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## Letter from the Editor

Spring is in the air! It's a time of renewal and new possibility. We hope you're creating new possibilities for yourself by developing ideas for future projects and getting your existing work "out there." The PAGE Awards is a screenwriting competition designed to give winning writers more than a pat on the back and some prizes – we're here to help scribes connect with reps and the buyers of film and TV material.

It's not too late to [enter the 2012 contest!](#) This year's Late Entry Deadline is Monday, April 2, 2012. If you've already entered your best stuff, we wish you good luck in competition. But if you haven't, get that script in soon! And for game-changing notes, like a development exec on demand, add Judge's Feedback to your entry. It's 4+ pages of industry know-how applied directly to the specific needs of your script.

Speaking of industry know-how, **LOGLINE** is always a fine source of actionable intelligence on the art and craft of writing for Hollywood. This Spring 2012 issue focuses on the small screen. However, we start with the personal experience of 2011 Grand Prize winner Pat White, who talks about writing both the fiction and screenplay versions of her story. The secret ingredients of a great TV sitcom are identified by PAGE Awards Judge Don Spencer. Next, the grand master of genre, John Truby, continues his study of today's top TV dramas and the specific challenges this form presents for writers.

As always, the fabulous Dr. Format Dave Trottier shares his knowledge of proper technique. This issue, the topic is how to format sitcom dialogue. Our resident producer, Marvin V. Acuna, issues an entreaty to banish your self-doubt and carry on. Wrapping things up are three specific requests for material from production companies, thanks to our friends over at InkTip.

Happy reading,



## Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ 2009 Gold Prize winner Rob Sudduth is now a staff writer on the new ABC series *GCB*. Rob is represented by MetaMorphic Management and UTA.
- ◇ 2010 Bronze Prize winners Andy Sipes and Matt Mariska sold their comedy series *Bullseye* to Comedy Central. They are repped by The Gersh Agency and Anvil Entertainment.
- ◇ The 2010 Bronze Prize-winning thriller *Bad Karma*, by Steve Allrich, is now in post-production. The movie was filmed in Australia with stars Ray Liotta and Dominic Purcell. In addition, Steve's new feature *The Timber* is currently filming in Romania, starring James Ransone. He is repped by PAGE Judge Eric Williams of Zero Gravity Management.
- ◇ The 2008 Silver Prize-winning feature *Somniphobia*, by Michael Brody and Jessica Brody, is now in pre-production with Zahra Pictures.
- ◇ 2011 PAGE Award winner Christian Ryden signed with Josh Goldenberg of Kaplan/Perrone and he is developing his PAGE Award-winning script with a major production company. Chris writes: "I can't thank you enough for all your hard work, the championing of my script and the efforts of everybody at PAGE to get it out there! The validation of placing in such a prestigious contest was hard to describe."

The [2012 PAGE Awards](#) Late Entry Deadline is April 2, 2012!

## Writing the Novel vs. Writing the Screenplay

by Pat White

Since I come to screenwriting from a fiction background, I thought I'd share a few of the challenges and benefits of writing both the screenplay and novel versions of a story, in case you want to give it a try. It's always nice to know how far the fall is before you jump. But first, a little background...

Pat White won the 2011 PAGE Grand Prize for her teen thriller *Escape*. A former journalist, Pat is an award-winning, published novelist with 15 books to her credit. She lives in a Seattle suburb with her husband, bossy Border Collie, and spoiled cats. Pat is currently President Emeritus of the [Northwest Screenwriters Guild](#).

I've been a movie lover since I was a kid, yet somehow ended up writing novels. I love books, sure, but not like I love movies. You know what I'm talkin' about.

Shortly after moving to Seattle, I discovered the Northwest Screenwriters Guild (NWSG) and was inspired to write a feature-length screenplay. The question was, should I write an original script or

adapt one of my books? I opted to start with an original idea, mostly to get a handle on structure and the different style of storytelling.

