

Published by:

The PAGE International
Screenwriting Awards
7510 Sunset Blvd. #610
Hollywood, CA 90046
www.pageawards.com

In this issue:

[Five Tips for a Great Pitch](#)
Michael Hauge

1

[The Writer's Perspective](#)
Step up to the
Table Read
Stephen Hoover

2

[The Judge's P.O.V.](#)
Focus on the Journey,
Not the Destination
Scott Levine

3

[What's Your Genre?](#)
Writing the Sci-Fi Film:
Inception
John Truby

4

[Spec Writing Tips](#)
My Favorite Flubs:
Part II
Dave Trottier

5

[Industry Insider](#)
The Three Pillars of a
Successful Screenwriting
Business: Part I
Marvin V. Acuna

6

[Sell Your Script](#)
Hot Leads
from InkTip

7

[Recommended
Resources](#)

8

Letter from the Editor

The Final Round of the 2010 PAGE Awards competition is at hand! The list of Finalists will be posted September 15. And on October 15, the 2010 Winners will be crowned. We want to congratulate each and every one of the 2010 Quarter-Finalists and Semi-Finalists for doing something very special and advancing through a tough field. The Judges have been most impressed by the quality of submissions this year.

In this autumn edition of *LOGLINE*, we look back at the summer's biggest movie as genre guru John Truby does a dream analysis of *Inception*. Special guest contributor Michael Hauge shares his recipe for the perfect pitch. 2009 Gold Prize Winner Stephen Hoover talks table reads and all they can do for you. To access the full power of your protagonist, begin your hero's journey with PAGE Awards Judge Scott Levine. Our format king, Dave Trottier, completes his two-part proclamation with five more flubs that can get your script flogged. Industry insider Marvin V. Acuna begins his own two-parter on the pillars of screenwriting success. And InkTip shares intel on what three producers are looking for on the spec market.

Happy reading,



Five Tips for a Great Pitch

by Michael Hauge

Opportunities for pitch meetings are fairly rare, especially for newer screenwriters. But as soon as you complete your first screenplay, you'll repeatedly face the challenge of having less than 60 seconds to convince the people in power to read it.

Every time you phone an agent or production company to discuss your story or script, you must be prepared to answer the question, "What's your movie about?" Your response will often make the difference between getting rejected and getting your material read.

Here are five techniques to help convince an agent, manager or executive to consider your script:

1. **Never try to tell your whole story.** You'll get lost, you'll run out of time, you'll bore the buyer and it's impossible anyway. Emphasize only those elements that will captivate an executive. Be clear about your objective: to persuade the person in power to read your script. That's it.
2. **Don't lead with your title or logline.** Save those until the *end* of your pitch, to summarize the story in one sentence.
3. **Begin by revealing how you came up with the idea.** This accomplishes many of your objectives: it puts you in control of the meeting; it reveals the commercial, artistic and thematic elements that make your story strong and unique; it pulls the listener into the story in the same way you were drawn to it in the first place; and by the time you hit the key character elements and turning points of your plot, it gets the buyer fully involved in your pitch.

Best of all, this is a powerful way to immediately convey the most important element of all: your passion for your story. Why is your story burning a hole in your soul? Why does it simply *have* to be told? Why does it have special meaning for you? And why will audiences flock to see it?

4. **Always mention two antecedents.** As he or she hears your pitch, every buyer is silently asking the same question: "Can I sell this?" The more commercial potential your script has, the better your chances of getting it read. So be prepared to mention recent, successful movies with the same genre, tone and target market as yours, that you can point to and say, "Because those made money, mine will make money." And describe your hero in such a way that your story's appeal to bankable stars will be apparent.

5. **End the pitch with a question.** This may sound obvious, but most writers end their pitches by just letting them fizzle out, and then wait awkwardly to see if their listeners realize they're done.

My favorite exit line for any pitch is to say, "So would you like me to send you a copy, or do you have some questions about the story?" This gives them two options, both good for you!

Michael Hauge is one of Hollywood's top script consultants and is the bestselling author of [Selling Your Story in 60 Seconds: The Guaranteed Way to Get Your Screenplay or Novel Read](#) and [Writing Screenplays That Sell](#).

