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Letter from the Editor

With the 2009 contest season reaching its dramatic climax, the list of [Finalists](#) has been posted. This year's PAGE Awards winners will be announced October 1st. Good luck to the gifted writers still in the running!

What awaits you within our latest eZine? European TV writer Yves Lavandier makes his *LOGLINE* debut a discussion of structure. PAGE Awards Judge Collin Chang has coined the term Emotional Dramatic Point to define the must-have moment where you make the audience cry. Dealing with rejection is something every writer must face, and two of our contributors share insights gained from their experiences with it. 2005 Gold Prize winner Glynn Borders offers a humorous look at getting the high hat from Hollywood and producer Marvin V. Acuna provides coping strategies for the dreaded "no" that often precedes "yes."

In his column on successful genre writing, John Truby illuminates the detective-story underpinnings that powered the comedy hit *The Hangover*. Our format czar, Dave Trottier, demonstrates dream sequences. And finally, the latest listings from InkTip.com may bring you a buyer for your latest spec!

Happy reading,



In Defense of Three-Act Structure

by Yves Lavandier

Write a story, any story, and 99 times out of 100, whether you want to or not, I bet you will end up with three acts. Why? Because having three parts in a narrative is as natural as other universal triads (mother-father-child, length-breadth-depth, solid-liquid-gas, inferior-equal-superior and above all, past-present-future). Every human action, whether fictitious or real, contains three logical parts: before the action, during the action, and after the action. This is the definition of three acts for Aristotle, G.W.F. Hegel, Zeami and Frantisek Daniel.

At the end of the '70s, a few theorists corrupted this simple definition. They pushed their formula to such an extreme that the rule has become rigid dogma and today the argument that the three-act structure is a myth has found traction. This mistakes **dramatic acts** for **logistical acts**. In classical drama, logistical acts correspond more or less to changes of setting or time, and sometimes a change of act is ordered for non-dramatic reasons. Though in the distant past the rule was to write plays in five logistical acts, if well written, at their core these plays still consisted of three dramatic acts.

In *Cyrano de Bergerac*, each of the five logistical acts corresponds to a setting: a theatre, a bakery, a plaza, a military camp, a convent. The dramatic acts amount to three. The second act begins when Cyrano declares to Le Bret that he is in love with Roxane (in the official "Act I") and ends with his final attempt (at the end of "Act IV"). The second act of *Tootsie* extends from the image of Michael (Dustin Hoffman) dressed as a woman in the streets of New York to his on-air confession. The second act of *Memento* — which tells a story backward — starts with Teddy (Joe Pantoliano) saying to Leonard (Guy Pearce): "You don't know what's going on. You don't know who you are. Do you want to know, Lenny?" It ends when we, the audience, understand what Leonard did. Even *21 Grams* has three acts, though it breaks up several storylines into their component parts and presents them in complete disorder, inviting spectators to piece things together for themselves. But the narrative is not as deconstructed as it appears. The inciting incident is presented in its essentials around minute 25 and the climax comes five minutes before the end.

Note that, in my definition, the climax is of course a part of the second act, as it's the most important part of the dramatic action. The first act is before the action, the second is during the action and the third is after the action (the resolution). Granted, it sometimes happens that you also find a climax in the third act; after the second act climax provides a first dramatic answer, the action is re-launched in the third act and this leads to a second climax.

Bottom line, the simple three-act structure makes perfect sense. Of course, there is always the challenge of filling the second act! But there are helpful tools such as sequencing, main markers and the principle of fractal structure, which states that all parts (scenes, sequences, acts, etc.), whatever their scale, have the same basic pattern. When it comes to three acts, there's no reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater. *For more, visit [Yves Lavandier's website](#).*

The King of Rejection

by Glynn Borders

In 2005, a collaborator and I won the PAGE International Screenwriting Competition in the TV Sitcom Pilot Category. The gold. First place. The big prize. Finally, I was getting some kind of confirmation. Validation. I was recognized.

