

# LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

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## Letter from the Editor

Happy New Year! We hope that one of your resolutions is to re-dedicate yourself to your craft and make 2015 the year you take the next step as a screenwriter. The [2015 PAGE Awards](#) competition is here to help you do that. Entries are now being accepted and the earlier you get yours in, the more you'll save on your entry fee. Enter on or before our Early Entry Deadline on January 15<sup>th</sup> and you can submit your script for just \$39!

We begin our eighth volume of the *LOGLINE* eZine with an issue that wraps up loose ends from last time and offers compelling new ideas. 2009 Gold Prize winner Suki Kaiser concludes her account of her personal journey in Hollywood thus far. PAGE Judge Tony Zequeira caps off his two-parter with five principles writers should employ in order to succeed.

Our resident genre expert John Truby explains the vortex technique and how it's used in the Nolan brothers' *Interstellar*. Dave Trottier, author of [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), assesses the amount of formatting a spec should include. Producer Marvin V. Acuna offers tips for your all-important pitch meeting with industry execs. To tie a bow on the issue, we have three leads on what producers are currently looking for, courtesy of InkTip.com!

Happy reading,



## Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ 2008 Gold Prize winner Lee Arcuri and 2012 Gold Prize winner Graham Norris have both been hired as staff writers on the new CW series *iZombie*. Lee is represented by Kaplan Stahler Agency and Graham by UTA. Both are represented by PAGE Judge Joe Riley of Velocity Entertainment.
- ◇ 2014 PAGE Award winner Samuel Bartlett has optioned his Gold Prize-winning thriller *Damage Control* to producer Nate Adams of Picture Lab Entertainment. Nate discovered Samuel's script while judging the Final Round of the PAGE Awards competition.
- ◇ 2014 PAGE Award winner Robert Brody has signed with PAGE Judge Tony Zequeira. His Gold Prize-winning action script *Red Sky* is now being read and considered by some of the top producers and directors in Hollywood.
- ◇ The new sci-fi horror movie *The Drift*, by 2011 Silver Prize winner Sue Morris, made its world premiere in the U.K. on Saturday, December 6th. The movie is now available on [Vimeo on demand](#). As a community project made by volunteers, all proceeds go to charity.
- ◇ 2010 Bronze Prize winner Erin Donovan wrote "The Whites of His Eyes," an episode of the CBS series *The Mentalist* scheduled to air January 21<sup>st</sup>. Erin tells us that she has now joined the Writer's Guild. "And thanks to one of your lovely judges who has stayed in touch with me since the PAGE Awards, I finally landed an agent (Sean Barclay at Gersh). This was a direct result of your wonderful screenplay competition, so I have to thank you guys from the bottom of my heart. Then, the cherry on top was that I also got a deal at WB Horizon for a spec TV pilot I wrote. They're taking it out to networks, so I will let you know if that actually gets made. But to have gotten this far with it is an absolute dream come true."

**2015 PAGE Awards Early Entry Discount Deadline: January 15<sup>th</sup>**

## “Survivor: Hollywood” (Episode 2)

by Suki Kaiser

*In our last issue*, Suki wrote about how she had become so deeply frustrated in her career (or lack of one) that she convinced her husband and two kids to sell

Suki Kaiser won a 2009 Gold Prize for her Action/Adventure script *Deepflight*. After crossing the Pacific on a two-year odyssey, she and her family have settled on a small island in Canada, where Suki plans to develop her own projects rather than waiting for pigs to grow wings. Her [blog](#) chronicles her ongoing adventures.

*everything, buy a boat, and sail 18,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean. A few months ago she returned and there was an email waiting for her, offering her a paid screenwriting gig from a major studio. Suki writes:*

I have had that long-form contract from the studio for **five** months now... And I'm still waiting to be commenced.

For those of you who know what that means, well, you get where I'm at (still broke) and for those of you who don't know...Um, it's a little like St. Peter saying you're "good to go" on up to Heaven but then he doesn't actually let you through those pearly gates. You're just stuck outside with all the other non-union writers, clutching a pile of story notes in your hand.

(In writer-heaven, you're no longer broke or anonymous and all the fancy agents and producers are thrilled to meet about every one of your spec scripts.)

