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## Letter From the Editor

Time is running out to enter the 2021 PAGE Awards. Our [Final Entry Deadline](#) is Monday night, May 3rd, so if you haven't already entered the contest, stop reading right now and get your script in the running! This contest is well known for its history of giving writers that break they needed to gain industry attention, obtain representation and even, in many cases, earn their first produced credit. Check out our Latest News (below) for some of these success stories. Are you ready to join them? We'd love to help make that happen!

To discover exactly how PAGE judges evaluate scripts, both for the contest and for their production companies and agencies, pick up your copy of [The Insiders' Guide to Screenwriting](#) today. It's loaded with insights on how your script is scored and ways to shore up the weak spots in your writing. Simply put, the Guide is indispensable for any writer who wants to understand how industry gatekeepers think.

The **LOGLINE** eZine is another great resource for scribes seeking knowledge about the inner workings of the screen trade. This issue begins with 2020 PAGE Silver Prize winner Kelly Jean Karam sharing her personal story of epiphany and inspiration. PAGE Judge Anna Siri offers a primer on the essential characteristics of a successful spec pilot. Script analyst Ray Morton helps writers evade three common pitfalls of the process. Dr. Format himself, Dave Trottier, demonstrates a useful slug-line technique. Career coach Lee Jessup puts the dreaded writing deadline into proper perspective. And finally you'll find a trio of leads from producers seeking specific material, thanks to our good friends at InkTip.

Happy reading,

## Latest News From the PAGE Awards

- ◆ Grand Prize winner Claire Tailyour's period drama ***Farewell She Goes*** is being produced by Backscatter Productions in the U.K. Silver Prize winner Matthew Fantaci has been signed by Sean Woods and Jon Levin at Fourward and by Charlie Ferraro and Geoff Morley at UTA. Gold Prize winner Brian Otting has been signed by PAGE Judge Andrew Kersey of Kersey Management. And through an introduction by our terrific co-sponsors Roadmap Writers, Bronze Prize winner Nicole Jones has been contracted to develop several of her feature story ideas for Luma Pictures.
- ◆ The TV miniseries ***Tyson***, written by two-time PAGE Award winner Colin Preston, is being produced by Martin Scorsese and Sikelia Productions. This story about the life of legendary boxer Mike Tyson will be directed by Antoine Fuqua, and Jamie Foxx has signed on to play the title role. In addition, two of Colin's original TV series, ***Broken*** and ***Snookered***, were recently optioned by one of Hollywood's most prolific producers, Mark Gordon. Colin is represented by Gotham Group and CAA.
- ◆ After working on the Disney animated series ***Mira, Royal Detective*** for the past year, 2004 Silver Prize winner Geetika Lizardi has now joined 2005 PAGE Award winner Janet Lin on the writing staff of the hit Netflix series ***Bridgerton***. Geetika is represented by 3 Arts Entertainment and A3 Artists Agency. Janet is repped by ICM.
- ◆ The TV movie ***Evil Stepmom***, written by 2017 Gold Prize winner Huelah Lander, is being filmed on location in Canada, produced by MarVista Entertainment. MarVista previously produced Huelah's TV movie ***Birthmother's Betrayal***, which premiered last year on Lifetime. Huelah is represented by Pacific Artists Management.
- ◆ The Netflix drama ***Surviving Summer***, co-written by 2019 Bronze Prize winner Gemma Crofts, is filming on location in Australia. Gemma has now been hired to write another series for Netflix. She was recently signed by Lauren Dineley at Writ Large.

**2021 Final Entry Deadline: Monday, May 3**

## What My Dad Taught Me About Writing

by Kelly Jean Karam

What's the secret ingredient to the best movies? The thrilling wartime rescue of a last surviving brother (*Saving Private Ryan*), the oddball tale of the founding of a shrimp company by a "what's-normal-anyway" protagonist (*Forrest Gump*), and the dramatic struggle of a 1950s Black family whose father once dreamed of playing baseball (*Fences*)... What do these powerful, unique stories all have in common?

