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Letter From the Editor

The PAGE Awards winners have been announced! A heartfelt congratulations to everyone who climbed this mountaintop. We're excited for you and look forward to watching your careers blossom before our eyes. And to those writers whose story ended prematurely this year, remember: writing is rewriting. Keep learning, growing and battling. Your next opportunity is December 1, when the 2017 contest begins.

With this final issue of 2016, we begin a new era for the **LOGLINE** eZine. Bigger pages, an airier layout and more pictures should make your read more pleasurable. Hope you like our new look! As always, we have great content for screenwriters. First, 2015 Gold Prize winner Jeremy Lee MacKenzie discusses the surprising results of his call for feedback on his film. PAGE Judge Tiffany Borders urges writers to avoid overused "trauma tropes" that need to be retired.

John Truby concludes his two-part analysis of film genres. "Dr. Format" Dave Trottier differentiates between scenes and sequences. Writing coach Lee Jessup, currently hosting a webinar on Stage 32, assesses the different paths that film and TV writers must take. And to close out the issue and the year: the latest leads from InkTip!

Happy reading,

Latest News From the PAGE Awards

- ◆ Lots of exciting news coming in from our 2016 PAGE Award winners! Grand Prize winner Diane Hanks has been signed by Jeff Portnoy at Bellevue Productions, Gold Prize winners Celine Held and Logan George have been signed by PAGE Judge Lee Stobby of Lee Stobby Entertainment, and Bronze Prize winner Julia Cooperman has been signed by Grandview Management. In addition, the 2016 PAGE Award-winning action scripts ***Never Leave Your Vehicle***, by Paul Clarke, and ***Off the Strip***, by Jonathan Kuhn and Austin Flack, have been optioned by PAGE Judge Mitchell Peck, and the Silver Prize-winning action script ***Carolina Caroline*** has been optioned by producers Brian Duffield and Nicki Cortese. There are many more deals in the works, so stay tuned!
- ◆ The action/thriller ***The Accountant***, by 2008 Gold Prize winner Bill Dubuque, opened in over 3,000 theaters across the country on October 14 and the movie was No. 1 at the box office on its opening weekend. Directed by Gavin O'Connor, ***The Accountant*** stars Ben Affleck, Anna Kendrick and J.K. Simmons. Bill is represented by Trevor Robbins at CAA and by PAGE Judge Eric Williams at Zero Gravity.
- ◆ 2006 Silver Prize winner Sang Kyu Kim is now working as a Supervising Producer on ABC's hot new fall show ***Designated Survivor***. Sang was previously a Staff Writer on the Starz drama ***Crash***, Story Editor on the TNT drama ***Hawthorne***, Producer on the AMC drama ***The Walking Dead***, Supervising Producer on the Fox drama ***24: Live Another Day***, and Executive Story Editor on the summer hit ***Wayward Pines***. He is represented by CAA.
- ◆ 2011 PAGE Gold Prize winners Dan Frey and Ru Sommer have struck a deal with Fox to develop their project ***Camelot***, a modern twist on the legendary stories of King Arthur that reimagines him as a modern-day graffiti artist who teams with his cop ex-girlfriend Gwen to battle crime. The writers will also serve as executive producers of the show alongside the Jackal Group's Gail Berman and former Fox COO Joe Earley. Dan and Ru are repped by Verve and Madhouse.

The 2017 PAGE Awards Contest Opens on December 1

Men vs. Women: Finding the Middle Ground

by Jeremy Lee MacKenzie

My short film *Flicker* is a simple story about a young girl dealing with her mother's death. She copes with that loss by remembering a game they played together in candlelight. Her mother promises to reincarnate as a candlestick so they will still be able to communicate through shadow puppets after she's gone.

It's a simple short film, the making of which spanned my entire college career. Here's how events unfolded...

I wrote *Flicker* in my freshman year of college, directly after a class trip to Sundance. There, I saw a lot of films about social issues. But one thing I learned was that it's most important to write the story you want to write, not what everyone else is writing. Rather than writing some social critique, I wanted to write a small story about the emotional connection between a young girl and her mother. I had no idea that the feedback and notes on the project would turn into a social lesson itself.

It began at the very first table reading of the script. About half of the people in the room were men and half were women. When the reading was finished, the response from everyone was emotionally strong, so I knew I had achieved my goal of creating an emotional catharsis. Several of the women said that parts of the script gave them chills! The men said that it was powerful, too.

But then I asked for additional feedback. Half of the men at the table pointed to a specific section in the script that they thought should be cut. "The final lines between the mother and daughter shouldn't be spoken," they said. "It should cut right to the climax," they said. The women immediately responded, "Wait! Those are the lines that gave us chills! You can't cut those lines!" The guys insisted that the lines didn't need to be there.

