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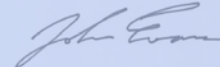
Letter from the Editor

From all of us here at the PAGE Awards, a hearty thanks to each and every writer who submitted their work to the 2009 PAGE Awards competition. The industry professionals judging the contest have now announced our 2009 Quarter-Finalists, and for the lucky writers whose work has advanced, the excitement is just beginning! Our judges are hard at work evaluating the Quarter-Finalists' scripts, and on August 1st we will be announcing the top 25 Semi-Finalists in each of our genre categories. But whatever happens next, after the first two rounds only 10% of entries are still in competition, so these talented scribes can take great pride in this achievement. To view the complete list of our 2009 Quarter-Finalists, [click here](#).

And now, to this issue of *LOGLINE*... I identify the mark of a good contest entry and viable spec script: a plot driven by its protagonist. 2005 Bronze Prize winner Dylan Costello declares that if you want to be a professional writer, you must use your time like one. PAGE Awards judge Mike Kuciak explains how to make supporting characters live up to their name and truly support your protagonist and antagonist.

In his column on successful genre writing, John Truby extols the virtues of J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek* as a model for sci-fi. The master of screenplay format, Dave Trotter, banishes your doubts about how to format dialogue in a foreign tongue. Producer Marvin V. Acuna demystifies the query letter. And finally, the latest listings from InkTip.com may offer a home for your latest script!

Happy reading,



Why All Good Specs are Character-Driven Stories

by John Evans

Every year, we at the PAGE Awards receive entries with intriguing concepts, well-developed characters, compelling themes, or all three. But many of these otherwise promising screenplays suffer from a common flaw – the stories are not driven by their protagonists.

Our judges are constantly making this vital point in their feedback to writers. In a Hollywood film, going back to the so-called "Golden Age of Cinema," the main character's goals create the plot. Or more specifically, the protagonist's efforts to pursue those goals – and the challenges that arise along the way – are the plot. In a commercial screenplay of any genre, the narrative must be constructed this way. Look at virtually any American film that receives theatrical distribution and you'll find a central character who takes action to achieve his or her goal in almost every scene. This purpose often evolves (or even reverses itself), and the overarching objective requires the protagonist to achieve smaller goals along the way, but we are always invested in the lead's efforts to do something.

Take the summer smash *The Hangover*. Even though it's a pure ensemble film, our three protagonists share one goal. Their efforts to get their missing friend back to L.A. in time for his wedding drive every sequence after Plot Point 1 (his disappearance). Everywhere they go, everything they do, is motivated by a goal that we understand and sympathize with. This goal informs the situations they find themselves in, the antagonists they face, and the challenges they must overcome. Initially, the guys were driven by the clear goal to get to Vegas and have the male bonding experience of a lifetime. In a Hollywood movie, once one goal is reached or abandoned, another is immediately established.

The "passive protagonist" is a condition as chronic to beginners' screenplays as athlete's foot to a locker room. When you get this note, it means that your lead character is simply reacting as things happen, or another character is driving the story with their clearer, more active goals. Passive protagonists lack goals to pursue, don't take meaningful action, or both. This is an easier mistake to make than it first appears because even in great scripts, things often do "just happen" to the central character, particularly when they are the inciting incident that sets the story in motion. But in the best scripts, the protagonist then decides to accomplish something important and takes a series of actions in pursuit of that goal.

Think of your story as your lead's struggle to do X. Give this character something difficult to do that will provide you with many opportunities to throw roadblocks in his or her path – complications, setbacks and opposition from other characters. If the audience can relate to this goal and respect your protagonist's ongoing efforts, whether the goal is achieved or not, you've gone a long way toward writing a commercially viable spec.

Finding Discipline as a Writer

by Dylan Costello

For many years, I have been writing. But could I actually call myself a writer? When asked the proverbial question of “so what do you do?” could I honestly turn around and say that I was a writer?

