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Letter From the Editor



Folks, time is running out to enter [The 2017 PAGE Awards!](#) The May 17 Final Entry Deadline is just days away, so finish up that last bit of tinkering, take a leap of faith and submit your script for your chance to win one of this year's awards. And remember, if your script advances to the Semi-Finals you'll have the chance to submit your latest draft for the final two rounds of competition. So do continue to refine your screenplay over the next few months, as the spirit moves you!

As we enter another summer, the **LOGLINE** eZine returns to offer you industry intel in between your stints at the pool, beach or ball-field. These articles are intended to educate and inspire writers of all levels of proficiency. Hope you enjoy!

This time around, 2016 Silver Prize winner Brian Golden discusses what inspired his move from Chicago to Los Angeles, committing to his career. PAGE Judge Helen Truong tells you what the industry expects from your TV pilot. Script consultant Ray Morton offers actionable advice for sci-fi writers. Dave Trottier, our resident formatting guru, details different approaches to the POV shot. Career coach Lee Jessup explains why the dollar option isn't going anywhere and, to conclude the issue, we tell you what types of projects three production companies are currently looking for, courtesy of InkTip!

Happy reading,

Latest News From the PAGE Awards

- ◆ 2010 PAGE Gold Prize winner John Scott III has been tapped to adapt the novella **Throttle** by Stephen King and Joe Hill. Producer Emile Gladstone and his company A Bigger Boat Productions nabbed the rights to the book and will produce the film. John's PAGE Award-winning horror movie **Maggie** was produced by Lionsgate in 2015, with stars Arnold Schwarzenegger, Abigail Breslin and Joely Richardson. He is represented by ICM and Sly Predator.
- ◆ 2008 Silver Prize winner Michael Brody has just been hired by Joe Lagana of Intrinsic Value Films to write a biopic based on the life of literary icon Norman Mailer. In addition, Michael's PAGE Award-winning thriller **Somniphobia** has been optioned by Zahra Pictures, and his action/comedy **The B Team**, starring Rupert Everett, Alexandra Paul, Jeremy Jackson and Kelly Packard, is being produced by Meyers Media Group.
- ◆ The new short film **Finding Chemo**, by 2005 PAGE Grand Prize winner Larry Postel, is slated to go into production this spring, produced by Darva Campbell. Campbell discovered the script via our terrific co-sponsor InkTip. Larry also recently optioned and sold his features **Kid Spaghetti** and **Flip Turn**, both of which are currently in pre-production.
- ◆ 2012 Gold Prize winner Graham Norris wrote the April 18 episode of the CW series **iZombie** entitled "Eat, Pray, Liv." Graham also wrote a pilot now in development at the CW entitled **Criminal Magic**, based on the novel by Lee Kelly. The new series will be produced by Rob Thomas, Danielle Stokdyk and Dan Etheridge. Graham is represented by PAGE Judge Joe Riley and Larry Salz at UTA.
- ◆ 2016 Bronze Prize winner Julia Cooperman wrote the March 16 episode of the USA Network show **Colony**, entitled "The Garden of Beasts." Julia is currently working as a writer's assistant on the show.

The 2017 PAGE Awards Final Entry Deadline: May 17

Out of Character

by Brian Golden

Several years ago, at a post-show discussion for a play I'd written, a member of the audience commented that, while she'd enjoyed the show, one moment in particular bothered her. It was a moment when the show's central figure had acted, the audience member said, "very out of character."

"I just didn't believe," she explained, "that she would be capable of doing that."

"That's so interesting," I said. "That's my favorite moment in the play."

I like moments — on stage and on screen — when people do things they don't seem capable of. Moments where a selfish ad man suddenly shows generosity or a career cop turns in his badge to become a teacher. Where a cynical CIA agent decides to trust a terrorist, or a robot that was programmed to "do no harm" picks up a gun and starts shooting.

We've been taught, as writers, to ask ourselves "what would this character do next?" But buried in this question are hidden limitations, invisible electric fences that box us in, prohibiting us from exploring the full potential of a moment and of a person. This is true in writing, and it is also true in life.

As a kid growing up in Iowa, Los Angeles seemed exotic and unreachable. Also: earthquakes. I went to school in St. Louis, then moved to Chicago, started a theater company, and spent eight years writing and producing low-budget original work. It was great fun, until it wasn't. But even as I watched friends and colleagues make the leap and find work as TV staff writers, I said, "that will never be me." I never thought seriously about leaving the Midwest.