It was like a curious analogy for sex and how differently men and women view it — though of course this scene was as far from sexy as it gets. I realized right then that there were significant, gender-based differences between the ways men and women wanted to see the story unfold. I decided to keep the content the women wanted, but from that moment forward I began collecting feedback from men and women and comparing it in my mind.

In my sophomore year I began trying to produce the movie, but faced some obstacles. *Flicker* plays with the idea of God but isn't religiously motivated, and the story's theme is an unusual take on reincarnation. We were trying to shoot the movie in a Catholic Church, but according to church policy, before permission is granted, a script has to be approved by a Bishop. It took months, but the script was miraculously green-lit by a Bishop, who said: "It's just a good story!"

So we finally had our location. We shot the film the summer after my sophomore year and by the second half of my junior year we were in post-production. When the first cut was done, I circulated the film among groups of men and women and asked for feedback — now two years later, with completely different groups of people. Once again, about half of the men in the group said that those same lines between the mother and daughter should be cut. And once again, a majority of the women felt those same lines were the most important lines of the film.

There were other differences too. Many of the men wanted the movie to have a faster pace, with more flashbacks. But the women said that the faster "MTV style" cutting was less compelling and that films are cut too fast these days. They wanted a slower pace, especially for a story like this.



As a male writer/director trying to tell a story about two females, it became frustrating to continuously receive the same feedback over and over from other men, most of whom had no idea that their instincts were in direct opposition to those of our female audience. To me, the answer seemed simple. This is not a story about a father and son. This is a female-driven story about a young girl and her connection with her mother. So I decided that we would go with the feedback we were getting from our female audience.

We finalized our sixth cut and sent it off to people in the industry, feeling really good about it, only to get the response that our cut was too long! The pacing was a bit off, and the film didn't play as well as we expected it to. Turns out we had put so much emphasis on honoring feedback from our screenings that we had settled on a cut that never "killed our darlings," that time-honored piece of advice to writers.

So, during my senior year, my editor and I gave ourselves a final challenge: to kill our darlings without removing the content our female audience felt was most important to keep. We thought, "There has to be a middle ground." So we cut the story with a faster pace, but not at the expense of those big moments. We ended up with a film that honors the desires of both groups but is now almost five minutes shorter.

Watching this final cut, both men and women finally seem to agree that it's a much better movie, and they can't imagine it being any longer. We have now sent it off for our next round of festival submissions knowing that, although it will never be perfect, we have done our best to find the middle ground.

Though of course we still receive notes from men that those final lines of dialogue don't need to be there.



Jeremy Lee MacKenzie won the 2015 PAGE Gold Prize for his short film script *Flicker*. He is a screenwriter, director, and wood-scroll artist who attends Champlain College in Vermont, where he will soon graduate with a degree in creative media.

Pain Management or “Did You Have to Boil the Bunny?”

by Tiffany Borders

In a script, there are multiple types of pain you can inflict on your characters — physical, psychological, financial, emotional — and how you use that pain can often make or break your project. Inflicting pain on protagonists, antagonists or key supporting characters is a screenwriting technique used to create a bond of empathy between an audience and a character. It's a commonly used tool because, let's face it, it's effective. Unfortunately, during the spec-writing process, relying on certain “trauma tropes” can be an unexpected liability. Think of it from this perspective: When there's a disaster covered on the news, how many times can you watch the same footage before you start to get angry with the TV for showing it over and over?

It's exhausting for readers to become emotionally engaged in scripts when they see the same “trauma tropes” repeated over and over again. The desire to avoid that unpleasant emotional connection can be strong. The result for your script? To avoid re-experiencing a familiar pain, readers may pull back emotionally from your story instead of allowing themselves to be drawn in. They may even experience frustration with you as the writer for trying to “fool” them into being hurt. And that means you've lost them.

Industry readers are very story-savvy these days, and they've seen it all. Writers need to come up with fresh ideas to intrigue increasingly sophisticated audiences, rather than relying on familiar dramatic tropes and convenient storytelling devices from days gone by.

The following are examples of trauma tropes that readers see all too often in spec scripts. You might reconsider using these shortcuts for defining character and making an emotional impact on the reader.

Animal Abuse

Tell someone that you saw an action movie or thriller and mention that the protagonist had a loyal dog. Then ask the person what they think happened to the dog in the movie. Nine times out of ten, they'll tell you that the dog was probably killed. It's sad, but it's an emotional beat we've come to anticipate.