Dylan Costello is a screenwriter based in the U.K. His debut script *Coronado* won a Bronze Prize in the 2005 PAGE Awards and is currently being produced by Fred Roos and Polaris Productions. He continues to write screenplays for film and TV.

Writing is a discipline. And to succeed as a professional writer, you need to discipline yourself as a professional writer does. I realized that if I wanted to think of myself as a writer, I needed to **work** like a writer. Every day. I had to really get into the mindset of being a writer to achieve success – making time to write, establishing my own writing structure and adopting professional writing habits.

This methodology really liberated my creative thinking. Sure, at times it was tough to sit in front of my laptop and think of something to write, but more often than not, once I started the ideas didn't stop coming. In the end, I would have to tear myself away from the computer.

I declared that I would make myself write something – anything at all – for at least one hour a day to qualify as a writer in my mind's eye. I didn't have to write an entire screenplay or a literary masterpiece, I just wrote whatever came into my mind. If I thought of it, I wrote it down. The editing came later!

Finding that discipline can prove daunting at first, but ultimately it is always rewarding. Tell yourself, “I am not going to bed until I have written at least two pages.”

Spend your lunch break or your commute scribbling whatever

comes to mind in your notepad.

Speaking of notepads, it is essential to carry one everywhere – or its modern counterpart, the audio recorder. I've always felt somewhat self-conscious speaking ideas into a Dictaphone whilst on the train home, but you just never know when that **idea**, that **twist**, that **amazing character** might pop into your head.

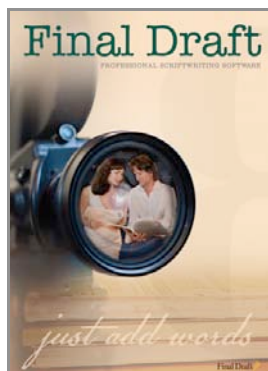
“I realized that if I wanted to think of myself as a writer, I needed to work like a writer. Every day...”

It's so important to make yourself write. Nothing can be as disheartening as staring at your screen or notebook and feeling totally at a loss, but just write. What comes out of your head might seem like complete rubbish to you, but that rubbish can be the foundation of various polishes, new ideas and new ways of thinking. That rubbish might eventually lead to the best scene you've ever written. If you set aside the time and put it to use, you create the possibility of inspired ideas that otherwise may have never come to you.

Giving yourself deadlines is another way to really discipline yourself as a writer. Nothing fires up my creativity more than being told that I have one month, one week, one day or maybe just **one hour** to write that certain scene or deliver that synopsis or treatment.

Deadlines and discipline go hand in hand, and by imposing deadlines on yourself for what you want to get done – and maintaining the discipline to **get it done** – your writing can eventually lead you to success.

And so, yeah, when people ask me now “What do you do?” I tell them, “I'm a writer!”



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Building Your Cast of Characters

by Mike Kuciak

When creating your screenplay's characters, here are some broad points to keep in mind:

The Rule of Five. Build the cast from a core of five characters: the main protagonist, main antagonist, love interest, supporting protagonist, supporting antagonist. The latter three are supporting characters, each with a specific function. Remember to ask...

Mike Kuciak is Senior Vice President of Development at management/production company AEI, where he finds, develops and markets projects for publishing, film and television. He's co-producing film projects he discovered and set up with Fox 2000 and Universal.

Why? Why does each character exist and what part do they play in the story? I've read countless scripts in which characters are introduced, do and say very little, then vanish after one scene. A character who is not important in some way to either the A-story or subplots should be eliminated, their lines and actions given to another character.

Names. Giving a character a name asks the audience to track that character. With too many

characters it's easy for confusion to set in, especially at the script level, when there isn't an actor's face to help you keep track.

In casting, there's such a thing as a "five-and-under" character; that is, a character with five lines or fewer. These are considered minor characters and rarely get names. For example, the taxi driver whose function is to ask "Where to?" should be identified as Taxi Driver or Cabbie. Conversely, a character who appears in many scenes and/or has a lot of lines should get a name. For instance, if there's a Head Security Guard who shows up a lot, give him a name.