Glynn Borders is a screenwriter and playwright based in New York City. In 2005, he and Marianna Annas won the PAGE Gold Prize for their TV Sitcom Pilot *Ellis Greco*. Glynn has worked as a special effects/pyrotechnics expert for *Saturday Night Live*, Conan O'Brien and David Letterman, and he has performed with several sketch comedy companies. He'll be premiering his one-man show *The Enforcer* in Manhattan on Sept. 13th.

You must understand, I've been writing screenplays for a very long time. Way before screenwriting competitions were the going thing. My frustration is that I'm The King of Rejection. It's true. I wear the crown. I am the king. I'm not very proud of it, even though receiving a rejection letter is a noble thing, a screenwriter's coming of age. I've been told that rejection letters are the bricks in the road to screenwriting gold. Man, I have been so close to that gold so many times, I have enough bricks to pave a whole new trail to the Land of Oz.

Like most people, my early scripts were returned unopened and unread, with a very short cover letter from the production company's legal department. It was basically a one-liner stating, conclusively, that they do not accept unsolicited materials. It was straight to the point. No agent? You ain't gettin' through here, buddy-boy. Eventually, however, my work did start getting through. I'm not really sure how or why, but people began to read my material. People I met by networking. Important people. I sort of made a name for myself, some kind of way.

The first company to take me, almost, seriously was Warner Bros. here in New York. That's when the wave of form letters began. You know the kind. There's only one draft. Only one template. They just keep changing the name. It went something like this:

Dear Mr. Borders,

Thank you for submitting your work to XYZ Studios. Unfortunately, it does not meet our needs at this time.

Blah-blah-blah, yadda-yadda-yadda. I got about ten of those.

Soon I graduated to personal rejection letters. Personal. You know the kind. Where the studio type or producer type actually dictates a letter to his or her assistant. In this letter, he or she actually takes the time to mention specific things in your screenplay, like characters, plot, etc. They went more like this:

Dear Mr. Borders:

Thank you for allowing us to read your material. Your protagonist is funny and engaging and your antagonist is a pure evil delight. Your inciting incident is fresh and unexpected. Unfortunately, our production schedule is full right now. So we are unable to take on any new projects. Good luck, and feel free to send us your latest and greatest.

I got about ten of those. Maybe more.

Somewhere in there, I attended a filmmaking seminar sponsored by *Independent Film Quarterly*. One of the speakers was an entertainment lawyer I'll call "Tim." Tim was really funny. He was engaging, smart and knew everything about the film business. He talked about how difficult it was for young screenwriters and how he hoped to assist talented writers. Whoa, this guy had to be

my ticket to success! Tim was incredibly approachable and I spoke with him afterwards. He gave me his card, I sent him my script, and he really liked it. We stayed in touch and he submitted a screenplay of mine.

Later, Tim told me, "Glynn, you're going to be an overnight success. I really believe that. Everybody will be surprised and will wonder where you came from. And by that point, you will have been around for a dozen years. Maybe even 20."

In the meantime, about 12 Hollywood execs took the time to call me. But just to reject me. The phone would ring. I would answer.

"Hello. Joe Vice President is calling for Glynn Borders."

"Yeah, I'm Glynn Borders."

"Please hold for Mr. Vice President."

I'm jumping up and down at this point. Silently, of course. He could pick up at any second and I had to present, at least, a spot of dignity. But there was a little voice in the back of my mind saying "Don't you believe it, Borders. Don't you believe it. Not until the contract is signed and the check has cleared. They've done this to you too many times before. About nine times, in fact. So you just chill, Brother Man. Just chill."

Finally, Mr. Vice President picks up the phone. He has that "close personal pal" pitch to his voice. Even his loud volume, coming through the speaker, said "close personal pal."

"Glynn! How you doin, buddy?"

"I'm great, Mr. Vice President. Thank you."

"Oh, please. Call me Vice."

I'm waiting to desperately inhale, but I don't want to sound like I'm gasping for air. So I turn it into an annoying stutter instead.

"Th-th-th-thanks, V-V-Vice."

"Glynn, I really think your script is funny. I actually laughed out loud and that's something I never do. Your characters are interesting, compelling, relatable and real. However, I am so very sorry, it's just not for us."

LONG AWKWARD PAUSE. I attempt to sound confident, positive.