As with any other pain-related plot point, pet abuse should be approached with caution. It's not your fault that I've read 30 different versions of cats getting murdered, but unless you have a very good reason to do this, it's best to avoid this “low-hanging fruit.” In far too many spec scripts, pets are nailed to doors, left with their necks broken at doorsteps, or shot while desperately trying to save their human companions.

In fact, many dramas (and even comedies, sometimes) establish an antagonist as being a Bad Guy by having them abuse an animal, whether it's the poor treatment of their own pet or someone else's. Can this particular trauma trope work? Yes. Consider the boiled bunny in *Fatal Attraction*, the nerve-wracking kitten sacrifice of *Drag Me to Hell* or the deaths of Sansa and Robb's direwolves in *Game of Thrones*, where these pets serve as more than a prop to move the psychological stakes down the line, so it works.

“Fridging”

In the late 1990s, many women spoke out about how female characters are frequently raped, killed or put through pain as a device to give their male counterparts

depth. “Woman in Refrigerator Syndrome” is the term now used to describe this screenwriting tool.

The phrasing originates from a 1994 *Green Lantern* comic in which the superhero comes home to discover his dead girlfriend stuffed in a refrigerator. These days, the phrase is applied to any female character who exists primarily to have violence inflicted on her. While this trope usually exists in stories to motivate a male protagonist to action, it's also overused to motivate female characters.

Assault is certainly worthy of an in-depth exploration on screen, but many scripts fetishize the act and use it as a shortcut to audience empathy. Often, the thinking is that characters must suffer trauma to have depth. For male protagonists, it's often the shame of not protecting “their” women; for female protagonists, it's undergoing the violence. Consequently, many writers fall into the habit of including some sort of rape or abuse trauma in a character's past (usually seen in flashback or exposed in tearful monologue), or incidents of rape/sexual abuse dramatized in the present day.

There's another unsettling undercurrent of this trauma trope. If what a female character suffers is what spurs her or a male protagonist into character-developing action, then that action is caused by the attackers, not the story's lead. The result can be protagonists who seem flat and one-note, being focused only on anger, revenge or despair.

The Threat of Rape

“Rape as Motivation” is another common trope that can alienate readers through over-familiarity. Last year I read more than 40 scripts wherein rape was used to motivate a protagonist. It's such a prevalent “go-to” motivation that there are groups of studio readers who have the dark humor to compete for who read the most scripts wherein rape, near-rape, or the threat of rape is the express route to motivating character action. It's such a cliché that it's become a grim joke.

Giving pain some kind of “twist” isn't enough to overcome reader burnout these days. To be used to the maximum desired effect, pain needs to be earned and shouldn't be the sole defining motivator. You can violate and hurt your characters in many ways without raping anyone or torturing their pets. You can shut a door and let violence, rape or some other degradation be implied (*Westworld* has done an excellent job of this lately).

You can remove a character's job, love or dignity. But if trauma is your story tool of choice, be sure that it's absolutely essential, story-motivated and not the only manner in which you motivate action for your protagonist. Now go give 'em hell.



Tiffany Borders began her career as an entertainment publicist, then trained as a literary agent. She was then hired as head of development for an independent prodco to manage a 22-project portfolio. She now works with two publishers to provide writing assistance and marketing guidance for new writers. Tiffany joined the PAGE Awards team of Judges in 2015.

Truby's Take: Secrets of Genre (Part 2)

by John Truby

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, download our September–October 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 regardless of culture or nationality. The big problem with Myth is that the story, which usually involves a journey, tends to be very episodic. To fix that, Hollywood almost always combines it with one or two other genres that update and unify the Myth story.

Action (Marvel films, the *Bourne* franchise) is one of the genres that is 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 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 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 (*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 six major Comedy forms in cinema – action, buddy, romantic, farce, dark 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 is all about the jokes. They jam the gags in from page one and don't understand why the script suddenly stops being funny. You don't start with the jokes and then tell a story. You start with a comic story structure, let the jokes emerge naturally, and build from the storyline.

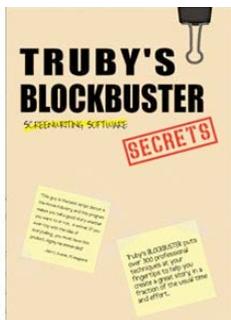
So what's the recipe for success in a world that's all about buying and selling genres? Choose the two or three genres that are right for your story idea. Learn their unique story beats. Transcend your genre by giving each beat an original twist. This three-step recipe is as close as you can get to guaranteed success as a screenwriter, but you still have to apply the recipe to your own writing.