Redundancy. As with scripts, every character should have a logline to describe them. If two named characters have the same logline, one should be eliminated. I recently gave notes on a romcom in which the main protagonist has two assistants, both of whom do the same thing: drop witty observations, listen to the protagonist bemoan her love life and do assistant-type stuff. My first note was to roll both characters into one. This not only helps to clarify the character on the page, it makes it easier to cast that character... The more presence a supporting character has in the movie, the higher the level of talent you can approach for that role.

Each of the three supporting characters mentioned earlier have their own functions in the story.

Supporting Protagonist

A supporting protagonist is a character who helps the main protagonist in some way. The obvious example is a best friend or sidekick. They often provide a key function to the main protagonist's tackling of the A-story. For example, the tech guy hacking security systems so your action hero can invade the villain's lair. They do stuff that's necessary but not as cinematic, i.e. research or surveillance.

They also give the main protagonist someone to tell what they're thinking, feeling and planning, for the benefit of the audience. If the lead is making a bad choice, the supporting character is there to say so. They can also give the audience something the main protagonist lacks. The classic example is comic relief. In a straight-up action/adventure, if the main protagonist is too funny too often the character may come across as silly.

To break the tension with laughs, we give some of those lines to the supporting protagonist.

Supporting Antagonist *"Supporting characters are critical players in the story with important jobs to do."*

Two varieties of this character pop up the most often:

The Head Thug. When the main antagonist has muscle or lackeys at their disposal, they often have this supporting antagonist. While the mastermind schemes, the head thug gets out in the field and does the dirty work. The clearest examples are the heavies Bond villains always used to have around. This character often represents an aspect of the main protagonist or antagonist taken to the extreme. If the hero is strong, he's stronger. If the hero is fast, he's super-fast.

The "head thug" character isn't limited to action or thrillers – in *Mean Girls*, Regina George (Rachel McAdams) has two "friends" who back up her bitchy comments and take part in her evil schemes.

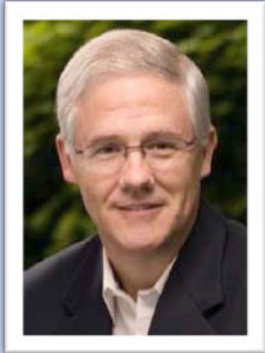
The Cop. The villain is always an antagonist, but sometimes an antagonist isn't a villain. In some movies, particularly thrillers, the villain is a shadowy figure. We might not even know his or her identity, the revealing of which is a major plot beat in act three. So how do we maintain the threat to the main protagonist in the meanwhile? One way is someone to chase him around while the villain remains hidden. The best-known example is probably U.S. Marshal Samuel Gerard (Tommy Lee Jones) in *The Fugitive*. He isn't the guy who killed the wife of Richard Kimble (Harrison Ford)... In fact, that murder was committed by the One-Armed Man, the villain's "head thug." But Kimble's been framed for the murder, and Gerard represents that threat. Without him directing the chase, it would just be a bunch of no-name police officers after Kimble. Gerard is a character who would likely be our protagonist in another movie. But he's a supporting antagonist here because he's working at cross purposes to the main protagonist's goal – in this case, Kimble remaining free to find out who murdered his wife, and why.

The Shifting Character. Sometimes, a character shifts alliances, transforming from a supporting protagonist to a supporting antagonist, and vice versa. In *Redbelt*, Chet Frank (Tim Allen) is an extremely self-centered character, and he's either a supporting protagonist or antagonist to Mike Terry (Chiwetel Ejiofor) depending on the circumstances. In *Casino Royale*, M (Judi Dench) is a supporting protagonist to Bond (Daniel Craig). But in the sequel, *Quantum of Solace*, Bond becomes a fugitive and, in trying to capture him, M performs the function of a supporting antagonist. She makes this switch because she holds doing her job and ensuring the security of Great Britain to be of higher importance than Bond's freedom.

