

LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

May / June 2010
Volume 3: Number 3

Published by:

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

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Letter from the Editor

They say writing is rewriting, and that a script isn't done until the movie premiere. True, but the time is now to let your baby take those very special first steps. Haven't entered your script in the 2010 PAGE Awards yet? Wrap up this draft because **Saturday, May 15th** is the **Final Entry Deadline!** And order Judge's Feedback to find out your script's strengths and weaknesses, as the pros see it. The only way to see how your script stacks up is to put it out there. We hope we can help to launch your career!

Start your summer off right with this serving of Hollywood intel: **LOGLINE** is back with insights into the art and commerce of screenwriting. First off, I tell you why it might be television, not movies, that make your dreams come true. 2006 Gold Prize Winner Tucker Parsons explains why passion for your project is a prerequisite. PAGE Awards Judge Dura Temple Curry illuminates the power of a title to make or break a movie. Genre guru John Truby discusses Tim Burton's failed attempt to adapt *Alice in Wonderland* and Format wizard Dave Trotter shows us how to construct a dream sequence. Producer Marvin V. Acuna debunks the myth of "If only..." and InkTip's Hot Leads put you in touch with producers seeking material.

Happy reading,



Time to Tune in to TV

by John Evans

Most screenwriters I know explain their challenging career path by professing a passion for movies, often punctuating this statement with a story of childhood wonder in a hushed theater. Though we all grew up with favorite TV shows, I've yet to meet someone whose writing jones began with dreams of penning episodes of *The Dukes of Hazzard*. And yet, in 2010 television writers have it better than their features brethren in a big way.

Not so long ago, much of the best talent in Hollywood considered television a comedown. Movies were where artists went to be fulfilled and TV was where you went for a steady paycheck. Well, the small screen still pays very well, but over the last decade it has also become a bastion of smart, edgy, character-driven storytelling. Even the film genres not devoted to "blowing things up real good" are producing vapid and/or formulaic product like *The Bounty Hunter* and *The Back-up Plan*. Compare *30 Rock* and *Date Night* and tell me which incarnation of Tina Fey you want to write for.

While lovelorn vampires, shape-shifting robots and the spandex super-set dominate the multiplex, complex characters like Don Draper, Walter White, Jackie Peyton and Tara Gregson wrestle with life's ambiguities on AMC and Showtime. As movie studios devote their resources to adapting books, games and toys, cable networks nurture original properties based on stories, not brands.

What's more, write a feature and you sell your power along with your script. The writer is less important than the director, the stars, the producers, and possibly the craft services crew (bagels are a necessity, after all; the person who dreamed up the movie you're making, not so much). But sell a series and you are the visionary who gets the best parking spot on the lot. Can you imagine Matthew Weiner, creator of *Mad Men*, trading his autonomy and small but sophisticated following for the opportunity to pump out studio fare aimed at the *Dancing with the Stars* demographic? You've got to feed the monkey, but come on.

Somewhere along the way, TV and movies switched places. Now it's film that's focused on peddling mindless entertainment for the masses, while TV is where things tend to get provocative. The TV show used to exist primarily to get you to watch the detergent commercial. Before long, the movie might be about the detergent. To the studios, recognizable brands are worth more than good stories. Thanks to the miracle of DVR, the only commercials you can't get away from are in the movie theater. How ironic is that?

Yep, seems like it might be a good time to put your big-screen dreams on hold and write a pilot. Try your hand at a *Modern Family* spec, or for a one-hour drama, *Justified* (it's best to spec shows in their first or second year, before execs get sick of reading them or they go off the air). If you live in a city like L.A., London, Toronto or New York, look for a job as a writer's assistant, P.A. or intern on a TV show. This road may not offer the quick gratification of a spec sale, but the destination looks a whole lot prettier.

These days, the writer is king of the airwaves, but only a peon on the film set. Wealth and fulfillment may not come easily in TV, but flip through a few channels and you'll see dozens of success stories to inspire you. Along with that movie trailer where a guy's getting hit in the crotch.