I think maybe I figured it out after a lunch I had with my 86-year-old dad before he passed.

Years of prison and financial ruin had taken their toll on Dad. The once-upon-a-time self-made multi-millionaire with a George Clooney smile was now a homeless old man whose jack-o-lantern mouth shot pieces of rice at me when he spoke during our meal.

I thanked him for his letters from prison. He said he wished he was better with words, but his street smarts had served him well enough that he wouldn't complain about having only an eighth-grade education.

I'd had some luck writing and I asked him if he wanted to hear about my recent project – a high-concept horror film with some quirky characters. He wasn't interested.

"Why are you wasting time writing nonsense when the real story is right in front of you?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, Dad, it's always about you."

But his eyes narrowed. He wasn't joking. Coffee and honey-drenched baklava arrived and gave me a moment to change my tone.

"Okay, maybe Dorothy was right: 'There's no place like home' to find a good story. How about we start small and end big? Tell me about a slice of your life."

"What do you want to know?"

"How about starting off with who you are?"

"I'm your dad," he grinned.

"Haha, always the card."

"No. Be glad you know that. Mine was absent."

"Awww... How about describing your best memory?"

"The night your mom and me had sex after your grandparents went to sleep." He smiled, and even with his missing teeth, he was back in all his Clooney coolness.

"Eww... Let's try to keep it innocent, Dad. What about when you were a boy?"

"Innocent? An Arab growing up in Detroit is born guilty."

"Surely there were some happy days you remember."

"That's easy. The day I joined the Army. I was 15."

The next question is what eventually spurred me to write *Kid Soldier*.

"Why would a 15-year-old boy ever want to join the Army?"

My dad rattled off scenes from his life – moments like stealing food and stuffing it into the large pockets of his hand-me-down jacket to help feed his family – and I lapped it up. Looking back on his childhood as a poor Arab boy raised by a welfare mother, surrounded by

eight brothers and five sisters, he wanted me to feel what he felt. And he wanted me to hear what he never got to say. That living in a shack across from a majestic cathedral never felt like a home. That the Army and prison life provided him with three meals a day, safety, and brotherhood.

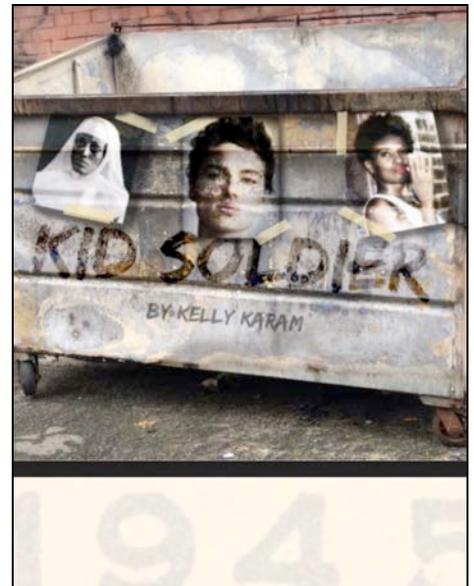
I realized in that moment what makes an honest tale tug at the heart: a human connection of empathy for the character.

In penning *Kid Soldier*, I also discovered that connection is what makes some of my favorite movies tick, and it's the reason they will continue to be watched and loved by so many. *Saving Private Ryan*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Fences* are each unique and powerful stories in their own right, but they all connect through the simplest, most universal themes: love, family, friendship, and failure.

*Kid Soldier* is the seven-day coming-of-age journey of a Christian-raised Arab boy, inspired by my dad. In the process of writing that story I learned to write and rewrite pages sweetened by themes that connect with the audience – but only after I was first that audience for my dad. After truly listening to him I became a better writer and, truthfully, a more caring daughter.

"There's no place like home," if you need to find a good story. And if you don't bother asking questions while they are alive, you may live to regret it later. Both my parents died last year, and oh how I long to ask them more questions and be their audience again. Oh, how I miss them so.

After my 2020 PAGE Award win, an up-and-coming New York director contacted me. She's now trying to secure funds for the project. Why? Because the story of family and the need to love is a story worth telling and worth selling. And "there's no place like home" to start small and end big.