Love Interest

Every movie, with very rare exceptions, needs a love story. It's a way to reveal the main protagonist's more vulnerable side, change up the pace of the story and put some heat on the screen. The love story is typically a subplot, though in a romance or romcom, it's the A-story. The love interest may also fulfill the functions of a supporting protagonist or antagonist (particularly in a thriller).

To sum up, supporting characters aren't just imaginary people we make up to say and do stuff; they're critical players in the story with important jobs to do.



Over the course of three decades, John Truby has taught more than 30,000 students the art of screenwriting. Using the knowledge and expertise he has applied as a consultant on over 1,000 movie scripts, he offers an approach to storytelling that has earned worldwide acclaim for his instructional courses and screenwriting software. He is also the author of ["The Anatomy of Story."](#) *Booklist* raves, "Truby's tome is invaluable to any writer looking to put an idea to paper." To learn more about John Truby's classes, screenwriting software, and story consultation services, visit www.truby.com

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The Science Fiction Film: *Star Trek*

by John Truby

Renewing an old series is one of the most difficult challenges for a screenwriter. The audience is familiar with all of the previous stories and the series' complete iconography. So the bar is very high. Plus, the reason you are renewing the series is because the mythology has been told to death. So coming up with a new story that both pleases and surprises the die-hards is extremely difficult.

In this summer's highly successful reboot of the *Star Trek* film franchise, screenwriters Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman chose to go with an origin story, which seems so obvious I wondered why the *Star Trek* powers hadn't done this a long time ago. Oftentimes the origin of a superhero or superhero team is the most fun part, not only because we get to see how this special magic first came into being, but also because the story is, literally, original. Every other story after the origin is essentially the same tale but with a different opponent.

But origin stories are also a lot more difficult than they appear, as the writers of *Watchmen* discovered. Audiences love seeing the formation of the original team, but if you take too long doing it, you kill narrative drive. And once you kill it, it's really hard to get it back.

Star Trek's writers solved the problem of renewing this ancient (by Hollywood's standards) series, and executing a good origin story, by grabbing some of the best techniques of science fiction, myth and drama. Science fiction often piggybacks on the myth form. That's why so many science fiction stories use Greek and Roman names, stories and history. Myth is the best genre for telling a story that covers a great deal of space and time, and science fiction is the futuristic form that typically covers huge amounts of space and time.

Like all genres, myth has certain unique story beats that must be present if you want to execute the genre properly. For example, many myth stories begin with the birth of the hero, followed immediately by the death of the father. Sure enough, that beat happens in the opening scene of *Star Trek*. And it's followed by every other major beat in the myth form.

The writers keep the story from being a predictable myth-repeat by adding some of the key beats of the science fiction form, especially the elements of time travel. Due to Gene Roddenberry's original premise of "*Wagon Train* in space," *Star Trek* has always emphasized the spatial aspects of science fiction, as the Enterprise visits one new world after another. As the show's tagline states, "Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Her ongoing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life forms and new civilizations... To boldly go where no one has gone before."

But this *Star Trek* is directed by J. J. Abrams, co-creator of *Lost*, whose brilliant fifth season has used the element of time travel better than it's ever been done before. In many ways, time travel is the key to rejuvenating the *Star Trek* franchise and making the origin story work. Time travel allows the writers to emphasize character change in a very plot-heavy genre, for many of the major characters, by jamming the characters' beginning and ending selves close together in time. It also lets the writers keep the narrative drive going fast and furious from the very opening sequence on. Instead of spending the abnormally long time collecting allies that origin stories usually require, the *Star Trek* writers can sprinkle the introduction of the various team members throughout the story.

The final genre the authors of *Star Trek* used was drama. Mixing in drama elements is the main way you transcend any genre, because you are essentially taking a mythic hero and adding psychological depth and individuality. This is the main technique writer Tony Gilroy used in writing the *Bourne* films, and what Neal Purvis, Robert Wade, and Paul Haggis did when called on to rejuvenate and rewrite the origin story for James Bond in *Casino Royale*. In *Star Trek*, the writers not only highlighted the moral and psychological needs of main characters Kirk and Spock, they also made the brilliant dramatic move of turning Kirk and Spock into lead opponents for a good part of the story.