Step up to the Table Read

by Stephen Hoover

Writing is rewriting. But what to rewrite? How do you know what's working and what's not? One helpful technique I've used as I develop and refine my screenplays is the table read.

What is a table read?

It's when a group of actors comes together to read a script out loud. Each actor is assigned a character or several characters, and one person is assigned to read the description.

Writer Stephen Hoover won a 2009 PAGE Awards Gold Prize for his thriller *Horror Comic*. A graphic novel adaptation is now underway with illustration by former Marvel artist Ron Fontes. Stephen and his wife, Tatiana, are expecting a baby girl in late September.

Why do a table read?

Because it allows you as the writer to hear your work performed out loud, which will help you make adjustments. As you listen to your dialogue spoken by other people, instead of just in your head, it immediately becomes evident if certain lines are redundant or too "on the nose." Does the dialogue sound realistic? Does it sound too realistic, becoming as dull and

ordinary as most real conversation? Is it funny? Is it **supposed** to be funny?

Sometimes the actors will trim words or take different approaches to the characters than you anticipated. This helps clarify what's actually on the page and how your script is coming across to others. It also helps stir your imagination and generate new ideas. If, like me, you write comedies, you may find that a talented comic actor will get into character and improvise, creating new material you can use in your next draft.

In developing my scripts, one of the most important questions I want answered is this: "Does my script nail the right tone for my genre?" With a table read, I find out! If it's a comedy, people should be laughing. If they're acting out my drama and no one's reaching for a Kleenex by Act Three, I need a rewrite! The script should evoke a core emotional response.

Tips for Setting up a Table Read

1. LOCATION

Pick a location where you have some degree of privacy. You want your actors to feel free to let it rip. If they get into character and begin yelling or moving around, your group will quickly become a distraction, if not an annoyance, in a public location. So try to hold your table read in a classroom, a private room at a restaurant or office, or someone's home.

2. ACTORS

If at all possible, you want trained actors to read your script for you. That way, if a scene feels flat or the dialogue sounds sloppy, you'll know it's on you as the writer rather than an amateurish performance. If you don't know any actors, you may be able to find them by posting a notice at a community theater, online or through your university drama department.

3. PAYMENT

Actors appreciate a show of respect for their effort. If you can afford it, offer at least a nominal payment of \$20 to \$30. Or if you meet at your home or a restaurant, you can offer to buy them lunch or dinner. If you provide some payment or a free meal,

everyone is much more likely to show up for the reading – and come back for the next one.

There are other potential benefits to doing a table read, for both the actors and for you. If you're a director or producer as well as a writer, this is an opportunity for you to get to know new actors. For them, networking with you and the other actors could lead to future roles.

4. PRE-READ

Make sure you send your script to your actors or hand them a copy several days before the reading. Give them a chance to read through the screenplay, get a feel for their characters and annotate their lines in advance.

5. READING SCHEDULE

During the read, I suggest taking a break for snacks in the middle. Or at least a bathroom break. It will take a couple of hours to read through your entire screenplay, and you want everyone to feel comfortable for the duration.

If you're offering a meal, schedule it at the end. Food makes people sleepy, and you don't want people falling asleep during your reading. For any reason.

6. TAKE NOTES

Make sure you have someone else read the screen direction in your script – reading it yourself defeats the purpose. You need to be paying close attention to what you hear, marking up your screenplay with ideas to help you with your rewrite. Jot down quick edits and polishes to the dialogue to make it sound more natural. Sketch out possible new lines to make a scene turn differently. Find places where you can increase the conflict. Track individual characters to make sure their arc plays out. You may also wish to videotape or audio record the reading to review later on.

7. IT'S A WRAP

Applause! Pay everyone if you agreed to do so. Pick up the tab. Email "thank you" notes the next day. You're creating your team here.

There's no greater thrill as a writer than to hear talented actors bring your characters to life. I promise, that rewrite you've been putting off will become a labor of love as you plow through the notes you've taken during your table read.

"One of the most important questions I want answered is this: 'Does my script nail the right tone for my genre?' With a table read, I find out!"



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Focus on the Journey, Not the Destination

by Scott Levine

When I was 12 years old and in middle school, my English teacher, Mrs. Weaver, offered extra credit to anyone who could write an engaging essay about what they did over the weekend.

One particular Monday, while collecting those assignments Mrs. Weaver scooped up my paper, shook her head with a sigh, and said, "Oh, Scott. You always have a story to tell."