Man, is it different than writing a novel! Sure, novelists preach "show, don't tell," but you really live it when you write a screenplay. Your characters can't share their thoughts in internal dialogue, and the bar for "on-the-nose" dialogue is much higher in a script.

After writing 10 books without an outline, structure was a new skill for me. Up to that point I'd been what they call a "pantser" – in other words, I wrote by the seat of my pants with no plan, roadmap, or even a definite idea of how to get to my happily-ever-after ending. I always just trusted that I'd get there somehow.

Not a good strategy when writing a 100-page script. Luckily, one of our NWSG guests was Blake Snyder, who taught me the benefit of outlining with his 15-beat structure. (If you're not familiar with the late, great Blake Snyder and his method, Google *Save the Cat!*)

For my second script, I adapted *Got a Hold on You* (Dorchester, 2003), the book I wrote. You'd think that would be easier, right? Not so much. It's torture deciding what should and shouldn't make it into the script. "Wait, I can't cut THAT scene! Not my baby!" Yeah, you've probably been there, done that, too.

So I shelved the ego and pretty much started from scratch. I pulled way back and relied on the bigger-picture elements to see me through: theme, plot points, character goals, motivations and conflicts. That second script earned me a few quarterfinalist spots in various contests, so I was excited.

For my third script, I decided to try something completely different – write the screenplay and the novel simultaneously. (This is about the time I developed a taste for whiskey.) That story is called *Escape* and the script won the 2011 PAGE Grand Prize.

In a nutshell, here is the process I used to develop *Escape*. I wrote the first 100 pages of the book and sent them to my agent for feedback. Then I wrote the script and sent it to a professional reader for coverage. Once the book and script were finished, I entered the script into various contests. I then signed with a new literary manager (thanks to the PAGE win!), who gave me notes on the script. My agent came back with notes on the book and... well, that's when it got downright confusing!

You see, my manager would give me a note and I'd think, "I'm sure I did that, didn't I?" After scouring through the script, I'd realize it was in the book. She also gave me fantastic suggestions to make characters richer and scenes better. Of course, then I would have to consider making those same changes to the 350-page book. But one little change has a ripple effect throughout the rest of the story.

I decided it was best to focus on one project at a time. That is, complete script revisions and send it back to my manager before picking up the book for yet another read.

I also had to accept the fact that the book and script were never going to be identical. That was a tough one for me. But even with the differences between the book and script, you still get to the same place. It's like taking the freeway versus the scenic route but still getting to Disneyland in the end. (Is there a scenic route to Disneyland?)

One advantage to having written the book is that I know my characters better than if I'd just written the script. In a novel, I dig excruciatingly deep to give the reader access to a character's most personal thoughts, dreams and fears. Writing fiction helps me nail a character's goal, motivation and conflict. I can peel away the layers of his personality, which makes him richer and more three-dimensional.

If you're primarily a screenwriter, you have to decide if you have time to write a full-length novel, along with your other projects. It could take up to six months, or longer, to write the book. However, if you write the script first, you can use it as a detailed outline for the novel. This advice was given to me by screenwriter/novelist [Royce Buckingham](#).

To write a full-length book, you need to learn how to write tons of internal narrative and elaborate description. You also now have the freedom (and perhaps the obligation) to venture off on tangents that enhance your story.

Do you have the time and patience? Are you passionate about writing fiction? You gotta love writing novels in order to produce a good one, because at the end of the day whatever you're feeling inside somehow ends up on the page. In other words, it's probably not a good idea to take a crack at writing a novel because you want to create your own source material... unless you truly enjoy writing novels.

But if you decide to write the novel version of your story and ultimately get an offer on the book, it certainly lends credibility to your script. A producer once said to me, "Hollywood likes it if someone else (in publishing) says 'yes' first." If the book is successful, that will boost your chances of optioning your script – and maybe even seeing it on the big screen. And in the end, that's what we're all aiming for, right?