Most of us writers never get the opportunity to rejuvenate a classic like *Star Trek*. But we can take on the challenge of telling a science fiction story so it has tremendous emotional impact on the audience. The choices the writers made in the new and improved *Star Trek* can teach us a lot about why science fiction has become one of the most popular genres in mainstream Hollywood film.

Formatting Dialogue in Foreign Languages

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

If I have a conversation in Chinese as well as English, do I use the dreaded wrylies to define Chinese and English? Also, in defining film reality, can I avoid the language barrier by writing my Chinese scenes in English?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

First, let me explain the question. The writer refers to "dreaded wrylies." Wrylies are the parentheticals that sometimes appear before dialogue. The term developed because so many beginners used the term "wryly" to describe their characters' dialogue.

JIM
(wryly)
The night is young, Cupcake.

And so the term wryly was born. The reason they are "dreaded" is because writers are encouraged to limit their use. Only use a wryly when the subtext of the dialogue is not otherwise clear. You can also use wrylies to briefly describe a character's action while he speaks.

In working with other languages, realize there is one central principle: *write in the language of the eventual reader*. If a character speaks in Chinese, do not write the dialogue in Chinese characters unless the eventual reader is Chinese. Simply write the line as follows.

JIM
(in Chinese)
The night is young, Cupcake.

If you want the audience to see the English translation appear on the movie screen, simply write:

JIM
(in Chinese; subtitled)
The night is young, Cupcake.

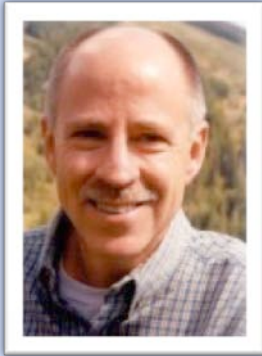
If the characters speak in Chinese throughout an entire scene, then make a clear statement in the narrative description that all the dialogue in the scene will be spoken in Chinese; then, write it out in English so the reader can understand it. If you want the audience to see the English translation appear on the movie screen, use a special note, as follows:

NOTE: The dialogue in this scene is spoken in Chinese with English subtitles.

Then, simply write the dialogue out in English. After the scene ends, write:

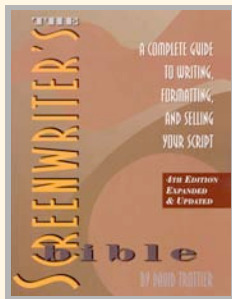
END OF SUBTITLES

Another option in dealing with foreign languages is to use a word or two in that language for flavor, but otherwise allow the characters to speak in English so that the audience will understand what is going on.



Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. His book "The Screenwriter's Bible," now in its fourth edition, is perhaps the most comprehensive industry guide on the market. To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit: www.keepwriting.com

The Screenwriter's Bible



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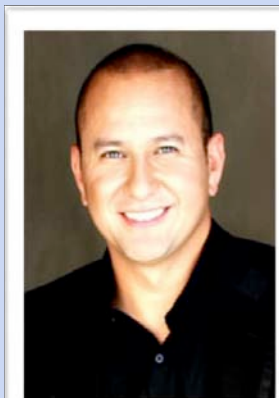
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Marvin V. Acuna is an executive producer of the recent dramedy *The Great Buck Howard* (starring John Malkovich and Tom Hanks) and the 2003 drama *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue). His credits as producer include *Touched* (Jenna Elfman) and *How Did It Feel* (Blair Underwood). For free video access to Marvin's famous workshop, "The Seven Habits of Hollywood's Most Successful Six (and Seven) Figure Screenwriters," visit ScreenwritersSuccess.com/pageawards

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The Right Hook

by Marvin V. Acuna

I recently hosted a tele-seminar that afforded aspiring screenwriters from all over the world the opportunity to listen to an insightful and stimulating discussion about screenwriting as a profession. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions that pertained to their personal challenges, communicating directly with the various guests who participated on the call. It should be noted that all the guests were successful, established veterans with at least 20 years of professional expertise.