So I can't tell you exactly what compelled me to write a pilot, on a lark, and ask a friend if she'd pass it along to her manager in L.A. I was bored. I was restless. I had an idea that had outgrown my brain's capacity to hold it. So I wrote a script. The manager, Myra Model, signed me. It was thrilling, and I had no idea where it was going. I loved Chicago. I got married in Chicago. I wasn't leaving Chicago. Many did, and many do, but that would never be me.

From July 2015 to late 2016, I made trips to Los Angeles. I went on about 30 general meetings, a handful of show interviews and got close (I think? Maybe?) to a job on a show that didn't get picked up. Whenever someone asked about my future, I'd give the same answer: "I live in Chicago and if I get an industry job I'll come to Los Angeles for it, then go back." I didn't think I was capable of asking my wife to move across the country for a job that didn't exist yet. I'm a relatively practical person. It would have been very out of character.

But on December 23, 2016, we packed 12 years of Chicago in a car and started driving west. We stopped back home in Iowa for Christmas, did New Year's with good friends in Denver, gambled in Vegas on my 35th

birthday, and made it to Los Angeles on January 6, 2017. Now, we live here. How did that happen?

I can tell you one version of the story — the version I tell when someone asks at a party, because it's clean and easy to understand. In this version of the

story, we're at a Chicago pizza place in the safest part of town, and we hear gunshots. We later learn it's the fourth incident on that corner in a year.

In this version, the next week I'm at a meeting in L.A. with a television network and when I tell them I live in Chicago and will move to L.A. when I get a job, I can feel the air change.

I can sense that they now take me (and my work) less seriously.

In this version of the story, when we return home to Chicago we're at a train station and see a man — a boy, really — step to the edge of the platform and, for a long moment, consider killing himself. We know he was considering it because later, on the train, he tells us, this stranger, while showing us the track marks on his arms. He tells us he would have done it, but then he had seen the looks on our faces and didn't want to ruin our lives. And after the boy leaves the train my wife and I, neither of whom believe in all that "signs from the universe" crap, look at one another and say, "I think it's time to go."

That version of the story is true. All of it. But there is another version. One a little less clean, a little harder to understand — except, maybe, for writers.

In this second version, we made the move because... I don't know. Because I wanted a fresh start. I wanted to shed whatever labels I'd acquired in a decade by the lake: the guy who's always five minutes late, the dude with whatever kind of attitude, the one who ran that theater company, the kid from Iowa. Who knows? But I wanted to do something I didn't think I was capable of doing. I wanted to ask my wife to move across the country for a job that didn't exist yet because, *who does that?* And because the answer is, *certainly not me.*

I wanted to act out of character. And my wife let me, bless her heart. The job still doesn't exist. And I don't know if it ever will. I'm trying. I miss Iowa. I have meetings. I eat tacos from street trucks. I go on hikes. California isn't perfect. But I like it. Being here is very, very out of character. But it feels new. And so do I.



Brian Golden won the 2016 PAGE Silver Prize for his TV Drama Pilot *The Bang*, a script also honored by The Black List, Staffing Survey, ScreenCraft Pilot Launch and AcclaimTV. Productions of his play, *Cooperstown*, have been nominated for a Jeff Award, three BTA Awards and an Ovation Award. He is also a journalist with numerous print and web bylines.

Pondering a Pilot?

by Helen Truong

As movie studio slates become smaller, comprised almost entirely of comic-book adaptations, remakes and reboots, more writers are shifting to TV, which has become a huge, open arena for original storytelling. If you're thinking of trying your hand at writing a TV pilot, it's important to understand how film and television writing are similar and how they're different, and what it takes to write a great TV pilot.

The biggest difference between TV and film is that a feature script tells an entire story. A feature's ending largely resolves everything — the main plotline, subplots and character arcs. Most people believe that, in contrast, TV pilots simply introduce you to the world and characters without any resolution at all. Nothing could be further from the truth. A strong pilot has to accomplish many of the same things as film, but in an even more tightly structured script. A pilot must introduce the characters and world in the first act and follow a plotline that has clear escalations, turning points and conflict as it progresses towards a climax and resolution. The resolution of the pilot must simultaneously be the first step of the larger series.

For example, the pilot for *Blindspot* follows the mystery of a Jane Doe who is brought to the FBI agent whose name is tattooed on her body. The two of them then piece together clues from these tattoos to stop a terrorist plot. The ending not only resolves their first mission, it cements their partnership and opens up the larger story of the mysteries they will be working to solve together.

In *Westworld*, the structure is not as procedural but the pilot accomplishes the goals listed above. While it doesn't have a clear climax, it ends on Dolores killing a fly, breaking her core programming and achieving free will, which (for now) resolves the main conflict of the series' first season.