If You're Not Passionate About Your Script, Who Will Be?

by Tucker Parsons

A while ago, I wrote a good thriller. Good, not great. It had some fun new twists. People liked it a lot. It won contests, got attention, got me representation, and – after many meetings and multiple (free) rewrites – went nowhere.

When a script goes nowhere, it wastes a lot of your time. This is an industry based on having lots of meetings for projects that are destined to go nowhere. Some people are paid to have those

Writer Tucker Parsons won a 2006 PAGE Gold Prize for his thriller *Double Bind*. He is EVP and Creative Director of the Writing Department at Ignition Creative, a leading movie marketing company. Tucker is the only person in his field to be awarded two Key Art Awards for writing.

meetings. As writers, we aren't. There's only so much of that dance you can afford to do, emotionally and financially. So after I gave up on setting up that script, I looked closely at it and its strengths and weaknesses. I had to remember that I had conceived it as an exercise. It was not a passion project, not something I felt in my bones. Ultimately, it took you places you've already been. I had to admit that I didn't love it.

Soon thereafter, I had an idea for a historical adventure (not a terribly commercial genre) that connected deeply with me. My managers didn't like it, so I parted ways with them and wrote it. Three drafts later (as opposed to seven drafts of the thriller) I signed a five-figure option on it.

So what's the difference between the two scripts? I really cared about one and not the other. One was created to appeal to a market and the other was created because it meant something to me. In my historical adventure, I had a strong point to make. I knew where its heart was. And that's the one the market responded to.

It's easy to get cynical about Hollywood, but it's bad for your writing. It's easy to think that what you have to do is come up with a clever commercial hook – something that's just a bit different than some successful model – and let the rest of the script go from there. But it's not enough. If you don't care on a deep level about some key aspect of your story or characters, you should write something else.

When a writer sees a movie with predictable plot points and lame dialogue, it isn't just a couple of wasted hours – it's personal. "I can do better than that," he/she says. "Someone got paid to write that secondhand junk. I should just bang out a tried-and-true formula because that's what Hollywood buys."

And so the writer goes with a foul-mouthed romcom, a zombie cop movie, or perhaps a by-the-numbers actioner with its clichés lightly disguised. And it gets sent around. After a bunch of nibbles and meetings, the writer starts hearing the common thread – words like "predictable," "underdeveloped," "on the nose," and "unoriginal" keep popping up in the passes. So the writer asks one of those imponderable Hollywood questions, "Why is it that crappy movies get made all the time, but nobody will give mine a second look? Why is their trash better than my trash?"

I don't really have an answer for that, only a few guesses based on my long life in Hollywood. In my day job, I make movie trailers and other movie advertising. I've been doing this for

over 20 years. And when we work on high-profile tentpole projects, we get to see up close how the studio process works. As soon as we turn in "version one" of a trailer, it enters "The Process." Although it's different in some ways from studio script development, it is also very similar insofar as you are working with execs, stars, filmmakers and producers – each with various levels of influence – and each with egos, styles, viewpoints and pressures of their own.

Whether it's a script, a trailer or the film itself, The Process is the road you take to the finish line. On big movies where there are three or four trailer companies competing, we liken it to riding a bull in a rodeo. Our job, above all, is just to hang on to the damn thing no matter what.

All too often, a fresh script with originality and zest goes through The Process and step-by-step becomes that cliché lame-itude the aforementioned writer saw and hated. (Although the truth is that The Process, as often as not, makes scripts better.) Still, it's a mistake for any writer to think that all this means you can mimic a formula and get away with it. No serious buyer goes looking for generic material to produce, even if that's what The Process sometimes turns a script into. Imitating well-worn formulas pegs a new screenwriter as nothing special.

From my own experience, there are also practical reasons to write what you care about. You don't know if any idea will work and you never will. But writing something you can really feel gives you a compass. When The Process begins and you're getting conflicting notes, and the director shouts at you, and the studio guy is spinning you around and the bull is trying to kick you off and you're choking and blinded in the dust...the thing you need most is a compass.