2020 PAGE Silver Prize winner Kelly Jean Karam is an emerging talent whose screenplays have won high acclaim from multiple industry sources. Fueled by over 50 years of life participation, both positive and negative – including a father who was a felon, a roving-eyed now-ex-husband, and three babies now all grown up – Kelly pens authentic, passionate characters who live in worlds where the rules, like life, are never fair, but always worth the journey.

## How to Craft an Unforgettable Pilot

by Anna Siri

You've heard of the Golden Age of Television, the period from the late 1940s through the 1950s where TV exploded on the scene in a way that changed the way we consume media forever. And I'm sure you've heard that we're going through a second Golden Age (sometimes called Peak TV), where the advent of streaming services created a million new avenues to escape into media and opened the door to some of the most creative, innovative storytelling ever. It's a great time for binge-watching.

It's also an incredible time to be a writer. There have never been so many opportunities for writers to take a step into the world of writing for TV. But that doesn't mean it's easy! The competition is still fierce, and the ever-shifting rules of TV writing can be confusing and difficult to keep track of. Here at PAGE, we get a ton of pilots in every conceivable genre, some of which are fantastic and some of which could use a little TLC to get them where they need to be. We often find that writers run into the same kind of trouble over and over again, so here are some suggestions to help you navigate the challenging (and hopefully rewarding!) task of crafting an unforgettable series pilot.

### HOOKS & ENGINES

Your series needs a hook – an idea that catches the audience's attention and makes them want to spend time in this world. This is the time for bonkers ideas! *The Queen's Gambit* is an edgy drama about chess. *The Nevers* is a supernatural drama set in the Victorian Age.

Does that mean **anything** will work? Sadly, no. A strong and marketable series hook is going to have three elements: 1. Unforgettable characters with strong physical and emotional goals. 2. A conflict-heavy setup and world with lots of potential for ongoing plot, i.e., a story engine with enough juice to drive multiple episodes and seasons of a show. 3. Something old, something new. This last one is always the trickiest as it involves finding ways to tell a familiar story in a new and innovative way. Look at something like Marvel's *Daredevil* – there are a million vigilante superheroes in the world, but this hero just happens to be blind.

The best ideas often come from life. Read everything you can, from books to magazines to blogs to poetry. Listen to podcasts and music. Visit museums (if only virtually during pandemic times). Stretch your interests and expand out of your comfort zone and you might be surprised by what ideas come your way.

### STRUCTURE, TEMPLATE, AND CHARACTER

Three acts? Five acts? Six? Act breaks or no act breaks? TV rules are endless, and although there's no one way to write a pilot, as with a feature it's good to know structure before you break it. Luckily there are a million resources out there that break down technical story beats and acts. However, it's also important to read, read, read, and watch, watch, watch all the scripts and shows you can get your hands and eyes on.

It's also good to keep in mind who you're writing for. Network, cable, streaming – every outlet is going to have their own flavor, and doing some research on what individual channels are looking for may help you structure your pilot.

One of the biggest mistakes writers make in pilot writing is neglecting the series template. As a writer your job is not only to set up the world and the characters, but also to show the audience what a typical episode is going to look like. Writers often focus on that first element and completely ignore the second, saving all the good stuff for the second episode. **Big red flag.** Don't assume you'll get a second episode – the pilot is your best chance to make a case for the series, establish tone, and convince the audience to keep coming back (see the pilots for *Schitt's Creek* and *The Good Place* for reference). Keep your setup short, roll that second episode into the first, and let your characters start doing what they're going to be doing over the course of the series right from the beginning. Pilots with too much setup tend to feel slow, no matter how interesting the world and the characters who inhabit it.

Next, make sure your protagonist (or ensemble) has something to do and something to learn. Story is about conflict and humanity, and a strong structure gives you a guideline for each character's arc. Think about the problems they have to solve, the steps they're going to take, and what they're going to learn as they go along. What is your show really about, at its heart? For example, the superhero sci-fi adventure *WandaVision* is really a story about grief, and Wanda's pathway to acceptance and closure is thorny with self-denial that expresses itself in an explosive and physical way.