In both examples, the ending of the pilot is only the beginning of the larger story. This is what eludes many writers who are transitioning between mediums — you aren't writing just a script, but an introduction to a series that should ideally last multiple seasons. Anyone reading and evaluating your pilot will be asking themselves: Are the characters interesting enough to engage us for several seasons? Is there enough conflict between them (and other sources of tension) to sustain this series for years? Are the stakes high enough? Are there enough subplots and mysteries to unravel that we have an idea what later episodes might focus on?

These are just a few of the fundamental questions that need to be answered in roughly 60 pages. (And you thought writing a pilot would be easier!)

One of the common refrains I often hear is: "Film is all about concept, TV is all about characters." While this isn't entirely true (films generally need strong protagonists with clear character arcs, and network TV is often just as much about premise as film is), characters are paramount in TV, where we will be watching this person not just for two hours, but for up to a decade as they grow and change. Which begets the question: "Is this a character we will remain fascinated by and invested in for the long haul?"

When you write for television, you have a lot of additional screen time, which allows your characters to

be more complex and exhibit shades of gray. We can watch your characters change slowly, over time.

For example, *Breaking Bad* starts off with a sympathetic protagonist in Walter White, but slowly captures his Faustian downfall as he becomes a drug lord. It's an extraordinary character journey that unfolds over seasons. We couldn't have necessarily foreseen all that would happen to Walter from the pilot, but the potential was clearly there from the outset.

In more procedural shows, the world is often just as important in terms of signaling the dramatic potential that a series has. This is one reason why medical, police and legal shows have proliferated over the years — they come with inherent drama that changes constantly. Whether it's a new patient every week, a challenging case or mysterious death, the worlds themselves are full of drama.

In recent years, many pilots have coupled the standard procedural with a more original angle of some kind. *The Mentalist*, for example, has a police team work together with an illusionist/sham psychic to solve murders. This fusion often captures the best of both worlds, as the familiarity of the procedural format is coupled with a fresh new angle.

Great pilots also present strong relationships and the potential for conflict and tension within those relationships. They bring together characters who will oppose each other, or who in working together have a relationship that is fraught with tension and conflict. For example, the classic Mulder/Scully relationship in *The X Files* brought together a skeptic and a believer who would have to learn to resolve their differences in perspective. In *This Is Us*, the brothers have very complex feelings toward one another and this unease is established in the pilot. Conflict is the main ingredient of all drama, yet many pilots forget that the most powerful conflicts are often with the people whom we are closest to.

Finally, effective pilots also drop clues or begin subplots that show us where further mysteries and plot points might lead, even if there isn't enough time to fully delve into them in the first episode. Sometimes even one scene with a key character lying about something or secretly meeting with an enemy is enough to clue the audience into the idea that there is plenty of rich dramatic potential ahead.

Both film and TV writing are extraordinarily challenging in their own ways, but if you choose the TV path, the main thing to remember is that you're not trying to convince the audience to fall in love with your pilot... but with your show.



A graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Helen Truong has read scripts and provided coverage for a number of studios and agencies, including United Artists, Amazon Studios, UTA and Paradigm, as well as the PAGE Awards. She is also an award-winning writer and director who has written screenplays for production companies in Los Angeles and New York.

Writing the Script Fantastic

by Ray Morton



Ray Morton is a writer and script consultant. He was a senior writer for *Script* and is currently the author of Scriptmag.com's *Meet the Reader* column.

Ray's recent books [A Quick Guide to Screenwriting](#) and [A Quick Guide to Television Writing](#) are available in stores and online. He analyzes scripts for producers and individual writers, and he is available for private consultation.

You may contact Ray at ray@raymorton.com and follow him on Twitter @RayMorton1.

Fantasy and science fiction are the predominant genres in Hollywood these days. Lots of folks are writing specs in both areas. I've read many – some are quite good, but many are lacking, so here a few tips for crafting better cinefantastique.

Be original

Sci-fi and fantasy scripts tend to recycle the same elements over and over again – space battles, evil galactic empires, space soldiers, wizardly mentors, mind powers, super death weapons, time travel, space portals, evil aliens, bug monsters, genetically engineered super-beings, robots and so on. To make a splash with your sci-fi/fantasy spec, introduce a new concept or put a fresh spin on an old trope.