## “My Life Would Make a Great Sitcom!”

and other common misconceptions...

by Donald Mark Spencer

How many times have you heard it? You're at a family gathering and drunk Aunt Edna or creepy cousin Mikey just can't wait to corner you and tell you:

“My life would make a great sitcom!”

Don Spencer is a produced playwright, TV writer, and newspaper and magazine columnist. In addition to working on a variety of TV series at NBC, CBS and UPN, he has also overseen the development of numerous film and television projects.

It's bad enough that everyone today thinks their lives would make a great reality show. But as the TV sitcom is making a comeback, writers will have to endure this conversation more than ever.

The reason most people think their lives would make a great sitcom is because at one time or another, they've felt that sense of theatricality when a conversation or situation reminds them of something on

TV. But even if funny comments and comical moments happen with regularity in their daily lives, it's rarely enough to sustain a good TV series. Personal experience might serve as a launching pad for a story, but the question is, will it run seven years on NBC?

“But everybody thinks I'm so funny!”

Just because we entertain our friends and get yuks at parties doesn't mean that humor will translate to a TV series. As a matter of fact, one very common misconception is that what agents and execs look for in a successful pilot are good jokes. I've read hundreds of sitcom pilots, written a few, and worked on several in production, and I can tell you one thing is certain: jokes are expendable. Many good jokes get written, get tried out on stage, and get thrown out.

Funny is not the goal of a good sitcom pilot. **Identification** is. What is this show about, and can I imagine a hundred different iterations of this same situation?

Let's look at one of the more successful new sitcoms, ABC's *Last Man Standing* with Tim Allen. It's about a father of three living in a world dominated by women (wife, three daughters, and many other women in his life). This is Allen's second successful family comedy after ABC's *Home Improvement*. Why are family shows such a favorite? Because, well, most of us who didn't grow up in an orphanage have a family of our own. So although the specific dynamics vary, we can **identify** with the characters and understand their relationships.

We're not all architects in New York with a bunch of boozy friends (*How I Met Your Mother*), and we're not all down-and-out waitresses at a late-night diner (*Two Broke Girls*). Nor are we all recovering from a bad breakup and living with three quirky guys (*New Girl*). But, at one time or another, we probably felt like we were in a similar situation or knew someone else who was.

Audiences like to relate to the confused, struggling

characters who are trying to cope with these comedic situations. We root for Ted Mosby and his single friends to find a love that lasts. We feel for successful Minnesota news producer Mary Richards, who just wants to be a wife and mother. We love Jess for her spunk as she tries to figure her life out, supported by three male roommates.

*Seinfeld* is certainly one of TV's most enduring series and, supposedly, that show was about “nothing.” Ha! You believe that? Watching any episode, it takes little analysis to realize there are usually four concurrent stories going on (one for each of the main characters) and they all wrap up (and often dovetail) in a hilarious climatic moment.

Was the show successful because Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld are fun at parties? No. The show worked so well because the cast and writers understood the truth of their **characters** and knew exactly what those characters would do in any situation. And Larry David carried this successful formula into his next series, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which has now run for as many years as *Seinfeld*.

“But Mom always tells me I lead such an exciting life!”

I will make you this promise: if you were to follow comedians-turned-sitcom-stars around for even four hours, you'd be so bored you'd never want to know anything else about them.

So why did their TV series succeed? Because each of these comedians portrayed an easily **identifiable character** that sparked with audiences. In many cases, they spent years developing their characters onstage while performing in clubs all around the country.

And as much as audiences want to watch characters they like, they **love** to watch those characters get caught up in fun relationships. *Three's Company* was about the relationship between a guy and two girls living together as roommates, which was cutting edge for its time (today, see *New Girl*). On *Mad About You*, Paul and Jamie were a married couple with a wonderful dynamic. They weren't Rob and Laura on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, nor were they Lucy and Ricky on *I Love Lucy*. Each couple was unique.

