPAD/RESTAURANT

Jo jumps in the helicopter.

From the restaurant, Sue looks up into the sky.

The key is to be clear, and to keep writing!



Marvin V. Acuna is an accomplished film and television producer. He recently produced the features *Chez Upshaw*, starring Kevin Pollak and Ileana Douglas, and *Lovelace*, with Amanda Seyfried, Peter Saarsgard and James Franco.

Previously, he executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (starring John Malkovich) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

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Don't Sell Your Soul, Just Kill Your Ego

by Marvin V. Acuna

Back in 2000, I was a fairly established manager representing actors, writers, and directors. At a social function I met writers Jeffrey Dyson and Christopher Hall. I quickly realized that these two were 100% committed to becoming successful comedy screenwriters. So we exchanged information and that was that.

Now at the time, I represented Bernie Mac, and later on, as I thought about the type of material that my company desired for Bernie, I knew I had to contact Jeffrey and Christopher. I didn't represent them, but I knew they had a deep understanding of the African-American market, especially as it related to big, broad comedies. And sure enough, they introduced me to one of their comedy screenplays, *Deadbeat Dad Detective*. The script was about a private eye who tracks down fathers who are delinquent in child support payments, and was essentially an urban *Fletch* meets *Ace Ventura*.

In other words, it was perfect for Bernie. Unfortunately, the material was FAR from perfect... So here I was, sitting on a hot concept, but with no good sample to back it up once we met with the studios.

I reached out to a colleague of mine, an up-and-coming agent at William Morris (now WME), who was also making his mark in the African-American comedy film/TV space. Together we thought about a veteran writer who could oversee the rewrite of the script, and whose name had enough weight in the industry so that it would bring more weight to the project. Fortunately, veteran screenwriter Takashi Bufford agreed to our proposal, and it seemed like we had a solid package to take to the studios.

But as a Hollywood professional, one thing you can never predict is the ego of the screenwriters you work with. Especially if you're asking a writer to essentially relinquish creative control of his material.

So, although I was nervous about how Jeffrey and Christopher would react to this arrangement, they showed remarkable maturity and humility throughout the process. Here were two writers who weren't interested in being "right," but more interested in getting the job done "right." They took input from my agent friend, they took input from Takashi, they took input from Bernie, and they took input from the partners at my company. They had absolutely no ego or emotional attachment to the material. They simply wanted to put together the best and most appealing screenplay they could.

As a result, everyone loved working with them, and ultimately, everyone wanted to help them succeed.

The cool thing is, once we set up this project, we had positioned Jeffrey and Christopher as talented writers in the African-American comedy space who attracted top quality talent to their projects. As a result, it opened up doors to the other studios as well. Jeffrey and Christopher experienced their "breakthrough," and they rode this momentum to sell another half dozen scripts or so.

So what's the lesson here for you?

The lesson is, in order to achieve the success you desire as a screenwriter, you must kill your ego for the benefit of the collective. The goal is to create a successful movie, not to stroke your ego. Give value, be humble, and don't be too emotionally invested in your material. Be a collaborator and a team player, not a prima donna. Seek frank feedback from the key players within your project, and then apply that feedback. Don't take things personally. You're selling a screenplay, not chunks of your soul (although it may feel like that sometimes).

Remember, this isn't me haphazardly giving you advice from just one, random experience. What I'm revealing are the attributes that ALL successful screenwriters have in common. This is the good stuff!



Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from 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 before submitting it. Thanks!

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

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

Company A

[Code: f3w49yf1q6]

We are looking for male-driven action scripts in the vein of *Man on Fire* that performed well at a contest or festival. As such, we are interested in character-driven revenge scripts with a strong lead role for a male actor in his 40s. Please include any information about the contests or festivals at which your script has performed well.

Budget TBD. Both 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. Thanks!

Company B

[Code: 78hdr3k5xe]

We're looking for horror scripts where the main characters are under siege in a single location. We are also open to Hitchcockian thrillers with a siege element, but please note we particularly need material that includes wit or humor and a moral purpose, so please describe those elements. Only submit if your entire story takes place in a single location and involves the characters holding down that location while under attack from outside.

Budget will not exceed \$200K. WGA and non-WGA okay.

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

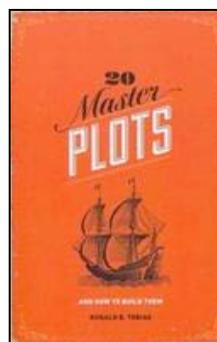
Company C

[Code: 5ej4d219ug]

We are looking for drama pilots with bibles. Submissions can be cable-oriented (in the vein of *Ray Donovan*, *Suits*, *Rectify*, *Burn Notice*, *Justified*, *The Americans*) or network (*The Good Wife*, *American Crime*, *Once*, *Galavant*, *How to Get Away With Murder*), but note that we are not reading or considering sci-fi material.

Budget TBD. Both 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. Thanks!

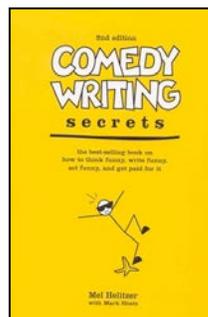


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- Analysis of successful plots and how to integrate them into your own unique story
- A handy plot checklist for any story you dream up

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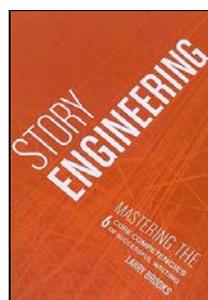


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STORY ENGINEERING

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