Don't make your fantasy too fantastic

Cinema is essentially a realistic medium and viewers always approach a movie using the real world as a frame of reference. Any move away from reality requires the audience to suspend disbelief. Viewers can usually accept one step away from the real world (e.g. aliens land on earth), because there's still sufficient reality to connect with, but they often have difficulty accepting more than one step away (aliens land on earth...and turn into werewolves) because each additional step leaves less and less reality to connect with. If viewers have to work too hard to connect with what's happening on screen, they can become frustrated and give up. So make sure your premise hews fairly close to recognizable reality – include one fantastic concept in your premise, but not two or three or 10.

Include some humanity

Audiences connect with characters they identify with. If your script only features aliens, robots or monsters, there won't be anyone for viewers to identify with and they'll never develop the emotional link with your characters necessary for your script to be successful. So include some humans in your piece. If that's not possible, then give your non-humans some recognizably human traits.

Build better worlds

Too many screenwriters take the easy way out and simply kit out an existing world (Ancient Rome, Nazi Germany) in futuristic and/or alien drag. This is never satisfying. If you're going to create a new world, go all the way.

Be practical

Writers of fantastic specs sometimes go overboard, telling tales in dozens of settings with casts of thousands and an overabundance of VFX. It would cost billions to bring some of these specs to life. That won't fly with potential buyers. With sci-fi and fantasy specs, less really is more.

Explain well

"Mugbar is a Fourth-Level Blondarf. When we meet him he's aiming a Fot Stick at a Lemlacian and performing the Ptari Ritual." Huh? Speccers often write fantastic concepts into their scripts and just expect audiences to get them. Audiences won't. Fantastic notions must be explained with appropriate imagery, action or dialogue.

Go easy on the description

Fantastic specs often get bogged down with excessive descriptions of their far-out sets, costumes and props, going into so much detail that the narrative gets buried. Remember, your only job is to tell the story. Give a general impression of what you envision and leave the details to the designers.

Dialogue

Talk is challenging in cinefantastique – characters need to speak in ways specific to the imaginary world of the story, but understandable to viewers. Many writers solve this problem by having characters speak in an exaggeratedly formal fashion ("I am going to initiate eight hours of restorative unconsciousness on my elevated resting platform" instead of just saying "I'm going to bed"), thinking it sounds futuristic or alien. It doesn't – it just sounds awkward and dumb.

Solid storytelling is still a must

Many spec writers think anything goes when writing fantasy. This is true for the characters, environments, and tech, but not for storytelling. Writing about imaginary people and worlds doesn't negate the basics of dramatic writing: narrative progression still has to make sense, the world's rules must remain consistent, characters can't deploy previously un-established powers in Act III, and you can't climax your story with a *deus ex machina*.

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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.

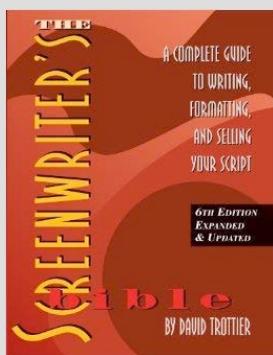
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It All Depends on Your Point of View

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

In my script is a scene where we're standing by a lake. Then we're under the water looking up through the water at children standing on the shore. How the heck should I slug that?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Since EXT. and INT. refer to where the camera is, and not to where the objects or people being filmed are, I would think something like EXT. UNDERWATER would work. Then describe the action. How about something like this?

EXT. LAKE SHORE - DAY

The children form a circle by the lake.

EXT. UNDERWATER - SAME

While the others dance, Pam peers down into the lake.

If you're thinking of a point-of-view situation, such as a monster watching the children from deep below the water's surface, try this for the second part:

EXT. UNDERWATER - SAME

An unseen lake monster watches the dancing children. Pam peers down into the lake.

READER'S QUESTION:

I have in mind a scene whereby what is viewed by the cinema audience would be black & white video feed (live or recorded) from a covert security camera. I had previously read that for a spec script, "POV" could be considered a camera direction and, therefore, should not be used. Suggestions on how to write this?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Sometimes a POV can be used, but usually you can avoid it. For example, rather than "JOHN'S POV – The monster licks its chops", you can write, "John watches the monster lick its chops."

That has to be a POV shot, and it's a bit more readable. In the original *Raiders of the Lost Ark* script, the writer uses the following device:

What Indy sees: A snake crawls towards him.

That's a POV shot. In addition, keep in mind that CAPS are a little hard on the eyes of readers who read tons of scripts. However, if you use POV once or twice in your screenplay, no one is going to scream or slit their wrists.

Concerning your specific example, it could be handled as a separate scene:

INT. FBI OFFICE - DAY

John plays the video.

ON THE MONITOR - BLACK & WHITE

In a basement, the secret agent dials the safe's combination.