"Well-uh, comedies are good. You know, uh, people always want to laugh. They need it. Plus, um, I think lots of people can relate. Even you said it's relatable."

The "close personal pal" leaves Mr. Vice President's voice.

"Well. You know. Glynn, it's just not for us."

ANOTHER AWKWARD PAUSE.

"But be sure to send us your latest and greatest."

So how do I manage to keep the big, ugly frustration monster from chewing me alive?

It's not easy, but I just buckle down and write something else. Since my background is theater, I usually try to write a play. This time around I'm going with solo shows. I even took a couple of solo show workshops. I have a 90-minute show, an hour show, and a 15-minute show. I'm shooting for the New York Fringe Theater Festival and hopefully I'll be performing the 90-minute show next summer. In the meantime, I'll keep trying to come up with screenplay ideas that inspire me to completion. I've come to realize that the only thing I can control is what I can control. So I just keep writing.

Long live the king.

Emotional Dramatic Points

by Collin Chang

You know that scene in a movie where things come to an emotional head and a character reveals a bit more about himself than he planned to? Or that lump-in-your-throat moment when a character bares her soul? In a good spec script, that moment isn't an accident. In fact, it's a premeditated machete swipe at your heartstrings. And each and every script needs to have at least one of those moments between FADE IN: and "No animals

Collin Chang has sold two scripts to major studios and has been hired on a dozen writing assignments. In 2006, his first independent horror film was made and ultimately distributed by ThinkFilm. Collin currently has projects in active development at Mosaic Media Group and Accelerated Entertainment.

were hurt in the production of this film," to leave a lasting impression on the audience.

I'm going to call this moment an **Emotional Dramatic Point**. Or EDP. Another thing about EDPs? They don't come with shoehorns attached. In other words, you can't just wedge an EDP into a script anywhere you'd like. If the emo shoe doesn't fit, it means it wasn't cobbled right. But don't take my word for it. Let's take a look at two case studies.

The Sixth Sense

M. Night Shyamalan strapped us in and sent us tilting on the emotional Matterhorn with this one. I believe that even if he hadn't thrown us the "Bruce Willis is really a ghost" twist at the end, *The Sixth Sense* would still pack the power of an emo hand grenade. That's because of the Emotional Dramatic Points Shyamalan ingeniously weaves into the fabric of his script, coming to a stitch point at its climax.

In the first act, Cole, the little boy who sees ghosts, is accused by his mother of taking his grandmother's bumblebee pendant from her dresser and leaving it lying around. There's obviously a lot of baggage left between Cole's mother and his deceased grandmother. It's one of the threads that M. Night brilliantly weaves through this deft, dramatic thriller.

At the climax, Shyamalan ignites his emotional napalm. The story thus far has been about Cole coming to terms with the fact that he "sees dead people." After describing his gift to his mother, Cole shares a little bit of insight about Grandma to ease his mother's burden. Here's how the end of the scene plays out:

```

                COLE
    She said, you came to her where
    they buried her. Asked her a
    question... She said the answer
    is "Everyday."

    Lynn covers her face with her hands. The
    tears roll out through her fingers.

                COLE
    (whispers)
    What did you ask?

    Beat. Lynn looks at her son. She barely
    gets the words out.

                LYNN
    (crying)
    Do I make her proud?

    Cole moves closer to Lynn. She cradles him
    in her arms. Mother and son hold each other
    tight.
    
```

For those of you who are taking notes, that is an Emotional Dramatic Point and a powerful scene. Impactful scenes like this one played a key role in *The Sixth Sense* staying at the top of the box office for four weeks in the summer of 1999 and made it one of the highest grossing films of all time. [Click here](#) to watch the scene in its entirety on YouTube.

The beauty of an EDP is that it's not confined to a drama, or for that matter, a thriller. An Emotional Dramatic Point can creep up on you in any script, regardless of its genre. The only requirement is that it has to be earned. Here's another case study that just happens to be a science fiction extravaganza.