The star of the project I had been hired to rewrite and the producers have changed a few times since bringing me on, and for awhile it looked like my dream was just going to fizzle and die before my eyes.

But while I was waiting for them to commence me, I just wrote the darn thing. Why not? I like writing.

When they finally told me the project was gonna go cold, I said with absolute conviction, "Oh, that's too bad, 'cause I wrote you something great."

And guess what happened? They were curious and kind of amazed, frankly, that someone would write a whole script without being paid.

I said, "yeah, well, I've been doing that forever."

When they wanted to see my draft, I said, "Sure, but you gotta pay me first."

The good news is that the project is alive again and I seem to be clinging to it with my bloodied, bony claws. I am assured weekly that things are "moving forward" – apparently at the speed of a glacier – and they still want me to write it.

I may not be a success story (yet), but I'm no quitter, either. I'm a badass. That's what being a reject for years does for you. You can take it on the chin, get flattened to the mat and bounce back up like one of those blow-up, knock-down clowns that kids love to punch in the face.



Suki and her family drop anchor in Tahiti.

You have ONE thing you can always do, and no one can take it away...

WRITE.

Write better, write more, write all the time, or whenever you can (I have to get up at four in the morning to get my hours in), write when you don't believe in yourself, when you're broke, when you feel too old, too busy, too tired, too frustrated.

Do it no matter how much stuff sucks or how bad it hurts or how much it feels pointless some days.

Being a screenwriter may be for dreamers but the reality is...it's also super-freakin' hard, man. It is a crushingly difficult profession that even the most Type A, driven, focused, organized people in the world would struggle to succeed in.

Go ahead and rock your weird sweater and your coffee-stained cargo pants if you must, but remember to pick your sorry self up off the floor on those bad days, when you get a "pass" from a studio reader or a "no thanks" from an agent.

Put on your face paint, grab your war rattle and be ready for the long haul, baby.

And have fun! Rebellious, break-the-mold fun, because while there's no guarantee you or I will become a highly paid, successful screenwriter, one of the perks of having the heart to even **da**re to pursue this ridiculous dream is that you get to wear that sucker like a badge.

You are the hero of your own movie. Make your life peculiar and marvelous, full of love, heartache, plot twists, reversals, comedy and adventure – so you can tell a story like nobody's business.

After all, you're a writer.

You didn't think it would be **easy**, did you?

## Things Film School Never Taught Me: Part 2

by Tony Zequeira

To pick up where we left off in [my last column](#), here are a few more principles that you need to understand in order to succeed in this business:

Tony Zequeira was an agent and manager at Larchmont Literary Agency and Evolution Management. He now runs his own production company and management firm, Super Vision Entertainment. Tony is set to produce a studio feature shooting in China this year. He studied film at Florida State University.

### UNDERSTAND WHAT SELLS

A lot of people approach me with pitches, treatments or books that they have the rights to and ask for my help in selling the concept as a movie.

The only people who get away with this are those who bring added value along with the property (i.e. an established screenwriter, a famous actor or

respected producer). But even for them, it all still comes down to producing 120 pages of screen time for the studio.

The currency of the movie business is the screenplay and, no matter how you slice it, a movie project without a script isn't a movie at all. A script is the blueprint for the film. Without the blueprint, all you've got is an idea.

These days, studios are no longer in the business of development. Those stories you read about ideas and pitches that sold to the studio for low- to mid-six figures are the exception and not the rule. And keep in mind that the news coverage can sometimes be a marketing ploy to bring attention to an otherwise foundering project. So when you **do** read about pitch selling, look closer. There is usually something else going on.

So keep your skepticism healthy. At the end of the day, the rules of the film business remain the same. And the cornerstone rule is that the script is the center of the universe.

### BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE GOT

If you truly think you've written the next *Silence of the Lambs*, then great — your manager, agent, or even you should be able to get anyone on the phone and you're off to the races. Great scripts do really come from anywhere, and the smart people in town know that.

If you don't have the next great script, then you need to adjust your expectations or move on and write the next thing. Good material is not entirely subjective. Hollywood can generally agree on what makes a good script. Armed with the right material, I can usually get anyone on the phone anytime, anywhere (including A-list companies). It's all about having something that doesn't waste their time and might be a viable piece of business. And even if they don't necessarily agree and they pass, if what you sent or pitched them is within the normal realm of possibility, the door should remain open for something else in the future. But the cardinal sin in this business is to BS people and waste their time. That's the quickest way to Siberia.