Without a compass, it's very easy to let go of the bull. But write something you can feel, and The Process becomes a journey you can successfully navigate.

"No serious buyer goes looking for generic material to produce... imitating well-worn formulas pegs a new screenwriter as nothing special."

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A Rose by Any Other Name...

by Dura Temple Curry

How many times have you sat down with a group of friends and “Voila!” the talk turns to films? And how often has someone in your group tried to conjure the name of a movie with: “You know, that film with Ewan McGregor and the blonde actress from *21 Grams*?” In this case, “that movie” with the forgettable title is 2005’s *Stay*, written by David Benioff.

Dura Temple Curry is an MFA graduate of UCLA’s School of Theater, Film and Television. She is the former Vice President of Development at United Artists and has worked with many talented producers and executives, including Alan Ladd, Jr., John Calley, Rebecca Pollack, Jeff Kleeman and James Middleton.

I had a chance to read *Stay* while a film executive at a major studio. Benioff’s work is one of the most thrilling, provocative pieces I’ve ever read. It starred two of the more talented actors of our time in Ewan McGregor and Naomi Watts. Its director, Marc Forster, has *Monster’s Ball* and *Finding Neverland* on his resume, among others. So why is it that *Stay* is one of the great box office failures of recent time, despite good reviews from critics such as Roger Ebert and *Rolling Stone*’s Peter Travers?

I believe that part of the reason is simple. The movie has a bad title. No. Make that a *terrible* title! The title *Stay* doesn’t begin to convey the otherworldly mystery and breathtaking suspense of Benioff’s disturbing landscape. The title *Stay* conjures: a) a command to a puppy b) a plea from one lover to another or c) the opposite of go.

Contrast great titles with those that are not and a clear-cut pattern emerges that can be summed up in one simple sentence: A great title seduces its target audience using a hook, a tone and/or a recognizable context.

Here’s a simple formula to keep in mind to identify your target audience: age + gender + genre = TARGET. If you’ve written a wildly funny comedy filled with unrepentantly gross humor, you’re probably targeting under-25-year-olds, both male and female, who are cruising for laughs.

The title *The Hangover* inherently suggests comedy, and the movie was an overwhelming financial success in part because the title seduced its target using a funny hook. The crucial **word of mouth** from the film’s carefully targeted audience made it No. 1 at the box office for two weeks in a row.

The recent *Hot Tub Time Machine* also did boffo box office in part because of its goofy/sexy title. The title spoke straight to the heart of its intended target: under-25 male-and-female fans of broad (or gross) comedy.

One of the best recent titles is the hit *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. While aimed at tweens 9-12, Jeff Kinney’s world takes aim at the inner nerd in many adults, expanding its demographic. Critics describe it as a kid’s movie that adults will enjoy – a fact reflected in its title.

How to Train Your Dragon is a whimsical title with a wildly imagistic hook that intrigues with the possibilities of action and adventure, clearly targeting its desired tweens-and-under audience.

Josh Klausner came up with the perfect title for his PG-13 comedy *Date Night*. Its lighthearted concept and intended audience – 18-34 couples on a date – are infused right into its title!

Another way to seduce your audience is through historical context focusing upon a person or a significant event, ideally with symbolic subtext. The stunning adaptation of Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* intrigues the audience with its dramatic, richly poetic title. The lead character, Scout, is told “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but...sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” The title also refers to the “mockery” of Southern justice in that era.

So when it’s time for you to name your baby, remember: Give your screenplay a title that will speak to its target audience. Find a funny or intriguing hook. Suggest the appropriate tone, context or location of your movie. If your script is a true story, invoke that historical event or famous person in your title.

Make sure the feeling your title evokes matches the genre of your movie, and most importantly, imagine what title would appeal most to your hypothetical audience member. If you’re trying to reach male tweens, ask yourself: “If I were 11 years old, would I leave my hot new Xbox game for a movie with this title?” And always analyze the competition. “Is my movie title more irresistible than the one playing in the theater next door?”