Originally from Spring Valley, New York, Scott Levine moved to Los Angeles in 1996 after graduating from Syracuse University with a double major in writing and speech communication. He cut his teeth working on films and television shows, also assisting A-list writers and directors on set and in script development. Before long, Scott began producing his own original material and sold a game show to CBS. He currently directs a screenwriting program at Walt Disney Studios in Burbank.

I was confused. Had she grown tired of reading about my life each week? Perhaps my preteen shenanigans simply were not relevant to her. Or maybe I just told stories in a really boring way. In any case, I sensed this was an insult and wasn't sure I would ever share my anecdotes with others again.

But is it not part of the human condition to share and compare life experiences with one another? To daydream, fantasize, and spin yarns? Some people write songs, others author novels, others paint pictures. We all need to tell stories. But why do some stories just seem better than others?

As screenwriters, we have all witnessed some spectacular things in our lives and thought, "Wow, this would make a great movie! I need to write this!" But how can you successfully utilize those attractive elements to create an effective story – one worth sharing with an audience who expect to be entertained for 90 minutes or more?

The short answer is that it all comes down to the protagonist's journey. Not the exotic locations, not the cool dialects and not the quirky, larger-than-life, never-before-seen characters. No, the audience must believe in your protagonist's mission, and appreciate his or her methods to accomplish worthy goals throughout your story. If you have that, you have the glue needed to successfully fuse together all of the colorful elements that you found so attractive in the first place.

An active and believable protagonist will make a good story great. Any story, whether comedy, drama, sci-fi, thriller or otherwise, is meaningless unless we can navigate that world's landscape through a relatable main character's point of view.

Might we still enjoy innovative action sequences, hilarious dialogue, or mind-blowing special effects without a compelling hero's journey? Sure. But a strong hero's journey makes all the other stuff pop because it provides context, meaning and heart.

For instance, is *Avatar* a story about the invasion of a peaceful planet by greedy humans, or is it the story of an open-minded man trying desperately to win back his personal freedom despite overwhelming obstacles?

Is *Inception* about how we can dangerously manipulate layers of psychoactive dreams for personal gain, or is it about a desperate man willing to push the boundaries of science and biology in order to be reunited with his family?

Is *Up in the Air* about the tepid climate of today's job market, or is it about a haughty, complacent character who thinks he has

everything – only to slowly realize he truly has nothing?

These movies all contain relevant and timely story elements. Countries continue to war over resources, neuroscientists discover more about our brains each day and joblessness continues to plague scores of families in our country and abroad.

However, if issues were all an audience wanted to see, they could stay home and watch the news. A typical movie-going audience wants to watch your hero live and breathe the same conflicts, celebrations and challenges that they themselves face each day in their own worlds.

"A strong hero's journey makes all the other stuff pop because it provides context, meaning and heart."

Their specific backdrops may be different from your hero's, but their journeys are essentially the same.

Before outlining your next story, consider what makes your protagonist's mission both unique and relatable. Have we seen other movie protagonists pursuing the same goals? If so, how is this character's motivation and plan different from the others?

Also, how will this journey impact an audience member's personal worldview? Are you introducing a new, important perspective that needs to be shared at this particular time? How do you think this point of view will be received?

Further, is your protagonist actively pursuing his goals in your story, or merely reacting to events happening around him? As audience members, we want to relish your protagonist's victories, curse his mistakes, and love with his passion, as if we are part of his consciousness. Audiences root for characters who take action, not act as bystanders. Your protagonist should drive the story with choices made and actions taken, and other characters should react to what your protagonist does – not the other way around.

To emphasize the point, I'll offer that both *Avatar* and *Battlefield Earth* feature blue, long-haired aliens, evil warlords and stunning space battles...but I probably don't need to point out how entirely different their stories are. To see why each movie works the way it does, strip away the layers to see what each protagonist is doing and what the audience's relationship to that protagonist is.

I'm compelled to wonder which of those movies Mrs. Weaver might prefer, but I'll likely never know. I'll tell you one thing for sure: I now believe that what she said to me that day was a compliment.