### KEEP THE BALL ROLLING

It's important to know where your story is going in the long run. A great pilot should not only wrap up enough of the episode's conflict to resolve the protagonist's current predicament, but also lay the seeds for longer arcs that are going to play out over the course of the season. You want your episode to feel like a contained story, but also fit into the larger season as a whole.

This is especially tricky in the era of binge-watching. More and more often, the entire season is structured out with the understanding that audiences are going to watch it all at once – but that doesn't mean that the individual episodes shouldn't be able to stand alone.

Creating a great TV series is a complicated and occasionally frustrating writing challenge. Luckily, the industry's need for new series shows no sign of slowing down anytime soon, and here at PAGE we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity and share your work with the world.

Good luck – we're rooting for you!



Anna Siri is an award-winning screenwriter and independent producer. She works regularly as a consultant, ghostwriter, and script doctor, and spends the majority of her time actively writing or searching for material to develop. Anna is an avid traveler, an armchair politician, a history buff, and an unapologetic bookworm. She attended Northwestern University and UCLA, and she has served as a Judge for the PAGE Awards competition since 2014.

## Are You “Digging in the Wrong Place”?

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](http://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](mailto:ray@raymorton.com) and follow him on Twitter @RayMorton1.

In the classic adventure film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, intrepid archaeologist Indiana Jones is trying to find the lost Ark of the Covenant before the Nazis do. He arrives in Egypt only to discover that they have apparently already determined where the Ark is buried and begun an excavation to recover it. Indy is obviously disappointed to learn this until he and his friend Sallah realize that the Nazis have obtained incorrect coordinates for the Ark. Delighted, both Indy and Sallah exclaim in unison: “They’re digging in the wrong place!”

This scene comes to mind whenever I find myself trying to solve a seemingly unsolvable script problem. Every writer runs into problems when trying to craft a workable narrative – story elements that won’t gel, plotlines that hit a dead end, characters that won’t do what you want them to do, etc. Sometimes the solutions comes quickly – in minutes, hours, days. Sometimes they don’t.

Over the years, however, I’ve learned a really valuable lesson: If I find that I’m stuck for more than a short time trying to solve a particular problem, it’s not likely that I’m stupid or untalented or a miserable fraud or any of those other things writers start thinking at times like these. Instead, it’s likely that I’m trying to solve the wrong problem – that I’m digging in the wrong place.

So where is the right place? Well, it depends on the problem you are trying to solve. There are three basic types of problems that writers tend to encounter:

### 1. The story won’t go where you want it to go.

If you are trying to get a story to go in a certain direction and you’re having trouble doing so, then the place to look is earlier in the story. The great Billy Wilder once said, “If you have a problem with the third act, the real problem is in the first act.” Every fictional dramatic story exists in its own unique world. The rules by how that world operates and how the narrative develops within it are established in the story’s first act, as is the starting point for the story’s narrative trajectory.

Dramatic storytelling is a progressive process. You begin in a certain place and then each scene moves the narrative forward. Each new scene builds on all the preceding ones. So if you reach a point in your story where you can’t get it to move forward in the direction you want, it is likely you are trying to advance the story in a way that violates the rules you set up back at the beginning. Or that you are trying to send the plot on a trajectory that doesn’t conform to the one launched in the first act. So the place to dig is the first act – go back and change the rules or the narrative’s launch point. Alternatively, leave Act I alone and take your story in a different direction than the one you were initially planning.

### 2. A character won’t do what you want them to do.

Like a story’s rules and launch point, your protagonist’s traits, opinions, principles, and capabilities are established in Act I and must develop in accordance with those established elements. One of the stranger bits of screenwriting alchemy is that quite often fictional people you create at some point refuse to do what you want them to. You’re probably trying to make the character behave in some way that is contrary to who they were established to be. To solve the problem, either go back to Act I and change them – establish the traits, attitudes, or abilities that will allow them to do what you want them to – or else change what it is you need from them.

