LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

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Letter From the Editor

If you're a longtime reader of the ***LOGLINE*** eZine, you know that we are a publication of the PAGE Awards. The 2017 PAGE contest is now open for entries, and if your script is polished and ready to submit, I encourage you to submit your screenplay before the **January 17 Early Entry Deadline** and take advantage of our lowest entry fees of the year! The PAGE Awards contest is one of the longest-running and most prestigious in the industry. Though the competition can be fierce, we've seen countless writers achieve their breakthrough after a strong showing. I truly hope that you will be next!

As 2017 comes out of the gate, ***LOGLINE*** presents a broad swath of thought on the screenwriter's life. First, 2016 Finalist Jeanne Veillette Bowerman advises scribes to give careful consideration to the medium their story should be told in. PAGE Judge Adam Sydney offers four keys to creating three-dimensional characters.

In this issue we also welcome a new contributor, Ray Morton of Scriptmag.com, who provides a primer for writers penning their first script. Dave Trottier, our long-standing format guru, discusses "style" and dialogue conventions. Career coach Lee Jessup emphasizes the value of a simple thank-you note to any industry professionals who lend a hand. And, as always, we end the issue with a three-pack of "hot leads" from InkTip!

Happy reading,

Latest News From the PAGE Awards

◆ More great news coming in from our 2016 PAGE Award winners… Gold Prize winner Josh Barkey has been signed by PAGE Judge John Zaozirny at Bellevue Productions. Gold Prize winner Andy Byrnes has been signed by Chris Watkins at Catapult Entertainment Group. Silver Prize winner Joshua Weisman has been signed by PAGE Judge Tony Zequeira at Super Vision, and Silver Prize winner Jeff Smith and Finalist Thomas Vowles are also now working with Tony Zequeira.

◆ 2016 PAGE Silver Prize Winner Tom Dean, 2014 Silver Prize Winner Mark Townend and 2015 Finalist Nick Yarborough all had screenplays on both the 2016 Black List and the 2016 Hit List, the industry's compilations of the best as-yet-unproduced scripts currently circulating in Hollywood. 2009 Finalist Matt Altman also has a script on the Hit List and 2012 PAGE Silver Prize winner Christopher Bacon was included on the 2016 Brit List, a compilation of the best unproduced screenplays in the U.K.

◆ 2013 PAGE Grand Prize winner Brooke Roberts started off as a Staff Writer on the CW series ***The Flash*** in 2014, was promoted to Story Editor in 2015, and was then awarded a double bump up to become a Producer on the show last year. She wrote the recent episodes "Frostbite," which launched the third season of the show on October 4, and "Killer Frost," which aired on November 22. Brooke is represented by WME and Circle of Confusion.

◆ 2005 Silver Prize winner Janet Lin is currently working as Co-Executive Producer on the NBC drama ***The Night Shift***, and she wrote the recent episodes "The Way Back" and "Unexpected." Janet is represented by The Gersh Agency.

◆ 2009 Gold Prize winner Rob Sudduth wrote the December 13 episode of the ABC comedy ***The Real O'Neals***, entitled "The Real Christmas." Rob is represented by UTA and MetaMorphic Entertainment.

The 2017 PAGE Awards Early Entry Deadline: January 17

The First Question Every Writer Should Ask

by Jeanne Veillette Bowerman

That brilliant idea hits your brain and dances off your fingertips and onto your page. A rush of exhilaration pours over you and you can't wait to sit down and write the "vomit draft." But are you writing a short film, a feature, a TV series, a limited series, a novella or a novel? Which format best serves your story?

That is the first and often most important question a writer should ask before starting any project. Trust me, if you pick the wrong format, your story will never make it to the screen. I did just that, went down the wrong rabbit hole and wasted years on it. Sharing my mistakes might help you avoid making the same ones.

In 2008, I got the gig of adapting the Pulitzer Prize-winning book ***Slavery by Another Name*** (***SBAN***). This was before ***12 Years a Slave***, before ***Django***, before ***Selma***, and long before the Black Lives Matter movement. Black films and race relations were not a hot topic in Hollywood – especially not period pieces.