The title of your screenplay is critical, so give it serious thought. Run various options by friends and strangers to get their ideas and impressions. Not only will a great title capture your eventual audience, but first and foremost, it will capture the interest of a “suit” like me who’s looking to discover the next big hit “coming to a theater near you!”

Make sure the feeling your title evokes matches the genre of your movie, and most importantly, imagine what title would appeal most to your hypothetical audience.

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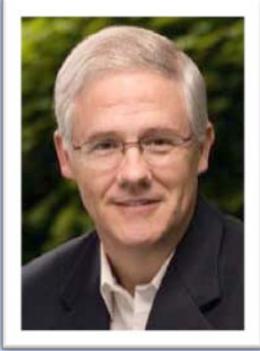
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Writing the Fantasy Film: *Alice in Wonderland*

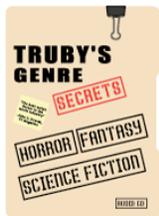
by John Truby

(Please note that the following article contains spoilers.)



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, just visit www.truby.com

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Alice in Wonderland is one of the greatest stories of all time, with arguably the best story world ever invented. It is also notoriously difficult to turn into a film. And the reasons all have to do with the script. The most recent version, written by Linda Woolverton, is the latest disappointment, and a close look at the choices she made are very instructive to those of us who love the craft of screenwriting.

Alice in Wonderland is a classic fantasy story, and in many ways it set the form. A little girl, living in a highly organized, mundane world, travels to an upside-down fantasy world of illogic and returns to the real world freer and a little more grown up as a result. The overall structure of the original story is very tight. The problem comes in the middle, because the middle is structured according to the myth form, not fantasy.

Alice is on a journey in Wonderland, which means that the story is highly episodic. Each scene is a new encounter with strange new characters. While these individual scenes are invariably fun and extremely creative, they do not build. This is the great challenge for any writer using what I call the "journey plot" (see [The Anatomy of Story](#)). It has stumped writers from Cervantes (*Don Quixote*) to Dickens (*Oliver Twist*) to Twain (*Huckleberry Finn*). The main reason the episodic element doesn't hurt the original *Alice in Wonderland* is that the book is so short. But that won't work for a feature-length film.

If we look at what Woolverton did in adapting the original story, we can see that almost all her choices were designed to overcome this episodic quality. Though effective at this, they also represent paint-by-number storytelling that gets increasingly boring as the story goes on.

It's 10 years later. The new Alice is a young woman trapped in the same stifling world and facing the prospect of a stultifying marriage to a rich fool. The trip to the fantasy world is supposed to force the heroine to confront her personal weakness. But notice in this set-up, the craziness of Wonderland won't force Alice to change because she's a rebel from the beginning. The single greatest feature of the original is that the fantasy world is based on illogic. So it attacks the very way that logical Alice and the audience think – the way we construct the world. Because this new Alice is never shown to be part of the "normal" worldview, fantastical Wonderland is just a series of strange landscapes.

To focus the story, Woolverton suggests the ending by showing a scroll in which Alice kills the Jabberwocky in the final battle. This sets up the vortex of the story that is supposed to sequence events at increasing speed. Now Alice's journey has an endpoint, so each stop is not a stand-alone moment, but a step on the path to her final destiny where she will save the kingdom.

But by turning Alice into an action hero, Woolverton has made a pact with the story devil. Action stories typically have even less plot than myth stories, not just because big action set pieces stop plot, but also because the audience knows that nothing big is going to happen until the final showdown. And in this film nothing does. Woolverton is still stuck with the journey plot, which makes it extremely difficult to add plot through reveals. Without surprises, the plot must die.

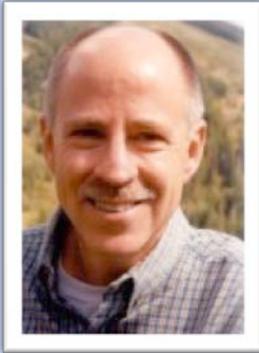
The other major technique Woolverton adds to overcome the episodic quality of the original story is to bring some of the major characters along for the ride. So, for example, instead of leaving the Mad Hatter after the tea party, he comes along as an important ally to help Alice kill the Jabberwocky and defeat the Red Queen.