### 3. An important concept or idea doesn’t fit easily into the story.

If you’re having trouble getting a certain idea or a certain concept (a plot point, a scene, a character) to work in your story, the question to ask yourself probably isn’t “How do I get this to work?” but rather “Does this belong in the script at all?”

However, writers are often reluctant to give up on a cherished concept, especially if it’s one of the seminal ideas that got them going on the script in the first place. It’s another one of those weird quirks of screenwriting that quite often the idea from which a script originally sprung often turns out to be irrelevant to the final product. So writers will often twist their narratives into impossible pretzels to accommodate these beloved bits.

If you find yourself having to contort your plot into shapes not found in nature to incorporate a specific element, then the problem probably lies with the element and not the story. At that point, the solution is to follow the time-honored writing dictum to “kill your darlings” and cut it.

So if you get stuck while you’re writing, don’t give up. Instead, solve your problem by digging in the right place. If you do, hopefully you’ll find the Ark. Just don’t let it melt your face off.

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## How to Slug Your Characters

by Dave Trottier



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.

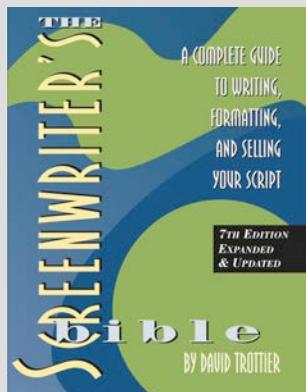
To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit his site: [www.keepwriting.com](http://www.keepwriting.com).

For \$20 off your script evaluation, email Dave at: [dave@keepwriting.com](mailto:dave@keepwriting.com).

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### READER'S QUESTION:

Is it okay to use character names as slug lines if you want to emphasize the character in a scene?

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

Yes, let's see how William Goldman did it in the scene excerpt below.

Goldman establishes the master scene heading (slug line) at the beginning of this scene—a room. In the excerpt below, he uses names as secondary scene headings. As you know, a secondary location must be part of the master (primary) location. In this case the characters are part of the primary location—they are in the room.

In the following excerpt of the scene, Annie actually chops off Paul's foot (unlike in the actual movie). This movie moment picks up after the first swing.

PAUL

shrieks as there is a terrible thudding sound -- and then his body jackknives. He is beyond agony as blood splashes over his neck, his face, and

ANNIE

her face splashed with blood and

THE SHEET

turning red and

ANNIE

eyes dull, getting into position again.

ANNIE

Once more and we're all done.

PAUL

as again there is the thudding sound, and he's incoherent. Animal sounds come from him as

ANNIE

takes a match, lights the propane torch, and there's a sound as the flame appears.

ANNIE

No time to suture, got to cauterize.

She brings the yellow flame closer. Paul shrieks even louder.

ANNIE

God, I love you....

What a punch line! And did you notice the lean writing? A lesser writer might have written it this way:

Annie chops off Paul's foot. He screams in pain. Annie burns the wound to cauterize it.

ANNIE

That should do it....

Now that's **too** lean, plus the punch line is weak. Narrative description should not be a general summary of what happens, but a specific account using specific language and choosing the right details. In Goldman's scene, the "yellow flame" is a key detail. Dramatize dramatic and emotional moments. The use of names as secondary scene headings also helps space out the action to deliver a powerful visceral punch. Goldman effectively focuses our attention on action and emotion.

**Caution!** Realize that when you use names as secondary scene headings, it means that the camera is on that character until the next scene heading. You should not describe other things that are in the room.

Generally, I advise against using names as secondary scene headings. It's just as easy to write the following:

Paul shrieks as there is a terrible thudding sound.

In other words, don't use characters as scene headings just to do it. Be like Goldman and use them only when there is an overriding dramatic (or comedic) purpose for using them. And keep writing!