Our project was a long shot to begin with, but I was (and am) fiercely passionate about the subject matter. I was determined to break all barriers, especially since we were exploring an area of American history unknown to the masses – the birth of the prison leasing system and genesis of the tension between blacks and law enforcement. What studio wouldn't want to bust the doors of racial injustice wide open? All I had to do was figure out how to condense 80 years of history into a stellar, groundbreaking feature, and I was good to go!

That should have been the first clue that I was on the wrong path – finding a two-hour story in 80 years of history is a tall order. But all I could see was the ability to reach a wider audience on the big screen. I rewrote the feature countless times and placed high in all the major contests. Dozens of high-level executives gave the same answer every time: "This is amazing. This has to get made. It's too important not to… but it's a black film, and no one is making black films."

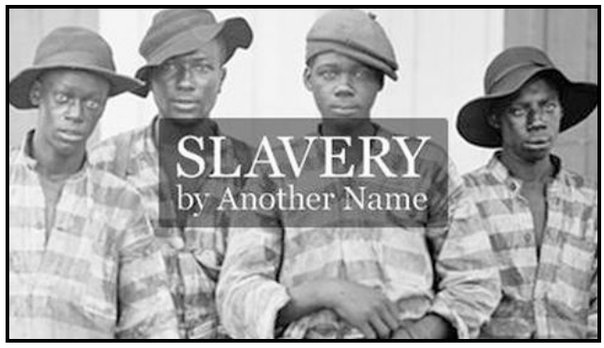
It was easy for me to rationalize that ***SBAN*** was only getting rejected because it wasn't lily white, not because I had picked the wrong format. But I can admit now that there were many, many times my brain whispered, "Miniseries, Jeanne, miniseries!" To which I slapped that brain down, sometimes with a good ol' shot of tequila, and said, "Shut up!" I ignored my own instincts because it would be a Herculean task to go from two hours of content to 10.

After years of frustration I realized I had been trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. ***SBAN*** needed to be a limited series for TV, not a feature film. It was time to put my big-girl panties on. So, last summer, I spent three months creating a 10-hour limited series treatment and writing the pilot episode.

To say it was brutal would be an understatement. I thought I knew the amount of work it would take, but truth be told, I didn't know squat. This was the greatest writing challenge of my life. But, at the end of the summer, I had a product that begged to be on the TV screen. Finally, I had written it in the format the story deserved. I entered ***SBAN*** into the PAGE Awards and was selected as a finalist in the TV Drama category. Hallelujah!

If I could go back to 2008, I would spend more time analyzing the story, its characters and my gut instincts instead of just immediately jumping on the feature path. Obviously, I can't do that, so let's try to help you figure out the best way to tell *your* story.

Before you write a feature film script, think about the subject and theme of your story. Is it one that people would pay $15 to see? Is it high concept? Is it a



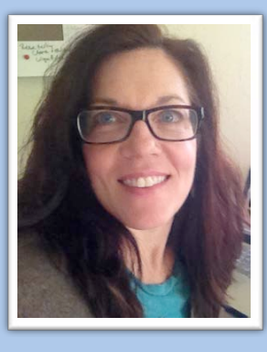
subject that's been successful at the box office? If so, can you spin yours in a new way to make it original? Is it something with sequel potential?

Remember, bigger isn't always better. How long do you need to tell your story and fulfill its greatest potential? As a short film, would the ending feel satisfying for both the plot and characters? If it were a feature, would it feel like there's too much (or too little) story to fill 90-to-120 minutes of screen time? As a TV series, will the premise produce enough narrative track to keep it going for 100 episodes?

Regardless of the format you write in, your characters have to be amazing on every level. How much screen time to do you need to evolve them? Are your characters more interesting than your conceptual hook (a sign the project is better suited to television)? And if you're writing TV, are the characters interesting enough to make people tune in every week or binge watch on Netflix? Do you need a number of characters to tell your story, or just a few? If it's just a few, steer clear of TV and focus on writing a short or feature.

There's no clear answer as to what the best format is for any given story, but too often writers don't explore that question enough and waste time writing their stories in in the wrong format.