Among the copious questions presented and addressed in this forum, the following prompted me to share my thoughts here.

"I've emailed a number of managers and agents seeking representation, but have not heard back from anyone. What's the trick to securing a good agent or manager to represent me and my screenplays?"

The trick?

There is no trick. The answer lies in your introduction, your very first writing sample, and **most importantly (drum roll, please), your logline.**

There are a vast number of tools to aid you in your pursuit of representation, but I will focus your attention here on just one – the query letter.

Most representatives delegate the trifling task of reading incoming queries to an assistant or intern. But truth is, most representatives do read queries. Even more importantly, representatives actually respond to ones that **hook** their interest.

If you are not generating any interest from your query letters, it simply means that you need to redraft your letter and specifically your logline.

Here are three basic guidelines to consider when crafting your next query letter:

1. Know Your Market

Targeting CAA or any of the top-tier literary representatives is simply the wrong strategy. They are shaping careers, not inventing them. They are elevating a career, not commencing one. Targeting boutique entities that develop new talent is a more appropriate and useful strategy. New blood is welcomed.

Do some due diligence on the target. This affords you the opportunity to personalize the letter. Hear me: I'm not suggesting that you make this some rambling saga. Keep it simple.

2. The Right Hook

The industry is changing and will continue to evolve, but what will not change is this... Representatives are seeking material they can sell in a competitive marketplace!

Your logline is the query letter's **essential ingredient**. I recommend that you always introduce your most commercial, big idea. Your logline should evoke the imagination to see the movie poster, the video box.

If it doesn't, rework your one-to-two sentence logline until it does. The goal is to entice the reader to request the script, just as a trailer's purpose is to sell tickets. This is the "coming attractions" moment.

3. The First Impression

Absolutely never neglect the basics of spelling, grammar, and clear, vivid writing. This is your first impression... it matters! Your query letter itself functions partly as a writing sample.

This is your sales tool, not a sales pitch. Don't make the mistake of confusing the two. This is not the place to ramble on about how great your screenplay is or how engaging your characters are. That's for the reader to decide.

So write a professional, intelligent, concise, intriguing query that includes a **compelling and commercially viable logline** and not only will you entice representatives to ask for more, but you'll be one step closer to a sale.

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Holiday Pictures

[code: dheec81trz]

We are looking for completed feature-length thrillers or crime dramas that feature a male Western protagonist who travels to the Far East to unravel some mystery – i.e. something in the vein of *Black Rain*, but preferably set in present-day China.

One of the principals at our new company was a producer on *Eve and the Firehorse*. For more info, feel free to look us up on IMDb.

Budget will not exceed \$5 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

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

Convergence Entertainment

[code: mx01q5p4k]

We are looking for completed feature-length ninja scripts in a contemporary or near future setting. No period ninjas, please. Submissions should be for material that is heavy on action and Ninjutsu, and should feature or be written for a Caucasian lead. Please do not submit unless your story is actually about real ninjas. Assassins, SEALs, and other assorted stealthy characters are not ninjas, and we're not looking for stories that can be "easily adapted."

Our credits include *The Medallion* and *Hybrid*.

Budget will not exceed \$15 million. Non-WGA writers preferred.

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

Cinemahead

[code: vnbb970tur]

We are looking for completed feature-length scripts that incorporate elements of the game of chess in the story. Submissions should involve a major character who is a chess player, or chess gameplay as a driving part of an action plot. We're not interested in stories that only use a token random chess sequence or two. We are open to scripts in any genre or rating.

Budget will not exceed \$5 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

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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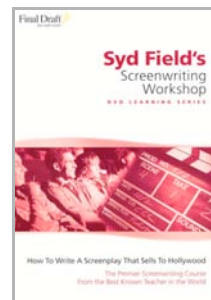
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