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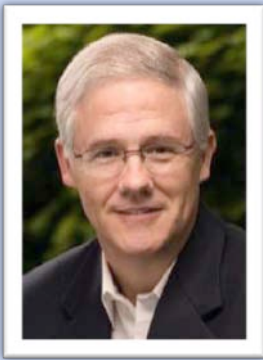
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Writing the Sci-Fi Film: *Inception*

by John Truby



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, please visit www.truby.com today.

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Inception takes off like a rocket and then slowly runs out of fuel. I loved the mind teaser of a plot, but found the longer the movie went on, the less I cared. How a film can generate two such different responses has to do with the important relationship between plot and character.

In the past with *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, Christopher Nolan, along with his co-writers Jonathan Nolan and David Goyer, has shown himself to be one of the masters of movie plotting. Plot is the most underestimated major skill in storytelling, with a lot of specific techniques you must learn to work as a pro. And make no mistake, the ability to pack more plot in your script is the single most distinguishing feature in a script and film that hits big.

Most writers don't realize that many of the plot techniques they will use for a particular story are determined by one of the first choices they make in the writing process: what genres will I use to tell this story? Indeed, Nolan's most brilliant move in writing this script was in combining two genres that are almost never used together: [science fiction](#) and [caper](#). Science fiction is the biggest of all genres, as huge as the universe and beyond. That's why it's so notoriously difficult to write well. It has a broad, loose structure that covers vast scales of space and time. The caper, also known as the heist film, is among the tightest and most focused of forms, built on a specific and high-speed desire line. That's why caper stories are almost always very popular.

By combining these virtually opposite forms, Nolan allows the audience to have their cake and eat it too. They get the epic power of science fiction with the driving speed of the caper. And using the caper gives Nolan another big advantage. The caper is one of the most plot-heavy of all genres, right up there with detective stories and thrillers, and is designed to fool not only the opponent in the story but also the audience. Like a magician, you point the audience's attention in one direction while the real action is happening somewhere else.

The rich plot provided by the caper is magnified many times when the mission takes us into the dream world, where the rules of logic change. This is where the power of science fiction kicks in. Science fiction is the most creative genre, because you can take nothing for granted. The writer must literally create everything, including the space-time rules by which human life itself operates.

To get maximum plot and puzzle, Nolan smartly creates three levels of the dream world, using the technique of "revelation plot." Plot in this kind of story comes from digging deeper and deeper into the same world, with each new level providing a whole new batch of reveals, and thus plot. In combining the caper story structure with a three-level dream world, Nolan takes the audience on a high-speed but mind-bending journey down three levels and back out. In yet another level, the hero's guilt-filled subconscious acts as the story frame and provides even more reveals.

Spoiler alert!

The character/emotion problem for *Inception* starts right at the desire line, the second of the seven major structure steps and one of the strengths of the caper genre. Desire is the hero's goal. It provides the spine of the story, along with the stakes, or why this story matters. In *Inception*, the goal is a concept – specifically, planting an idea in someone's head. Not only is this a cold abstraction, it means the stakes are ultimately meaningless. We are told this idea will prevent ecological catastrophe. But that's just a line of dialogue. None of the story is at all related to it.

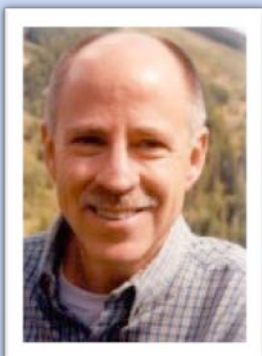
Another source of an emotionless story has to do with the hero's relationship to those most important to him, or lack thereof. From the beginning of the film, his wife is already dead so there is no chance to get to know her or see her interact in the present with the hero. What interaction they do have is tainted by the fact that she is morose, deadly, and generally a real drag. Supposedly the hero is doing all this to get back with his kids, but again he has no personal interaction with them, except to see them as an unreachable image.

With such a weak goal (which propels a story forward) and such a strong ghost (which pulls a story back), the narrative drive must inevitably grind to a halt. And that's just what it does. We get some beautiful, haunting imagery, but the final reel is a slow trek through a dream museum.

There is one final structure element that causes this visually stunning film to slow down and become less involving as it goes on. In the [22 Step Great Screenwriting Class](#), I talk a lot about the moral argument found in all great storytelling. It's the sequence under the surface that made the plot of *The Dark Knight* build in intensity and was the real key to the film becoming a cinematic masterpiece and blockbuster hit. The plot is built on a series of moral tests that Joker throws at Batman. Each test is progressively bigger and more difficult than the one before.