Star Trek

In Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman's sci-fi blockbuster, there's a well earned Emotional Dramatic Point at the very beginning of the script. George Kirk, who will soon become the father of one James Tiberius Kirk, takes command of his vessel when the Federation captain beams himself over to a more powerful enemy ship, the Romulan "Narada," to offer their surrender. When the captain is killed, Kirk orders his crew to evacuate and then flies the ship on a suicide run into the maw of the Narada. This gives the escape shuttles a fighting chance. One of the escaping crewmembers is Kirk's wife, Winona, pregnant with their first child. Amidst the explosions and phaser beams cutting through the hull, an emotional drama slowly unfolds. Let's eavesdrop on the end of the scene, just after Winona has given birth:

```

                WINONA
    He's-- he's beautiful, he looks
    like you.

    Heartsick, George laughs -- glances at the
    MONITORS -- SELF-DESTRUCT COUNTDOWN IS AT T-
    MINUS 20 SECONDS.

                WINONA (CONT'D)
    George, you should be here --

                GEORGE KIRK
    I know-- so what should we call
    him, huh?

                WINONA
    We could name him after your father.

                GEORGE KIRK
    Tiberius? Are you kidding me?
    No, that's the worst-- we'll name
    him after your dad-- let's call
    him Jim.

                WINONA
    ...Jim. Jim it is.

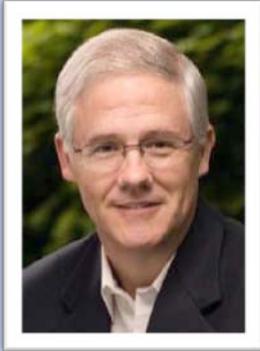
    Through the VIEWSCREEN -- he's ABOUT TO HIT
    -- the ship ANGLES within the enormous
    Narada blades -- George scared now --

                GEORGE KIRK
    Sweetheart? Sweetheart? I love
    you. Can you hear me? -- I love
    you. I love y--
    
```

It's chaos, death and explosions all around, but George and Winona are playing Heathcliff and Catherine, forever together, forever apart. This EDP is bolstered by a brilliant act of noble selflessness as through his sacrifice this fledgling captain saves hundreds of lives, including those of his wife and son.

A good EDP creates an experience that not even the most jaded reader can deny.

WHAT'S YOUR GENRE?



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his 22-Step Great Screenwriting and Genre courses to sold-out audiences in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Sydney, Rome, Toronto and other far-flung locales. Over the past 20 years, more than 30,000 students have taken Truby's 22-Step class and rave about the insights and direction it has given them. He is also the author of ["The Anatomy of Story."](#) Booklist declares, "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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Writing Comedy: *The Hangover*

Breaking Down One of the Summer's Biggest Hits – Why This Unique Comedy is Actually a Textbook Case

by John Truby

Comedy is the most underestimated of all genres. Most writers think they can write a good movie comedy if they're funny. They think all you have to do is string together a lot of jokes and gags and you'll have a successful comedy script. How wrong they are.

It's not just amateurs who make this mistake. Many of the top comedy screenwriters in the business write "front-loaded" scripts, meaning they try to pack as many jokes in the first 10 minutes as they can. That seems like a good idea; once you get the audience laughing, they're bound to keep laughing. In reality, these scripts hit "the wall" about 10 to 15 minutes in and miraculously they're not funny anymore. The writers don't realize that they've made the classic mistake of starting with the small – the joke – and trying to go big. Instead they should have started with the big – the right comic story structure – and the jokes would have come naturally, from the characters.

The Hangover is a textbook example of how to write a comedy script the right way. This is the story of four guys who go to Las Vegas for a bachelor party and end up in a nightmare. The normal approach to writing this story is to follow them throughout the night as they make one mistake after another.

To see why writers Jon Lucas and Scott Moore didn't use this approach, take a close look at the photos of this horrible experience that play over the movie's end credits. What you see are four drunk guys doing outrageous things. The fountain. The tiger. The baby. The wrong guy. Ha ha ha, right? Wrong. First of all, drunk people aren't funny, at least not for longer than ten seconds. It's similar to the old actor's rule: if the actor cries, the audience won't. If the actor laughs, the audience won't. A drunk making a fool of himself may be hilarious to him, but not to the sober people watching.

But there's a bigger reason this wouldn't have worked...