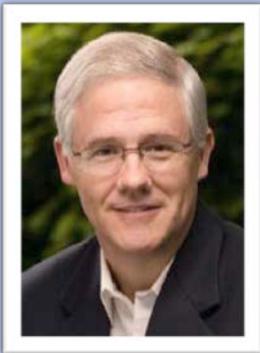
We love watching couples on sitcoms. Why? Because we all want to be part of a couple. We all want to have a successful... say it with me... **relationship**.

*Friends* lasted 10 seasons on the strength of the six friends' loving relationships, which changed over the years but endured. We were hooked in by Ross and Rachel's “will-they-or-won't-they” and moved when Chandler finally decided to man up and fulfill Monica's dream of getting married and starting a family. Didn't see that coming watching the pilot, did you? But the possibility was there because of the... **relationships**!

You want to create a great sitcom? Whether based on someone's life or pure fiction, you can't go wrong writing about interesting, identifiable characters in fun, well-defined relationships. As a matter of fact, without that, you really can't go right.

### Story in Television: Part 2

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](http://www.truby.com) today.

In our last issue, John explained why television has surpassed film as a writer's medium. Today he takes a look at two top shows and the writing challenges their creators face.

The ability to solve story problems quickly, and with originality, is the single most important quality of a professional television writer. To master story as it is practiced in television, and to have the best chance of breaking into this medium, study the top TV dramas and tease out the story problems the shows' writers solve day in and day out.

With *Mad Men* taking the year off, *The Good Wife* is the best-written show on television. This accomplishment is remarkable given that it is a network show, which typically means more interference from executives and the need to please a broader audience base. A legal drama, *The Good Wife* uses the primary story strategy found in most American dramas today: combine the crowd-pleasing simplicity of the stand-alone with the critic-pleasing complexity of the serial. Alicia Florrick, the lead character, tries (and usually wins) a case each week. But she must also navigate the political and personal currents that come with being in a cutthroat law firm and having a husband who cheated on her.



*The Good Wife* is about situational ethics and whether a good person can balance conflicting moral challenges and remain clean in the real world. The story challenge for the writers then is two-fold: come up with an ingenious way Alicia can win the weekly legal case for her firm, while also slowly tightening the vice of her moral jeopardy as the season progresses. Over the first two seasons, the writers have met these challenges with flying colors, primarily by weaving multiple conflicts from opponents both within and outside the firm. But it's the emphasis on moral conundrums that really sets the storytelling of this show apart.

AMC's *The Killing* is a Crime-Detective story, which is the most popular genre, not only in American television but throughout the world. When breaking down the story beats in a particular show, it is always a good idea to start with the show's genre. The unique story beats of a particular show are usually an outgrowth of the inner workings and inherent restrictions of its genre.

*The Killing* is based on the Danish series *Forbrydelsen*. The tagline for its first season was, "Who killed Rosie Larsen?" This, and the show's setting in the gray and rainy Northwest, recalls one-season wonder *Twin Peaks* and "Who shot Laura Palmer?"

The tagline tells you the primary desire line of the show (what the heroes want). Desire is one of the three or four most important story elements of a show. In about 99% of crime stories, "Who killed X?" is the desire in a particular episode. In *The Killing* (and in *Twin Peaks*), this is the desire of the entire season. In other words, *The Killing* is a serial, not a stand-alone crime show, and that makes all the difference.

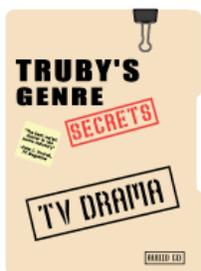
This means the writers must create, and service, a huge web of characters, many of whom had the motive and opportunity to kill Rosie. Since the killer will not be caught at the end of each episode, the show will have a slower pace and deprives the audience of a satisfying solution at the end of each hour. This episode-ending solution is the primary draw of the stand-alone show. So the writers have a huge story challenge: how do we work through the vast array of suspects in a way that both gives some shape to each episode while also sequencing us to the real killer at the end of the season?