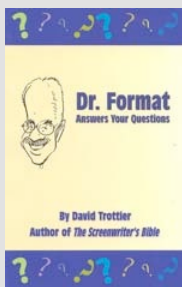
Don't think for a moment that moral argument is primarily designed to increase the intellectual quality of a film. It increases the emotional power of a story many times over, because the stakes now involve lots of other people and not simply the psychology of the hero. Moral argument in story is very complex. Sometimes you nail it, and sometimes you just don't.

The more you learn about the all-important connection between plot and character, intellect and emotion, the better writer you will be.



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. [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: www.keepwriting.com

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My Favorite Flubs: Part 2

by Dave Trottier

In the last issue, we reviewed the first 5 of my 10 favorite clichés and glaring goofs. Now for Flubs 6-10! Avoid these missteps, or at least handle them in a creative way.

6. Obvious exposition.

```

CARLA
Darling, do you recall my liposuction?

LARRY
Yes, Sweetums, that was two years ago.
We had been married for only 17 months.
That was just after our puppy choked on
a chocolate donut.

CARLA
(sadly)
We ate a lot of chocolate donuts in
those days.
    
```

...And so on. Let exposition emerge naturally in conversations unless you are writing a broad comedy. (Obvious exposition includes voice-over narration that adds little to what we already see on the movie screen, and flashbacks that stop the momentum of the movie.)

7. Narrative clichés. The central character is a writer trying to break in who succeeds in the end by selling the story that we just watched on the movie screen. It's actually a clever idea. I even had this idea once, as have thousands of other screenwriters.

Another favorite plot cliché is this: *Sue's family was killed, and now Sue must find the murderer to prove her innocence/avenge her family.* If this is your idea, add a unique twist to it or execute it in an original and compelling manner.

8. Confusing scene headings. For example, no location is identified below:

```
EXT. CHRISTMAS MORNING - DAY
```

Another problem is a secondary heading coming out of the blue. For example, note how the secondary heading does not logically follow the master scene heading:

```
EXT. SWAMP - DAY
```

```
Larry trudges out of the swamp.
```

```
BATHROOM
```

```
Larry washes his face at the sink.
```

How can a bathroom be part of a swamp, and how did we get from an exterior shot to an interior shot? Make sure you understand how to use master and secondary scene headings.

Finally, I often see too much description in scene headings. For example:

```
EXT. WINDY NIGHT WITH PALE MOON SHINING THROUGH TREES IN THE WOODS
```

That should actually be written as follows:

```
EXT. WOODS - NIGHT
```

Save the description for the description section of your script.

9. Character intro clichés, like "ruggedly handsome." If your character is ruggedly handsome, let him prove it with his rugged actions.

10. Query letter clichés. For example, "Suzie confronts her demons."

There must be a lot of demons out there, because they are constantly being confronted in query letters. And query letters are not the only place. In writing this personal confession, I have attempted to confront my own demons. But oh, the nightmares continue...

CUT TO:

Dave, ruggedly handsome, awakens bolt upright in his bed.

The Three Pillars of a Successful Screenwriting Business: Part 1

by Marvin V. Acuna



Marvin V. Acuna executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Tom Hanks, and Colin Hanks) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue). He also produced *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 "The No. 1 Online Information Hub for Screenwriters on the Business... of Show Business." Just click below!

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Recently, I attended a festival and was invited to participate in a roundtable discussion with various screenwriters. It felt a tad like speed dating. Every so often a festival volunteer would ring a bell and I would be relocated to yet another table.

We were not provided with an agenda and I was given no advance notice as to the purpose of this encounter.

Among the sea of screenwriters that I met, one asked a very KEY question: "What is the key difference between a successful screenwriter and a screenwriter who is not successful?"

I'll offer the same answer to you that I did to that particular table of screenwriters. Ready?

THE SUCCESSFUL SCREENWRITER RECOGNIZES IT'S A BUSINESS.

In my humble opinion, there are three pillars to a successful screenwriting business. And make no mistake... this IS a business.

Pillar #1: The Craft

Outliers, the book written by Malcolm Gladwell (gladwell.com), notes the following:

"The idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a critical minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise. In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours."