### KEEP AN OPEN MIND

The odds may be against you becoming the next Tarantino,

but that doesn't mean you can't have a great career.

Most writers fresh out of film school think that they will be writing *12 Years a Slave* within four to five years of graduating. I know everyone in my class thought they'd be the next Sergio Leone, Sam Peckinpah or Robert Rodriguez. They scoffed at something as menial or lowbrow as a raunchy comedy, direct-to-video movie or schlocky horror film. I actually know people, however, who have a 3,000-square-foot house in Sherman Oaks, two new cars and make \$200,000 a year off direct-to-DVD movies. They take trips to Europe each year.

You can make a fine living off writing the next sequel to *American Pie* or *Chucky*. Working in the business and success in the business are actually synonyms, and many of today's A-list filmmakers cut their teeth on B-list films. Look up your favorite writers or directors on IMDb. Chances are there was a B movie or two in their past. James Cameron actually got fired off a B movie, which caused him to dream about robot cyborgs from the future. That spawned a little indie called *The Terminator*.

### KNOW WHAT YOU ARE NOT GOOD AT

I can count on one hand the amount of successful filmmakers who are good at writing, directing, producing, editing and scoring their own works. When someone tells me they are an actor/producer/director/ blah blah blah, my eyes glaze over. Most people spend their entire lives trying to be good at just one of those things. It is even **more** important to know what you are not good at, so you can focus on what you are good at.

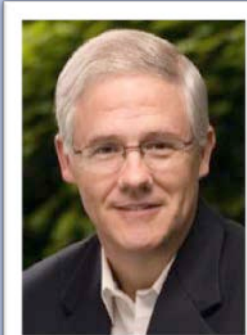
Great at concepts, but not writing? Find a writer to partner with. Great at action but not character? Partner with a good character writer. But don't try to do it all. In this process, you will also learn the art of collaboration — a super bonus for later.

### THERE'S NO CRYING IN THE FILM BUSINESS

In this business, "good enough" is really no good at all. When you go out for a job, your competition may very well be those established writers whom you grew up admiring, so always bring your A game. No one cares if this was just your first script, if you were going through a divorce or if your dog died. All people care about is the final product.

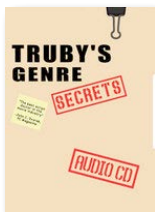
So forget about the excuses. It's tough for everyone. With every hurdle you let hold you back, someone else got over it and got the job done. Suck it up and learn that if they succeeded where you failed, then you deserved to lose the job to them. Learn from your mistakes and try again. Be better next time.

The quickest and best way to be successful in this business is to treat it like a business. Dreams are great. But you have to do the work. The most ironic part about great writing and filmmaking is that when it's done right, it actually looks easy. But don't be fooled. Untold amounts of years of hardship and hard work went into that "overnight" success.



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.

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## Writing the Science-Fiction Film: *Interstellar*

by John Truby

**Spoiler alert: this breakdown divulges key information about the plot of the film.**

In my opinion, setting up a **story vortex** is the single most important technique in popular screenwriting today (found in the [Anatomy of Story Master Class](#)). With Christopher and Jonathan Nolan's *Interstellar*, we see both the potential and the challenge of this plot technique. **Convergence** occurs when the writer crosscuts between two or more main characters and storylines, at progressively greater speeds, leading to a single point in space and time where everything is resolved at once.

Why is this vortex so important in film? Unlike serial television, film is a one-time event. So theoretically we can get the most powerful dramatic impact in a movie by starting the vortex with the widest expanse in space and time and narrowing down to one point.

One of the biggest misconceptions about plot is that it is a series of unrelated obstacles the hero must overcome. But this creates an episodic story that keeps hitting the same beat until the narrative drive simply stops. Plot is really the entire line of interconnected events, the superstructure or extension bridge that must span the full length of the story.