Some of the solutions the writers use include cross-cutting among many storylines (not just the main investigation line), increasing the number of false clues/red herrings, and focusing suspicion on a new wrong suspect every one or two episodes. The failure of the writers to definitively name the killer at the end of the first season raised howls of protest. Of all the explanations I've heard for this "mistake," the one that makes the most sense to me has to do with the biggest story flaw of a serial detective show whose desire line extends over the entire season. Once you tell the audience who killed the lone victim, what makes them tune in at the beginning of season 2? As a matter of fact, revealing "who done it" in season 1 is precisely what killed *Twin Peaks*.

John Truby's

"TV Drama Course"

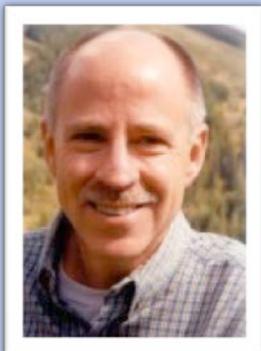
Audio CD



This course is designed to make you a professional TV writer able to work on the staff of any show. It teaches you how to break down a show and write a great spec. You also learn the different story beats for the various genres of one-hour TV, how to include Emmy-caliber elements in your story, how to write on staff, when to break the "rules," and more.

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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](http://www.keepwriting.com)

## How to Format Sitcom Dialogue

by Dave Trottier

### READER'S QUESTION:

I want to write an episode for a situation comedy. Is the formatting for dialogue the same as in feature-length scripts?

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

It depends. Dialogue for one-hour drama shows and half-hour comedy/drama shows filmed with one camera is formatted like a feature with the entire dialogue block single-spaced. But dialogue for standard multi-camera sitcoms is double-spaced and different in other ways.

A comparison will be helpful. What follows is how a speech would be written in standard spec screenplay format.

```

GROUCHO
The other day I shot an elephant
in my pajamas.
    (flicking his cigar)
How the elephant got in my pajamas
I don't know.
```

What follows is the same speech written for a situation comedy.

```

GROUCHO

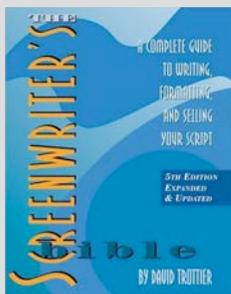
The other day I shot an elephant
in my pajamas. (FLICKING HIS
CIGAR.) How the elephant got
in my pajamas I don't know.
```

As you can see, there is a big difference between the two examples.

One reason the TV sitcom style emphasizes dialogue is that a sitcom is actually a two-act stage play shot for TV. In a situation comedy, the emphasis is usually on dialogue, not on action. There are often only one or two sets for a sitcom series.

If you wish to write for a specific sitcom, you will first want to see how scripts for that show are formatted. There are slight differences from series to series.

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## The Television Writers Vault

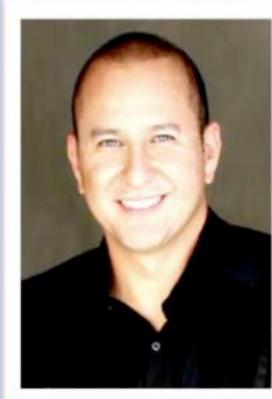


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Marvin V. Acuna was the co-creator and executive producer of *Platinum Hit*, the elimination competition series for Bravo that showcased undiscovered singers and songwriters as they battled through songwriting challenges. He also executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Colin Hanks) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

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## Never Give Up!

by Marvin V. Acuna

Harriet Beecher Stowe once said:

**"Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn."**

For many aspiring writers the search for a representative to sign them and market their material or to align themselves with an established producer who will bring their words to life can be a daunting and frustrating task. It can make you scream!

Submitting your material blindly and never hearing back a response is tough, but to submit material that has been requested and then **never** hear back, ugh. Shoot me now.