Before you begin writing, push yourself to expand your comfort zone, ask the tough questions, and be willing to take a different path than you anticipated. If you do, I promise that your story will be better served – and so will your writing career.



Jeanne Veillette Bowerman was a Finalist in the 2016 PAGE Awards competition with her limited-series script, *Slavery by Another Name*. Beyond writing screenplays and novels, Jeanne is the Editor of *Script* magazine, writer of the *Balls of Steel* column and co-founder of Twitter's weekly screenwriting chat, #scriptchat. She appears on Stephanie Palmer's list of the "Top 10 Most Influential Screenwriting Bloggers."

Creating Characters Who Will Work for You

by Adam Sydney

If you've studied the craft of screenwriting, you know that a lot of attention is usually paid to story structure, and rightly so. Building a solid structure is vitally important for most types of film and television stories. But it's your characters who are supposed to be responsible for most of the beats of your script, right?

Unfortunately, when writers focus too much on structure they forget that their characters should be *doing things* and they end up with passive characters who simply react to the things that happen to them. They carefully outline every beat of their story and then plug in placeholder characters who just do whatever is required so that the next event can happen. This isn't compelling storytelling.

Regardless of genre, fully formed characters who propel the story forward with their decision-making are what make a script truly engaging.

So how exactly do you build three-dimensional characters who can drive a narrative? There are four basic elements that are vital for creating active characters who will generate unique and interesting storylines…

GOALS

Most of you won't be surprised by this one. You know that your protagonist needs to have a main goal that will keep your audience riveted throughout the film.

To figure out whether your protagonist's goals are adequately powerful, here are the two questions you need to ask yourself: Does the character really, *really* care about the story goal? And are there dire consequences if he or she doesn't reach this goal? If the answer to both of these questions is yes, then audiences will probably care whether or not your protagonist reaches his or her story goal.

FLAWS

Why would you want your main characters to have flaws? Shouldn't they be perfect? Well, with some genres, audiences don't mind a tall, blond, brilliant, hilarious, beautiful, muscular protagonist, but that can be hard work for the writer. How can a character like this make a mistake and complicate matters, thereby driving the plot forward? And while it's nice to idolize a hero or heroine sometimes, wouldn't your audience be even more engaged in your story if they could empathize with a real human being in the main role?

The great thing about human flaws is that we have so many to choose from! There are physical flaws and emotional flaws and psychological flaws and mental flaws. It can be something that the audience doesn't consider a flaw, but the main character does. Or perhaps only the characters around the protagonist consider it a flaw. As long as you can generate some juicy conflict from your character's flaws, you'll be in good shape.

NEEDS

A psychological hole in a character's life that he or she isn't fully aware of is called a "need." Often, needs are generated by a character's childhood. For example, imagine that ever since Tommy's daddy left when he was five years old, Tommy has needed the approval of male authority figures. As soon as your audience figures out the underlying need that drives what Tommy does, they'll be intrigued to see how things play out for him.

So how can you develop the most interesting goals, flaws, and needs for your characters? One easy way to build a multi-faceted character is to make sure that these characteristics are as specific as possible. If the goal of your protagonist, Maggie, is "love," what is she actually going to do to achieve that goal in your story? For your own purposes, define the goal as sharply as possible. If Maggie's goal is to "find a puppy who will love her more than her abusive parents did, so she'll build up enough courage to express herself through music," then we will have a much better idea of Maggie's story beats.

In addition, make sure that your protagonist's goals, flaws and needs have nothing to do with one another. This will prevent the character from being one-dimensional. For instance, if his goal is to build a house, his flaw is that he doesn't know how to build and his need is to feel safe in a home because he was abandoned as a child, your character will lack depth. Compelling characters have many facets.

INTERNAL CONFLICT

This last element is kind of like math: pick two or more from above and find a conflict generated by them. Here's an example:

1. Roxanne's *goal* is to get to the third moon of Xaxon so that she can stop her sister from marrying Prince Nathos, whom she just found out will use the union to exploit the inhabitants of her home planet.

2. Her *flaw* is that she always does the opposite of what her elders tell her because she believes she understands the universe better than they do.