Bringing characters along on the journey and having a single ongoing opponent is always a good idea when you're writing a myth story. It allows the audience to care about the characters more intensely and increases the power of the opposition. But the value of these two techniques is largely removed when the heroine's goal is so predictable and mundane as fighting a dragon in a big final battle.

Many people have expressed disappointment with director Tim Burton for this visually stunning but boring film. But visuals have always been what Burton is good at, not story. I find it fascinating to compare how a visual artist like Burton (*Batman* and *Batman Returns*) and master screenwriter-storytellers like Christopher Nolan, Jonathan Nolan and David Goyer (*Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*) handled the same story material. Frankly, there is no comparison, and it's one more proof that movies aren't a "visual" medium, they are a "story" medium.

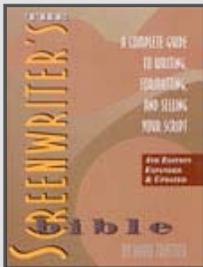
Ironically, screenwriter Woolverton's efforts to unify and build the story stripped this film of the great strengths of the original story, which are the breathtakingly original characters and scenes. And Burton's vaunted ability to create strong visual worlds totally misfired when he failed to base his visuals on the defining principle of the *Alice in Wonderland* story world, which is the brilliant illogic and nonsense that only a professor of logic could create.

One day a screenwriter may solve the riddle of making a great *Alice in Wonderland* film. That will be a great accomplishment that I would love to see.



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 Fourth Edition



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Buy Dave Trottier's classic reference guide at [The Writers Store](http://TheWritersStore.com).

Daydreams and Nightmares

by Dave Trottier

READER'S 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. First, create a transitional device to slip us into the daydream. In the *Casablanca* flashback, we move toward the cigarette smoke and DISSOLVE to Paris. But a transition is also easily signaled with a word of dialogue or an action. For example:

INT. HALLWAY – DAY

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

MARY'S DAYDREAM – AFRICAN JUNGLE

Describe the daydream. Then return to reality with this:

BACK TO SCENE

Or perhaps this:

BACK TO HALLWAY

Here is an alternative method:

INT. AFRICAN JUNGLE – DAY – MARY'S DAYDREAM

And then after the scene ends:

END OF DAYDREAM

INT. HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

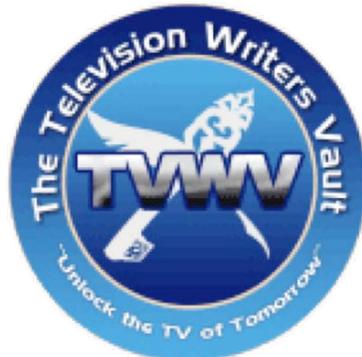
Or, instead of the two headings above, simply write:

INT. HALLWAY – PRESENT DAY

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

Handle dreams, visions, mirages, flashbacks and nightmares in the same or similar ways. And keep writing!

The Television Writers Vault

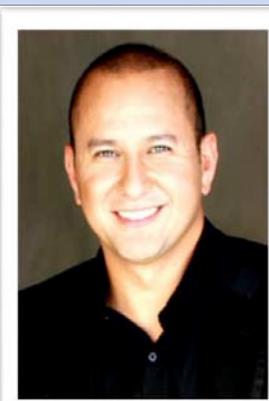


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Marvin V. Acuna executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Tom Hanks, and Colin Hanks) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue). He also produced *Touched* (Jenna Elfman) and *How Did It Feel* (Blair Underwood). To receive a copy of 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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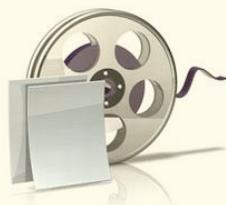
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The "If Only" Trap

by Marvin V. Acuna

If only I had an agent; if only I had a manager; if only I had a relative in the business; if only I were younger; if only I lived in L.A.; if only I had more time; if only I didn't work a full time job; if only... (FILL IN THE BLANK)

While all these statements undoubtedly feel very true for the screenwriter uttering them, "if only" is a trap. A mental trap!