John Truby serves as a story consultant for major studios and production companies worldwide, and has been a script doctor on more than 1,800 movies, sitcoms and television dramas for the likes of Disney, Universal, Sony Pictures, FOX, HBO, Paramount, BBC, MTV and more. He 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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Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for companies such as 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.

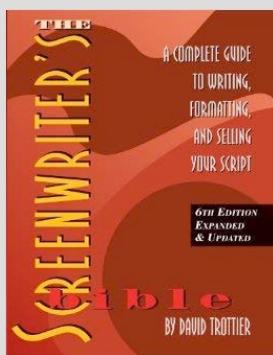
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Are Rules Made to Be Broken?

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

Why are there so many screenwriting rules?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

There is one rule: don't show up drunk to a meeting. Other than that, think of most everything you hear about writing as guidelines. It's important to understand screenwriting conventions, but you can be creative within those conventions and sometimes bend or even break "the rules." For example, standard Romantic Comedy structure goes as follows: the lovers meet (Catalyst), they are thrown together (Big Event), one or both fall in love (Midpoint), they separate (Crisis), they come together, usually after overcoming a flaw (Showdown or Climax).

Notice how Nora Ephron (and her co-writers) creatively handled this in *Sleepless in Seattle*. Learn "the rules," understand why they are there, and then get creative and give us some twists and a wonderfully inventive script. You can write what you want...as long as it works.

READER'S QUESTION:

The majority of my story takes place in a small, Southern, U.S. town. It appears as SOUTHERN TOWN in all my master scene headings. It could be anywhere in the South: Virginia, Alabama, South Carolina, doesn't matter. Should I give this town a fictitious name? It's starting to look bad with page after page of SOUTHERN TOWN.

Also, when my character goes from EXT. SOUTHERN TOWN – GRAVEYARD – DAY, for example, to, INT. SOUTHERN TOWN – LIBRARY – DAY, do I have to keep repeating SOUTHERN TOWN? I suspect you address this in your book but if you do it is not clear to me.

DAVE'S ANSWER:

SOUTHERN TOWN is fine, but consider a fictitious name that sounds Southern. Famously, Andy Griffith used "Mayberry" when faced with the same situation.

In response to your second question, you don't need to keep repeating SOUTHERN TOWN. Unless that's the main location, use this:

EXT. GRAVEYARD – DAY

Or:

EXT. MAYBERRY GRAVEYARD – DAY

I filled in with "Mayberry" just to illustrate. And then:

INT. LIBRARY – DAY

If everything takes place in this town, then you only need to mention it once in a scene heading, and then only when it is the main location, such as:

EXT. MAYBERRY – DAY

A quaint Southern town.

READER'S QUESTION:

What does MOS mean?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

It means "with-out sound." The reason it is MOS instead of WOS is because it originates with Austrian-born director Eric von Stroheim, who would say, "Ve'll shoot dis mid out sound."

With MOS (mid out sound), we see the characters' lips moving, but we don't hear their voices or the sounds around them. For example:

Two twenty-something parents, BUSTER and CAROL shout at each other MOS.

Keep writing!



Author of the bestselling book [Getting It Write: An Insider's Guide to a Screenwriting Career](#), Lee Jessup is a career coach for professional and emerging screenwriters, with an exclusive focus on their professional development. Lee's clients include television writing program fellows (Humanitas, CBS, WB Television Writers Program), WGA members, Golden Globe and Emmy nominated screenwriters, writers who have sold screenplays and pitches to major studios, contest winners, and many more. Lee spent 6+ years as director of ScriptShark.com, where she connected thousands of writers with industry professionals.

To learn more about Lee and her services, visit leejessup.com.

Breaking Into Screenwriting: Film vs. TV

by Lee Jessup

When approaching the industry strategically, many writers consider not only what they enjoy writing or what format speaks to them, but also where they might have greater odds for building a sustainable screenwriting career. Judging by the numbers, there are more opportunities in television than in film. In 2014, over 4,000 WGA members claimed income generated from working in the TV sector; by contrast, only 1,800 WGA scribes made their money in the feature film sector. Therefore, it's easy to assume that there are more opportunities in television, and accordingly breaking into that particular sector should be easier. But is that really the case?

Breaking into TV and breaking into film are two wildly different propositions.

Think of the TV space as a more corporate business environment, complete with long-term and short-term business strategies, a highly politicized hierarchy and a 9-to-5 (or 9-to-7) office environment, while the feature film space is more of a run-and-gun start-up, more agile and flexible, with each feature project representing its own start-up opportunity for a short-term business proposition. Therefore, writers who thrive in TV tend to be those who relish stability and appreciate learning and climbing each step of the ladder, while feature writers have more of an entrepreneurial mentality, are slightly daring, fiscally speaking, and are comfortable starting new businesses with every new spec script they finish.