3. And her *need* is to stop making decisions based on how they will affect her mother's health because, as a child, Roxanne's mother coincidentally almost died soon after Roxanne broke an heirloom.

There are a lot of potential internal conflicts we could generate with these elements, but here's one: Roxanne wants to get to Xaxon's moon to stop her sister from marrying (1), but she's worried that her mother will fall ill when she finds out (3), so Roxanne hatches a plan to find someone else to ruin the wedding. Now we not only have a story that's never been told before, we even know the first act break. And we have a pretty good idea what Roxanne will do and what she'll need to learn before she is victorious!

There are an infinite variety of personalities you can create using these four elements. What's more, once you've figured them out for your character, you'll find it's easier to generate an compelling backstory and create interesting secondary characteristics. It's worth the effort — fully developed, multifaceted characters will always help your script stand out!

Adam Sydney's love of film inspired him to get a couple of master's degrees in screenwriting, one from the American Film Institute and one from the University of London. While studying, he worked as a reader for the ICM Agency and the U.K. Film Council before taking on the role of Head of Development at Outside Film Sales in London.

Writing Your First Script

by Ray Morton

Every screenwriting career begins with a first script – with the work that results the first time an aspiring author constructs a blueprint for a movie-to-be. A lot of blood, sweat and tears go into these initial efforts. Unfortunately, most aren't very good.

Why? Because many first-timers come to screenwriting with great ambition – with a desire to write epics, period pieces or sci-fi/fantasy adventures; to craft intense dramas or mordant comedies based on their own life experiences; or to reinvent the art of storytelling by presenting their narratives in experimental ways – but they have not yet developed the skills to support that ambition.

Epics are hard to write because they require so much more – more scope, plot, characters, action – than "normal" scripts. Science fiction, fantasy and period scripts are difficult because they require the author not just to tell a story, but also to create an entirely new and/or unfamiliar world for that story to take place in. "Personal" scripts are a challenge because it's very difficult to find the drama in the non-dramatic events of everyday existence. "Experimental" scripts are risky because it's only one small misstep from the sublime to the ridiculous.

As the old saying goes: "You have to learn to walk before you can run." Writing scripts like these is the screenwriting equivalent of a marathon, so my advice is to hold off on tackling overly ambitious material and instead start off simply by:

1. Telling a genre story

Genre stories usually employ a standardized narrative structure and contain a number of mandatory plot elements. Working with these predetermined bits gives you a chance to get the hang of story construction and development without having to generate everything from scratch. The scope of most genre pictures is modest, which allows you to build your skills working with a few characters and telling a relatively simple story without having to juggle multiple plotlines and a large cast.

Genre tales usually employ stock characters with stock arcs. Working with these pre-established personas teaches you how characters function practically in a script and how to effectively integrate their transformations into a dramatic narrative.

2. Setting your story in the here and now

All screen stories require "world building" – the coherent development and clear presentation to the audience of the time, place and reality in which a story takes place. Setting your first story in the familiar present allows you to develop your world-building skills without the script's success being dependent on them. Once you've gotten the hang of setting the stage in a familiar environment, you can then begin the process of constructing more ambitious milieus for your future stories.

3. Telling a linear tale

Modern screenwriters love non-linear narratives – scripts filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, asides, mosaic plot construction and so on. But when first-timers attempt to do this, they are rarely successful. Why? Because successful non-linear storytelling requires the mastery of two completely different skill sets. The first is the skills needed to construct a solid linear narrative, because at its core all dramatic storytelling is linear – every dramatic tale begins with an inciting incident and builds inexorably to a first-act plot twist, a second-act reversal and an inevitable climax. The second is the skills required to artfully shatter that linear narrative in ways that allow the script to reap the benefits of mosaic storytelling and still make sense.

Most newbies attempt the latter without first mastering the former and the result is usually an incoherent mess. Focusing on telling a straightforward story in your first script allows you to solidify your ability to craft a clear narrative before you turn the plot into a jigsaw puzzle.