That voice in your head turns on you. Doubt creeps in. Am I good? Am I wasting my time? Should I get a real job? Self-preservation of the ego kicks into overdrive. Then the big one: What have I done with my life?

Be assured you are not alone. You may feel alone, but you are most definitely not. First, everyone in the business has their own challenge and while it may feel different from yours, it isn't. The agent who didn't make partner, the producer whose last movie tanked, the actor who no longer opens a film, the writer who wants to direct, the TV writer who wants to be in film...the list is endless. This is the business of **next**.

Next time you feel this way, remember the following: You are in control of only one outcome – completing a final written product. The rest is not in your hands. It's just not. We trick ourselves into believing that if we worry enough and get angry enough we will somehow impact the outcome. It won't.

Introduce your material and follow-up about a month later if you don't hear a response. Follow-up a month after that and so on...

When do you stop following up? Depends on you...

Keep in mind that you are not the only screenwriter that submitted material. The professionals I personally know have so much material presented to them from varying sources that much gets lost in the shuffle.

Submit and move on to the next. In fact, your mantra should always be **next**, moving on!

Keep in mind that you may never hear from the recipient of your material ever again. The reasons vary so greatly that you will never know why.

Submit, follow up, submit, and follow up. (**NOTE: If you submit via email, it may be useful to attach your screenplay again to make it easily accessible to the third party.**)

Sometimes my office receives angry calls or emails because a writer is frustrated that we have not responded to their material. That immediately gets our response. My assistant scans our submissions and tosses their screenplay away.

Be original in your follow-ups. Maybe it's not an email, but it's a thank you card for the opportunity to submit. Maybe it's an article you read about them, their movie or their client that you include in a note. Maybe you attend a conference where they are speaking. You get it... the possibilities are endless.

Be gracious, patient and most of all original when you follow up... you are a writer after all.

Submit, follow up, submit and follow up. Next, moving on!

But remember: never, **ever** give up!



## Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from [InkTip.com](http://InkTip.com)

### 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](mailto: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

### OCI

[code: an2kzd0kdq]

We are looking for completed feature-length contemporary, family-friendly Christmas movies that will be suitable for cable TV. No elves, red-nosed reindeer or other fantasy material, please. We need stories with families and/or loveable pets set during Christmas time.

Budget will not exceed \$2 million. WGA and non-WGA okay.

Our credits include *The Legends of Nethiah*.

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

### Company Name Withheld

[code: 1cnr1zkqdm]

We're looking for completed feature-length horror scripts (hauntings/ghost stories only) inspired by true stories or true events, i.e. hauntings/ghost stories from around the world.

Budget has yet to be determined. WGA and non-WGA okay.

Our credits include *Without Men*.

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

### Sarke

[code: jkv8nucstd]

We are looking for completed feature-length scripts that feature only two main cast members and few (if any) extras. We prefer horror or thriller submissions, but we are open to any genre as long as there are no more than two main characters in the story.

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

Our credits include *247 °F*, by a writer we found through InkTip.

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

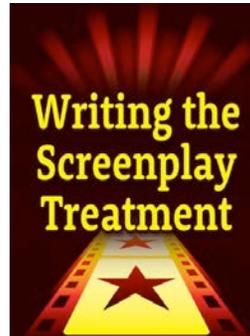
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### WRITING THE SCREENPLAY TREATMENT

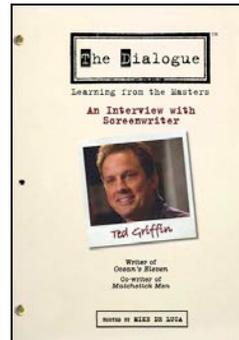


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### THE DIALOGUE: TED GRIFFIN



An enlightening interview ranges from the film and TV writer's early work on *Ravenous* and *Best Laid Plans* to the unexpected pitfalls of trying to direct his first film, *Rumor Has It...*

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