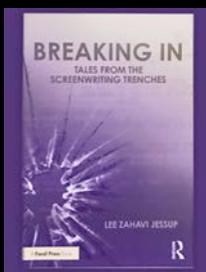


Author of the best-selling books [Getting It Write](#) and [Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches](#), Lee Jessup is a career coach for professional and emerging screenwriters. Her clients include writers who have sold pilots, pitches and specs; staffed television writers; participants in 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](http://leejessup.com).

### Lee Jessup's Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches



A boots-on-the-ground exploration of what it takes to become a working writer in the industry today.

This book includes:

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- Insight from 20+ agents, managers and executives
- Guidance from sought-after consultant Lee Jessup

Learn all about:

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- Getting repped or staffed
- Landing writing assignments
- Contests and fellowships

[Click here to learn more!](#)

## Conquer Your Deadlines Like a Boss

by Lee Jessup

As a writer you use deadlines to move your screenwriting forward, set expectations for your creative timeline, establish goals and deliver on them. However, meeting a deadline is not your ultimate purpose, and sacrificing quality in order to meet a writing goal can be a stumbling block.

Example: one of my writers was working hard to develop a TV concept he was having a tough time breaking. He found himself getting frustrated that while he was taking the time to really think through the building blocks he was putting in place for the series, he was also blowing the all-too-ambitious deadlines he had originally set for himself. Which is when I had to remind him: We use deadlines in service of process and efficiency. When developing material on spec, we don't curtail process in service of a deadline.

At the end of the day, and as much as I love deadlines (and I **really** do!) it's not just about hitting them. What it is about is generating great work and using your deadlines to help you get there systematically. And listen, I am all about discovering your velocity, seeing where you can accelerate it, and exploring how to become a more efficient and successful writer. But you do that by learning **how** you can work best with goals and deadlines.

**Most writers don't write well when feeling defeated.** No writer should set deadlines knowing she is going to miss them. Your deadlines should set you up for success and help you feel empowered in your process, rather than make you feel like a failure again and again. Failing to meet your deadlines is only going to motivate you so many times. If you keep missing your deadlines over and over again, missing them just becomes part of your process – that thing that is always a bit of a thorn in your side. Screenwriting is challenging enough – you don't have to make it any tougher for yourself. And no one writes better when constantly feeling as though they are failing at the thing they are after. In my experience, writers tend to work much more effectively when they feel accomplished and capable.

The most important thing about deadlines is setting them in a way that best supports your unique process. If slow-and-steady is your thing, then don't lean towards aggressive, impossible-to-meet deadlines. Set the sort of deadlines that will allow you, at your pace, to meet them and maybe even exceed them. Of course, you can always try to accelerate, but remember to do it gradually, a little bit at a time, instead of setting unrealistic deadlines and somehow expecting to suddenly become a whole different writer.

On the flip side, if deadlines motivate you and you are able to find a way to meet them every time, be realistic but ambitious. Challenge yourself to go that extra mile every once in a while. However, be sure to not burn yourself out on those deadlines!

### A few hacks to help you set effective screenwriting deadlines:

- When starting a new project, never just define the date by which you want to reach the finish line, i.e., the completed script. Make sure that every deadline has at least four milestones baked into it, such as completing tools, treatments, outlines, or specific acts. That way if you fall short on one, you can accelerate your pace or adjust your final deadline to accommodate for extra time. Better to adjust proactively early on than blow your deadline.
- Observe your own velocity. Don't set deadlines based on how quickly you want to write, set deadlines that you should be able to meet based on past writing behavior, even if they are a bit ambitious. Then see if there are places to accelerate your process, even just by 5 or 10 percent.
- Deadlines are not for everyone! If you find they only cause you to feel intimidated and therefore less productive, consider structuring your process using other methods or a less rigid structure.
- Reward yourself! Once you've successfully bested a big deadline, don't forget to mark the moment by celebrating your accomplishment.

Most importantly, remember this: Every writer is unique, and it's your job to identify the processes and methods that best work for you when developing your own material, without the deadlines of a writer's room or the rigid schedule of a writing assignment. In order to one day be effective in those aforementioned scenarios, you have to first master your own process. And to do so you must figure out what works for you, what motivates you, and how to become the most efficient screenwriter you can be.