The Nolans are masters of plot. In fact, they are so good at it that they are the only screenwriters in popular filmmaking today who consistently have too much plot in their films. Whether from hubris or from artistic challenge, they try to stretch the plot span as long as possible, with as many story threads as they can get away with. The problem with a long suspension span is that you force the viewer to make huge leaps of logic, believability, motive force and emotion. For example, in *The Dark Knight Rises*, the plot is so vast and complex that it collapses from a lack of forward narrative drive.

*Interstellar* is the Nolans' most ambitious plot yet. Both *Interstellar* and *Inception* set up a giant vortex in which all plot lines converge to a single point in space and time. In *Inception*, the hero and his team travel to three levels of the subconscious to fulfill the goal of planting an idea in someone's mind. In *Interstellar*, the hero and his team travel to three worlds to fulfill the goal of finding a new place for humans to live.

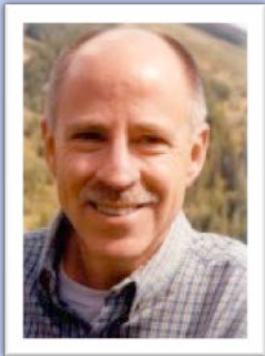
But *Interstellar* has a stronger emotional kick at the end because of how the writers handle the vortex point. In *Inception*, the point at which all the plot lines converge happens when the van, packed with sleeping team members, hits the water. All three main action lines come to a stunning conclusion at this split-second in time. But that's not the end of the movie. The hero still has to go into his deepest subconscious world to confront his nasty ex-wife and get back his kids whose faces we've never seen. So the emotional payoff just isn't there.

With *Interstellar*, on the other hand, the Nolans create a massive vortex that weds plot to emotion, because the vortex point of the story comes at the moment the hero, Cooper, meets his long lost daughter, Murph, who is now much older than he. This father-daughter relationship has been set up from the beginning as the central relationship of the film. So when the complex plotlines all come together at this communion, it's an emotional knockout punch that leaves the audience in shock. And it's followed immediately by the hero heading off to save the other female lead, Brand. That's a helluva one-two punch.

*Interstellar* shows the tremendous payoff when a plot vortex is done properly. But it also shows us the flaws of the vortex technique, especially when writers make the suspension span this long and complex. For one thing, the story goes on for a good hour before any narrative drive kicks in, not to mention emotional involvement for the viewer. For another, there's little conflict in the first half of the film, which makes it slow going.

Let me quickly say that criticism by some reviewers about the fallacy of the science in this movie is ridiculous, and totally irrelevant. The science fiction elements in the film are there to allow the writers to make extreme contrasts of character and theme, which are made possible and further intensified by the power of the film medium to crosscut (for all Science Fiction story beats, see the [Horror-Fantasy-Science Fiction Class](#) on CD).

With the Nolan brothers you have a rare example of writers who not only know the craft of popular storytelling, they also push the limits of the art form. That's why they have so much to teach us, especially in the area of plot. Of all the elements that went into the success of *Interstellar*, the one most important for screenwriters to study is the vortex. Apply this technique to your stories and your chances of success will go up tremendously.



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)

## To Format or Not to Format

by Dave Trottier

### READER'S QUESTION:

Shouldn't the screenwriter just write a good script and let the tech people figure out all that [formatting] stuff? Does a screenwriter really need to know how to direct the camera?

My experience in writing plays is that the director ignores almost all the directions; I'm pretty sure the same applies to film scripts. In other words, the scriptwriter, like the playwright, supplies the words that people speak to each other, and it is left to other professionals to film it.

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

My friend, let's take this question one idea at a time...

Yes, you should "write a good script," and that "good script" by definition would include correct format. It's not a script unless it's written in script format. Your premise almost sounds like this: "I'd like to write in Spanish without having to use the Spanish language." Use the language of film.

You mention the "tech people." You are not writing for the tech people, the director, or the actors. You are writing primarily for the reader (story analyst), who is almost always the first person to read a script and write a **coverage** for the producer or agent the script was intended for. If the coverage is negative, the agent or producer is unlikely to read the script.

Industry readers read quickly because they have so much to read, and thus they expect a script to meet some minimum requirements, such as appearance (that is, correct format).

Does a screenwriter really need to know how to direct the camera? No.