When looking at what a writer needs in order to break into the feature film space, this sums it up: An outstanding feature spec. If you write that amazing, standout, undeniable spec, whether it goes on to sell or get made is almost secondary. With an outstanding spec screenplay on your hands, you will be able to get representation, get introduced to the town, go on tons of general meetings, and build a fan base. An outstanding spec can take a writer from complete unknown to toast-of-the-town in the industry equivalent of mere seconds. And while this "buzz" does not mean that the writer is guaranteed a hefty screenwriting check, if used correctly, it can launch a new writer into the screenwriting space in a big way.

Breaking into TV is a much more challenging proposition. It's true what they say: Once you're in, you're IN. It's getting in that's the challenge. Not only do you need to have that outstanding sample script – one that puts your voice, creativity, structural chops and world-building skills on display – but you also have to network, network, network. In this time of "peak TV," many TV scribes hope to bypass the room, skip lower-level staffing, and jump directly to becoming a content creator. But even though on rare occasions we have seen new, unvetted writers set up a show and go straight to the top (e.g., Mickey Fisher), an unproven writer is going to have a hard time selling a pilot to network without some undeniable elements. As one of the interview subjects for my book put it: "Without Kevin Spacey, Beau Willimon would have never gotten on Netflix." While in the feature world every bit of the writer's vision better be on the page, in the TV world the buyer is banking on the writer's long-term vision for the progression of the show — a hefty gamble to make with an unknown writer who has yet to take part in the ongoing process of creating television.

Because of this, breaking into TV usually takes multiple efforts on multiple fronts, which can take many years. Although there is no sure thing, there are two common paths for breaking in to TV: going the assistant route, which usually means putting years in the room as a writer's assistant before you are granted a freelance episode or a promotion directly into the writing staff, OR gaining entry to the TV writing programs and Fellowships operated by the major networks, which can put you at the front of the line for a staffing position. However, it has been said that it's harder to get into the TV writing programs than it is to get into Harvard, and assistant positions are hard to come by as well, as many young writers are competing for them.

Bottom line, although it is easier to break into features, it is harder to sustain a feature writing career (and make a continuous, consistent living doing it), while television is harder to break into, but easier to sustain a well-paid career once you're in. The good news is that new writers are breaking in all the time. But the writers who do break in are those who not only possess superior talent and work on their craft continuously, but also those who learn and understand what it takes to break into the business sector they have chosen as their destination. So, whichever your destination, be sure to learn all you can and set your expectations accordingly.

STAGE 32

NEXT LEVEL WEBINAR

"Constructing Your Screenwriting Career: A Breakdown of Breaking In"

With Writing Coach
Lee Jessup

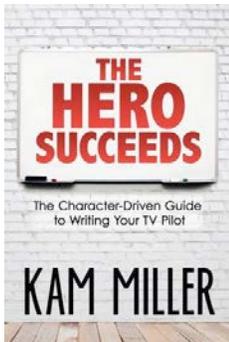
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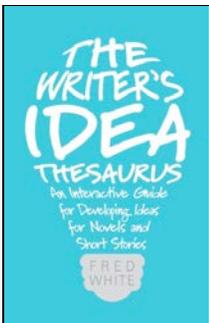
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Company B: Seeking Risky, Unique and Non-Derivative Comedy Scripts

We are looking for feature comedy scripts. We particularly need original, risky, non-derivative material, and we are open to gross-out comedy as well. Please only submit if you have a synopsis that describes the full story arc and which shows the humor, as we will only request scripts to read if we're laughing while we read the synopsis.

Budget will not exceed \$5M. WGA and non-WGA okay.

To find out about this company AND submit to this lead:

- 1) Go to <https://www.inktip.com/leads/>
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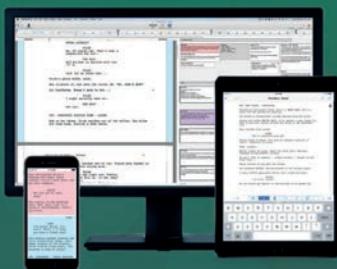
Company C: Seeking Horror Scripts With Prominent Child Roles

We are looking for completed, feature-length horror scripts that feature child actors/child characters in prominent roles, e.g. scripts in the vein of *Poltergeist*.

Budget TBD. Both WGA and non-WGA writers may submit.

To find out about this company AND submit to this lead:

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