I feel that screenwriters Craig Mazin and Ted Elliott offer some valuable wisdom in their blog at theartfulwriter.com. *"Let's be clear. Writing is a skill. Talent is a huge part of it, but there's also a practice part. A science part. A 'read yer freakin' Campbell' part of it. There's hard work. Self-criticism. Structure. Vocabulary. A memory for movies. Grammar. Story analysis. Philosophy."*

To further simplify – a writer writes. There are tremendous benefits derived from consistently honing your craft. I'll focus your attention on just three: A) Refine your voice; B) Isolate your strengths and weaknesses; and C) Create an inventory of material.

In a video presentation I heard sometime ago, uber-successful screenwriter John August (johnaugust.com) mentioned that he had roughly 50 unproduced screenplays on his shelf.

How many do you have?

Pillar #2: Market Intelligence

Wikipedia tells us that market intelligence is information relevant to a company's market that is gathered and analyzed specifically for the purpose of accurate and confident decision-making in determining market opportunity, market penetration strategy and market development metrics.

LISTEN TO ME: You are your own Company. You are! When you begin to generate that huge revenue you aspire to attain, the first thing your reps will suggest you do is legitimize your company and form a corporation.

The very same entertainment professionals you are seeking to attract and partner in your business are successful BECAUSE they gather market intelligence.

In fact, an agent's primary responsibility is to "cover" their assigned studio. They must report back to their superiors every bit of information they can mine from the studio executives and the entertainment community so that it can be distributed to the entire company. The more effective they are at gathering market intelligence, the more valuable an agent they become to their agency and the agency's clients.

Consider this: Industry market intelligence is so valuable to executives, producers and representatives that in the late 1990s a dozen or so very entrepreneurial studios executives formed the company Filmtracker.com, the epicenter of privileged information.

Immersing yourself in the business will afford you a competitive advantage over other aspiring screenwriters. And believe me, in a business as competitive as screenwriting... You want every advantage you can get.

For Pillar #3, see you next issue!



Sell Your Script

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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!

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2. Enter your email address
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code

BKS Productions

[code: u4qg65c2r0]

We are looking for completed feature-length college or high school comedy scripts that can be adapted and translated to shoot in China and be distributed there. Submissions must be for material that does not contain scatological humor or sex, i.e. something in the vein of *Revenge of the Nerds*, but without nudity. Stories involving nerds overcoming obstacles are ideal, like an underdog sports team winning a tournament or the geeky science team using their education to best the obnoxious jocks.

Budget will not exceed \$1 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include *Sumo Mouse*, *Secret Cutting*, and *The Four Chaplains: Sacrifice at Sea*.

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

Nasser Entertainment Group

[code: ata75eksxh]

We are looking for completed feature-length contemporary scripts where the entire story takes place in just one or two locations. This is for a specific actor, so submissions need to be character-driven with a strong or leading role for a man in his 40s. Aside from that, they can be in any genre, and any interior location (a bar, an office, a garage, etc.) is welcome.

Budget will not exceed \$1 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include, among many others, *Christmas Crash* and *Desperate Hours: An Amber Alert*, both of which were written by writers discovered through InkTip.

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

Leo Films

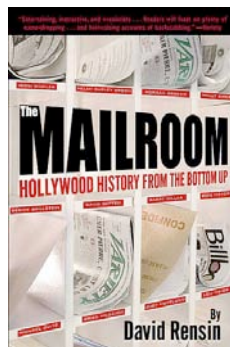
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Budget won't exceed \$2.5 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

For more info, feel free to look us up on IMDb under [Leo Films](#).

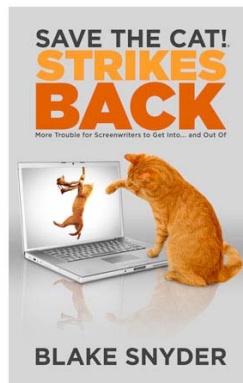
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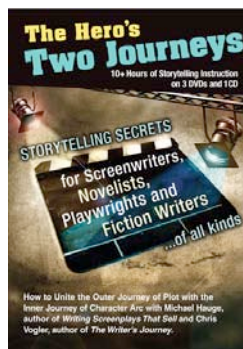


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