"If only" disease is common in every industry, but it's rampant in the business of show. Typically, screenwriters are not even aware that their minds are invested in this vicious belief system. But unfortunately, once the screenwriter afflicted with this disease has selected a "rock solid" excuse, they live with it. They rely on it to explain to themselves and others why they are not moving forward or getting any closer to realizing their dream. It serves to insulate the screenwriter from addressing the real problems. So any time they can't figure out a solution to the challenges they encounter, they just pull out the old reliable "if only..."

The reason I listed "If only I had an agent" first is because it is the most insidious "if only" and the most difficult to conquer. No matter how many times you read this...no matter how often you hear successful screenwriters like Michael Martin (*Brooklyn's Finest*) tell you how they made it without an agent...you may still not believe it, but the fact remains:

AN AGENT IS NOT THE ANSWER.

"How do I get an agent?" is arguably the No. 1 question I hear at seminars, classes and conferences.

I have sat on panels labeled everything from "Filmmaking 4.0" to "Diversity in Entertainment" and, without fail, someone always raises their hand and asks, "How do I get an agent?"

In many ways, this is probably why I'm so motivated to educate and prepare budding screenwriters with a practical foundation of entertainment-business acumen. There are so many incredible stories from successful screenwriters who are in this business because they chose not to self-sabotage their dreams!

Believe me, although it's wonderful to have an agent as part of your team, agents do not define your opportunities nor dictate your success. I strongly encourage you to visit my website, www.thebusinessofshowinstitute.com and listen to the discussions I have had with screenwriters over the past year. You're sure to become inspired.

Don't find yourself sitting on a stoop at a ripe old age telling your grandkids about what might have been, "if only..."

Want **screenwriting advice** from the insider who consulted on *The Wrestler*, *Hancock* and *Beowulf*?

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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

Johnson Production Group

[code: f7ednpxjyf]

We are looking for completed feature-length disaster scripts. As long as the potential film would best be described as a disaster movie, then please submit.

Our credits include numerous MOWs including *A Valentine Carol*, which was sourced through InkTip.

Budget is 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.

Crossroads Production & Management

[code: 5b8gn7zq7c]

We are looking for completed feature-length faith-based scripts (i.e. scripts in the vein of *Fireproof*).

Our credits include Sidney Lumet's *Find Me Guilty* (Vin Diesel).

Budget won't exceed \$5M. WGA or non-WGA writers may submit.

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

Cypress Point Productions

[code: a9kq4yfc5v]

We are looking for completed drama, dramedy or romantic comedy MOW scripts that are family friendly and feature a lead character between the ages of 17 and 29, preferably female. We are not open to material with child leads. When submitting, please list any networks to which the script has already been shopped in the personal message space.

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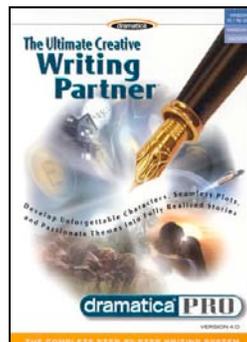
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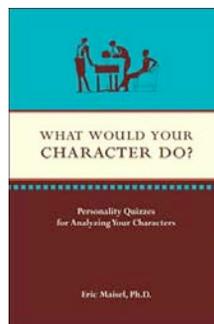


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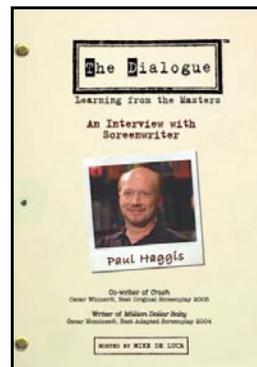
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