It's all the same story beat. Those outrageous events may seem different on the surface, but comically and structurally, they're all the same thing: drunk guys doing stupid things. And that means that there would have been no narrative drive and no plot. The script would have hit the wall after 15 minutes and all we would see are actors trying to top what just happened in an increasingly desperate attempt to generate laughs.

Notice also that that story strategy would have broken another key comedy rule: comedy should come from character. Once four individuals become mindlessly drunk, they turn into a single character: the drunk idiot. So not only would we have no plot, we'd have no character.

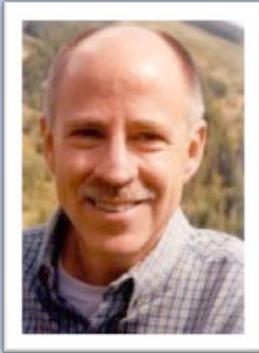
So let's look at the comic story structure these screenwriters did use. Amazingly enough, this is a detective story told with a storyteller frame. The desire line: to find out what happened to Doug, the groom.

It's rare for a comedy to use this structure (*Fletch* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* are two). But it's a very good idea. The detective story has one of the strongest narrative drives of any genre. Which means you can hang a ton of jokes on it without being afraid of collapsing the storyline. And because the story tracks the three friends while they are sober, all of the jokes can come from character, from the unique flaws and personalities of the three guys.

The detective structure gives this script another huge advantage that most other movie comedies lack: a plot. The detective form is the most reveal-heavy of all genres, and reveals are one of the keys to plot. Where the normal approach to a raunchy comedy would have provided almost no plot, the detective form told with a storyteller frame gives the heroes, and the audience, an almost unlimited supply of surprises as they slowly piece together what really happened the night before.

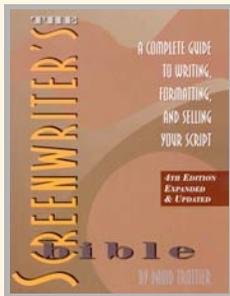
In the [Comedy Class](#), I talk extensively about the 11 key story beats for comedy, the beats for the seven major comic story structures – action comedy, traveling angel, buddy picture, romantic comedy, farce, black comedy and satire – setting up and paying off jokes, and the many ways you can make the comedy come from character.

This script uses a lot of those techniques. *The Hangover* is not perfect. Even with the detective structure, the story and the comedy both flag for a while. But this script does show clearly how choosing the right comic structure at the beginning makes all the difference between a blockbuster comedy and the thousands of other comedy scripts that never even make it to the screen.



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



With a wealth of information in a single indispensable guide, "[The Screenwriter's Bible](#)" provides you with crystal clear explanations of script formatting and screenwriting fundamentals, including dozens of useful worksheets, checklists, marketing advice, sample query letters, and the latest on the new spec style. The one book every aspiring screenwriter must own.

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Dreams, Visions and Flashbacks

by Dave Trottier

QUESTION:

If a character is listening to someone talking, and the character drifts off into a daydream or fantasy, how do you set it up?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Handle this the way you would a flashback or a dream. First, create a transitional device to slip us into the daydream. In *Casablanca*'s flashback, we move toward the cigarette smoke and DISSOLVE to Paris. But a transition could easily be signaled with a word of dialogue or an action. Here's an example:

Mary listens to the voices behind the door. They fade as she looks away.

MARY'S DAYDREAM

Describe the daydream. Then:

BACK TO SCENE

And continue with the original scene with Mary at the door.

If you have a special location in mind that you want to emphasize, write it as follows:

INT. AFRICAN JUNGLE - MARY'S DAYDREAM

Or:

MARY'S DAYDREAM - AFRICAN JUNGLE

And then after the scene ends:

END OF DAYDREAM

INT. MARY'S ROOM

...Or wherever the original scene took place.

Keep in mind that a spec script must be visually clear. The reader must be able to easily visualize the action and movement.

Good luck and keep writing!



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Marvin V. Acuna recently executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Tom Hanks, and Colin Hanks), *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), while producing *Touched* (Jenna Elfman) and *How Did It Feel* (Blair Underwood). To receive a copy of Hollywood's "Most Valuable e-Newsletter" for FREE, sign up for *The Screenwriter's Success Newsletter* at www.TheBusinessofShowInstitute.com "The No. 1 Online Information Hub for Screenwriters on the Business... of Show Business."