BACK TO FBI OFFICE

If you want that to be a live video stream, you could write, "John watches the live video stream." Here's another method for handling this.

INT. FBI OFFICE - DAY

John watches the live video stream.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT - BLACK & WHITE

The secret agent dials the safe's combination.

Then key in another master scene heading and keep writing!

Dude, Where's My Option?

by Lee Jessup



Author of the best-selling book [Getting It Write](#), as well as the newly released [Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches](#), Lee Jessup is a career coach for professional and emerging screenwriters. Her clients include writers who have sold pilots, pitches and specs; staffed television writers; participants in TV writing programs or feature labs; and, of course, writers who are just starting out.

In her role as coach, Lee serves as an industry guidance counselor, adviser, drill sergeant, cheerleader, confidant and strategic partner. Previously, Lee had her own script picked up, worked in development and ran ScriptShark.com for more than 6 years.

To learn more about Lee's services, visit leejessup.com.

There was once a time, in the not-too-distant Hollywood past, when a screenplay option was standard operating procedure, and the first step to an eventual sale. Those were the days when a writer wouldn't consider doing rewrites or even taking notes without paperwork in place. In a world of studio deals and potential spec sales, it was all about closing the option — or better yet, the sale — and getting "commenced."

But boy, have things changed. Today, roughly 20-plus years after the spec market boom, and almost 10 years after the WGA strike that changed the game, I continue to hear writers say that they will do "as many rewrites as the producer wants" once they have a well-paying option agreement in their hands, if not a straightforward six-figure spec sale. The only problem is, while we continue to hear stories about how it used to be back in the good old days, today's Hollywood operates within a very different landscape.



While we do on occasion observe the head-spinning spec sale, the reality today is that most scripts rarely find a home until an attractive package has been cultivated for them. Not only does the writer have to get the script 100% ready, he also has to get it packaged with actors and/or a director in order to have any hope of getting compensated and having his project go before the cameras and see the light of day.

Before I continue, let me quickly set the record straight: I am not suggesting that writers should be taken advantage of, or do their work for free while others pocket the loot and get rich off them. All I am saying is that while writers should, of course, aim to get paid for their work, the reality is that in today's industry, it's not as simple as it was in previous decades.

In order to understand this, we have to look at how things have changed. In the early 2000's film development funds dried up, and have yet to be effectively replaced. European film funds, which funneled significant Euros and pounds into Hollywood, folded. As a result, development departments throughout Hollywood shrank or were eliminated. Fewer and fewer producers now have studio deals, and therefore have less funding to lean on when it comes to developing new work.

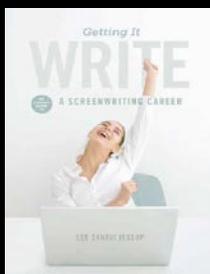
With significantly less money available for development, producers, agents and managers are required to develop material on spec. And if a writer does not have a pre-established quote, if the material is not coveted by multiple powerful companies, or if the writer doesn't have the sort of high-powered team behind him or her that could successfully make such demands, he or she is likely to be asked to do the same, i.e., develop the script alongside the interested producer or manager to ensure that the script becomes everything it can be in order to get the movie made and the writer compensated. Which is why the \$1 option is more popular than ever.

Where in decades past hefty options were given to writers whose projects producers had hoped would "get there," today those same options are often not granted until the producer or executive involved is convinced they have a ready-for-market, winning property on their hands. Yes, there are occasions when writers are granted an option with some modicum of pay. But most often, for first-time writers, the fee is not going to be significant.

While many writers understandably lament all of this, and argue that being asked to work for free is just not right, there is something you should remember: Developing your screenplay with a known producer can benefit you in more than one way, even without option money. Of course, it would be great to get your movie made. But beyond that, should your screenplay garner a great deal of attention and industry interest, there's a good chance you will have many new doors opening before you. Doors that will help you get paid on this particular project, or the next.

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We are looking for features in the smart sci-fi or comedy genres. If your story checks both boxes, all the better. Scripts should be geared to an indie sensibility and modest budget (e.g., *Her*, *Ex Machina* or *Safety Not Guaranteed*).

Budget TBD. Only non-WGA writers may submit.

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We are looking for TV psychological thriller pilots and bibles. We are especially interested in serialized shows dealing with a business empire, in the vein of *Billions* or *Empire*. Pilots should be contemporary but we're open to recent period pieces if they are business-related. Must be adaptable to shoot in U.K./Europe, so if story is set there, please say so. We're not looking for material with a sci-fi element.

Budget TBD. Both WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

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