4. Telling a regular story in a regular way

Don't use a lot of narrative gimmicks. Don't be weird or obscure or elliptical solely for the sake of being weird or obscure or elliptical. Don't try to invent new screenwriting terminology or formats. Just tell your story and tell it well. That's a big enough challenge for the first time out. Wait until you know what you're doing before you try to get clever. Remember that other old saying: you've got to learn the rules before you can break them.

Of course you're not going to develop all of your screenwriting skills to optimum levels by penning a single script. As with all skill development, it's a process – the more scripts you write, the better you'll get. If you start simply and give yourself the time to develop a solid set of foundational skills, then you will eventually be able to give free rein to your creative ambitions.

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

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

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

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.

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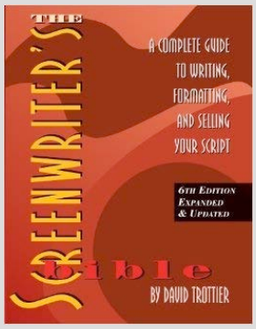

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Just My Style

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

Recently, I came across something regarding screenplays that talked about style and tone. Can you give me a brief explanation of these terms?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Style is the way your writing is dressed up (or down) to reach your audience or achieve your purpose. All writers develop, usually subconsciously, an individual style of writing. For example, Shane Black often begins sentences with verbs. Here's an example from a football game from his screenplay ***The Last Boy Scout***:

```
He takes the ball on the run. Tucks it under his arm.
Turns the corner. Picks up a blocker.
```

Style influences **tone**, which is the mood of the piece. In fact, the tone of a particular scene may imply a certain musical mood to the eventual composer of the musical soundtrack.

When the famous ***Peanuts*** character Snoopy writes, "It's a dark and stormy night," he's trying to create a mood.

Writers often adopt different styles for different scripts to influence the tone or mood of those scripts; and yet, everything they write will carry their imprint and something of their personal writing style.

READER'S QUESTION:

What is the proper format for dialogue involving a ventriloquist and his dummy?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

I think the clearest and most effective way to handle this is to treat the two as separate characters.

```
                VENTRILOQUIST
You're looking stiff today.

                DUMMY
I forgot to moisturize.
```

Here is a second correct method. In this case, we'll have a little boy speak for his plush cat, which he has named Baba.

```
                JIMMY
Do you want to cuddle?

                JIMMY AS BABA
Only if you pet me, too.
```

READER'S QUESTION:

I have a character (let's call him Joe) who at times takes on the persona of a new character (Wayne). There is no other Wayne in the script. When Joe is pretending to be Wayne, should I still call him Joe when writing his dialogue, or should I identify him as Wayne?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Naturally, you are referring to the **character cue** section of the dialogue block. Please allow me to clarify the term **character cue** so that everyone knows what I am talking about. A dialogue block consists of three possible sections, named below.

```
                CHARACTER CUE
          (parenthetical)
Dialogue or spoken words.
```

In screenwriting, you should refer to a character in the character cue section by using the exact same name each time. In your particular instance, I suggest you refer to your character as JOE/WAYNE or JOE AS WAYNE when he is posing as Wayne. Thus, the name JOE is always in the character cue. The character cue is where you must be consistent.

There is one other area where you should be consistent, and that is in the quality of the writing itself. So... keep writing!

When Writers Behave Badly

by Lee Jessup

Confession: I am sweating. I am squirming. I am shifting in my seat. Writing this blog post has been a pain in the you-know-what. I've tried cracking it every which way, and ultimately felt like I never really got my groove with it, possibly because, well, it's something of an icky subject to write about.

Trust me when I say that there is never an easy way to break the news to another adult that he or she has somehow misbehaved. But this stuff is way too important to not put it out there. After all, it's all about the nuanced behaviors that relationships are often built upon, relationships that can and often do become foundational to one's career. Despite my Israeli reputation for being direct and oftentimes blunt, it is not part of the job that I savor. But when I got into the coaching business, I did so to become an advisor and support system, which does on occasion mean getting even my most talented writers out of their own way.