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Rejection: as American as Apple Pie

by Marvin V. Acuna

It may be hard to believe now, but when I was a kid I was shy. EXTREMELY shy.

[United Skates of America](#) was THE spot to be when I was in my very early teens. I'd skate, play video games, and... work hard to muster the courage to finally ask my teen crush, Sharon, to skate with me. She was soooo cute. But I could never get the words out. It felt and looked a lot like [this](#).

The fear and humiliation of rejection can be so powerfully paralyzing that dreams can go unrealized... like my dream of skating with Sharon.

If baseball is America's pastime, saying "no, it's a pass" is Hollywood's.

Rejection is and will always be part of your journey as a screenwriter. That's simply a fact. But you can use rejection to empower you instead of sabotage you.

Academy Award® nominated screenwriter and film icon Sylvester Stallone said the following on the subject: "I take rejection as someone blowing a bugle in my ear to wake me up and get going, rather than retreat."

Here are a few tips on how to address rejection:

1. As Zig Ziglar says, "Every 'no' that you receive is one step closer to a 'yes' and more importantly, a step closer to aligning you with the right executive, producer, manager and/or agent.
2. You've said "no" in the past. So think of a time when you rejected an opportunity that was presented to you. What was going through your mind? Did it mean the opportunity was without value? Probably not!
3. Be sure to put things into perspective. Avoid using words like "always" or "never" when you're talking to yourself about your career. For example, "Agents always reject me" or "I'll never sell my project."
4. Remember that each experience can be a lesson, if you're open to it.
5. Don't take rejection personally. It's business. Solely business.
6. Avoid phoning everyone you know to moan and prolong your suffering.
7. Instead of self-pity, indulge yourself in a self-esteem ritual... do something that makes you feel great.

I hope these tips are helpful. They changed my life. It's not going to be easy. It takes practice... It takes work... But doesn't everything?

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IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

Please submit your work only if it seems like a **perfect fit** for these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with jerrol@inktip.com before submitting it. Do not contact the production company directly. Thanks!

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

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

Wishing Well Pictures

[code: rp8xfkzm5y]

We are looking for completed feature-length dramas (male lead, 20's) with extreme magical realism – situations that involve fantasy or supernatural ideas in a hyper-reality, but still grounded in realistic characters or woven seamlessly into our natural world. Perfect examples: *The Fountain*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *The Matrix*, *What Dreams May Come*, *Benjamin Button* and *Pleasantville*. Think David Lynch, Terry Gilliam or Charlie Kaufman. Premise should be original and thought-provoking, not a modern spin on an old tale, and no detective stories or biopics.

Budget has yet to be determined. WGA or non-WGA may submit.

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

Catsnake

[code: 1b5pmubby4]

We are looking for feature-length scripts in any genre featuring parkour/free-running, in the vein of *District 13* or *Breaking and Entering*. Script should make free-running an integral part of the storyline. The production team includes a very well-known free-running name who is willing to co-produce and star in the picture. Our credits include *Baseline* and *The Grind*.

Budget will not exceed \$5 million. WGA or non-WGA may submit.

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

Big Mind Film Inc.

[code: vqywu01jwd]

We are looking for completed feature-length Sci-Fi scripts from Canadian writers only, no space action epics or alien characters. We are open to a variety of Sci-Fi stories, particular those influenced by greats like William Gibson (*Neuromancer*), Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Ray Bradbury. Our credits include *Outcast*, *Bugs* (Sci-Fi Channel) and *Army of the Dead*.

Budget will not exceed \$4 million. WGA or non-WGA may submit.

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

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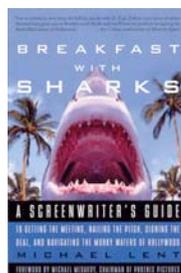
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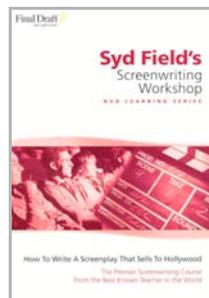
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