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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2. Log in here: [www.inktip.com/leads/](http://www.inktip.com/leads/)
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code. You'll then be able to submit your work directly to InkTip's producers.
4. **IMPORTANT:** Please submit your work only if it fits these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with [jerrold@inktip.com](mailto:jerrold@inktip.com) before submitting.

### Company A: Seeking Christmas Movies

We are looking for Christmas movies for adult audiences. Scripts in the vein of *The Family Stone*, *Christmas With the Kranks*, and *Four Christmases* are strongly preferred.

Budget TBD. WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

To find out about this company and submit a query:

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### Company B: Seeking Rom-Coms and Romantic Dramas

We are looking for romantic comedies and romances to which A-list talent can be attached, in the vein of *Eat Pray Love*, *It's Complicated*, and *Always Be My Maybe*. Scripts that feature a strong female lead over age 40 are strongly preferred. Diverse characters are also welcome.

Budget over \$5M. WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

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### Company C: Seeking Character-Driven Drama Scripts

We are looking for character-driven dramas. We are happy to look at a script with a different sub-genre if it has a character-driven story at its heart.

Budget TBD. WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

To find out about this company and submit a query:

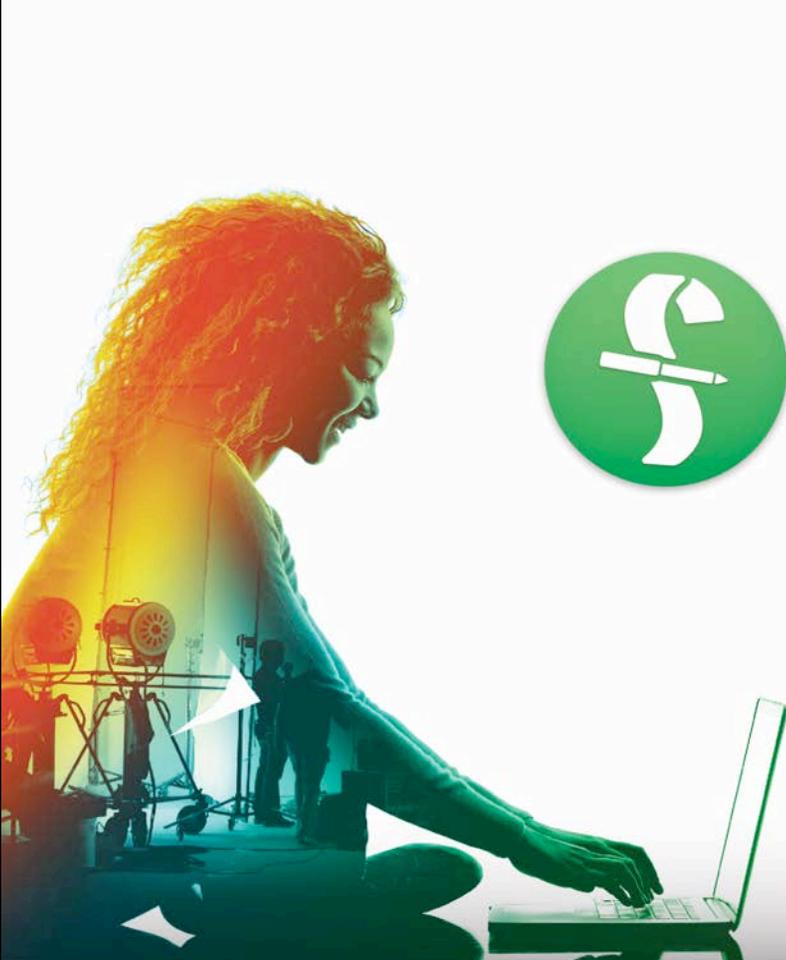
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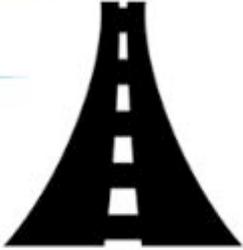
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