I recently had drinks with a producer friend. He had been developing a project with a writer, but when a similar project sold on the spec market, he decided to put away the script he and the writer were working on. However, before ending their creative collaboration completely, the producer referred the writer to an agent he often works with. The agent fell in love with the writer's original work, and signed the writer right away. "Good for the writer," my producer friend told me, "I mean, I know our project died on the vine, but I thought this agent thing would at least net me a thank-you card in the end." Even though the conversation quickly veered to other topics, I found myself thinking about that long after we said good night.

The reason my producer friend was, well, annoyed, was not because he was expecting a marching band at his door or an expensive bottle of tequila sent his way. But he had nothing to gain from connecting the writer to the agent. He did not collect any money. He didn't promote his own career. This introduction served him in no way. So the absence of a simple card or small gift implied a lack of appreciation for what he had done, and left a bitter taste in his mouth.

Was it only this one writer, or are other writers not behaving as they should with agents, managers, producers and other industry colleagues? I quickly realized that to dig into this question I need look no further than my own experience throughout the years. Though I have not done so often, when I encounter work that I think is truly superior – or "undeniable," as the industry likes to say – I have made introductions on the writers' behalf.

I realized that I could easily remember which of those writers extended some sort of gesture of gratitude, be it a small gift or a card, and the ones who hadn't. And the more I thought of those who had, the more I realized that the very same writers were sending thank-you cards after general meetings. They graced their agents and managers with gift baskets upon landing a job and always sent a care package, a bucket of popcorn or a bouquet of flowers come holiday time. This reminded me once again that everything you do in this industry registers. Even if you don't get a thank-you for your holiday card, people mark these small but important gestures and they influence the relationships that will emerge.

The reality here is simple: A little gratitude goes a long way. And a paperless post thank-you card costs you nothing. Maybe the producer wouldn't have mentioned to me – by name – a writer who sent him a thank-you card or gift basket, but he sure did make a point to mention the one who failed to say **thank you** when it was deserved, because, well, all things being equal, nobody wants to work with someone who is ungrateful. I get the argument that agents and managers don't need a thank-you card because they are getting 10%. But if they choose to help you and invest in your career instead of somebody else's, you should take every appropriate opportunity to show your appreciation for that.

In the end, all this is to say: Be sure to extend a little old-fashioned gratitude whenever someone helps you out – and not only when them helping you does nothing for their business model, as was the scenario with my producer friend. Also thank them when they get you staffed, help you sell your spec or fight for you on that open writing assignment. Not just because other writers are doing it, but also because coming off as grateful and appreciative will make others want to work with you and by extension help you one day when you find you need their support or enthusiasm.

Author of the best-selling book *Getting It Write*, as well as the upcoming *Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches* (due March 2017), 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.

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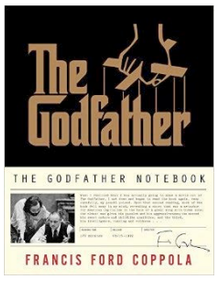

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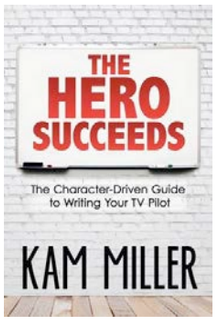

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Company A: Seeking Character-Driven Dramedies

We are looking for character-driven dramedy scripts in the vein of ***The Prestige***, ***Goodfellas*** or something with a Coen Brothers feel. They can be period pieces or contemporary as long as they have strong comedic moments despite comedy not being the spine of the story.

Budget will not exceed $1M. Only non-WGA writers should submit their work at this point in time.

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

1) Go to https://www.inktip.com/leads/

2) Copy/Paste this code: 3wxq30hnae

Company B: Seeking Female-Driven MOWs

We are looking for female-driven thrillers in the vein of the Lifetime network. Material should be somewhat realistic and character-driven, focusing on relationships (family, marriage, romantic or otherwise). We are not interested in supernatural, horror or action. PG-13 content preferred — no graphic sex or violence, please.

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

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

1) Go to https://www.inktip.com/leads/

2) Copy/Paste this code: dd0vd6wzgv

Company C: Seeking True Stories

We are looking for completed, feature-length scripts that are based on true stories.

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

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

1) Go to https://www.inktip.com/leads/

2) Copy/Paste this code: pzhcgq35a8