A spec script (written on speculation that you will sell it later) should not contain camera directions, shot descriptions, editing choices or other technical directions normally found in a **shooting** script. That should come as good news. However, it helps to understand the visual aspects of film and write the script in such a way that you direct the camera without using camera directions.

For example:

A vulture circles high above the grassland until swooping down on a half-eaten gazelle.

He picks at the gazelle's stomach.

The first paragraph implies an aerial shot or crane shot with the camera descending down to the jungle floor. The second paragraph is a CLOSE UP. A professional reader will get that.

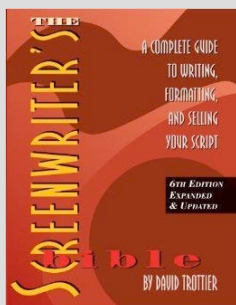
You mention the director. After the writer, the director becomes the second creator of the film (with the editor being the third). The director will have his or her ideas, as you correctly implied. However, your script should include enough detail that your vision is not only understood by the reader, but your story involves him or her emotionally. That's how your script eventually becomes a movie.

Good luck with that project and keep writing!

**New Year's Special:** To take \$20 off a script evaluation by yours truly, email me for details at [dave@keepwriting.com](mailto:dave@keepwriting.com).

### Dave Trottier's

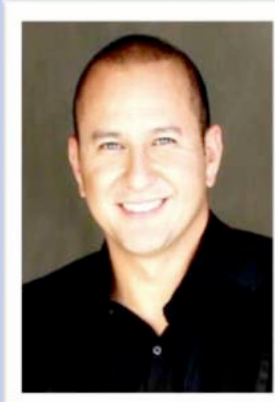
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Marvin V. Acuna is an accomplished film and television producer. He recently produced the features *Chez Upshaw*, starring Kevin Pollak and Ileana Douglas, and *Lovelace*, with Amanda Seyfried, Peter Saarsgard and James Franco.

Previously, he executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (starring John Malkovich) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

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## Revealing the Mysteries of the Pitch Room

by Marvin V. Acuna

Let's pretend that you got your script into the hands of an agent, manager, or producer. And of course they loved it ;) Cool, so your job's done, right? All you have to do now is wait to be showered in fame, fortune, and unlimited studio writing opportunities, right?

Not so fast, hoss.

You see, even GETTING your script into the right hands is just step one. If an agent, manager, or producer actually likes your material, then he or she needs to champion it to the studios. And if they are successful at selling your gripping story idea, then you could be called into the mythical "pitch room" at a studio.

Because here's the thing. It's rare that a studio will be 100% gung-ho on a spec script from a new writer. More than likely, the studio executive(s) will be intrigued by the idea, but they'll need some more clarification about the story, about the characters, or about some other detail related to your screenplay. So they'll call you into the studio to talk it out.

And this, my friend, is your make or break moment. If you are unable to clearly communicate your vision, if you are unable to clearly transfer your enthusiasm, in other words, if you are unable to SELL your story, then you will fail!

In Hollywood, there are FAR more people who can say "no" than there are who can say "yes." So your SOLE objective is to give these studio executives a package so clear and so precise that when they relate your story idea to their boss, they can get that "yes" for you.

Okay, now that I've given you the 10,000-foot view of the pitch room, I'm going to break down the specific techniques you need to do in order to achieve success there. (Remember, this is AFTER it's been determined that you have a killer script.) Ready?

### Understand that screenwriting is a business.

Have you done your market research? Do you understand your genre (currently and historically), the players in your genre, the mandate of the studio, and how your script fits into that mandate? Do you speak "Hollywood-ese?" Is your pitch easily transmittable to a higher up? Are you likeable as a person?

### Be flexible with your ideas.

The studio wants to know how receptive you are to being a collaborator. And I'll tell you this right now – you will never sell a screenplay in Hollywood without someone else putting their fingerprints on it. If you can't accept this fact, then go write novels, because that's more of a solo writing process. But if you want to sell scripts then you must understand that it takes a village to make a movie, and that village will sift and sort through your script, making notes, and adding suggestions for rewrites and edits. It's your job to grin and bear it.

### Practice your pitch.

Here's a pivotal strategy to implement before sitting down with any Hollywood professional...

Prepare your pitch as if you were going into a pitch room, then grab a camera and pitch your screenplay on video. Look, screenwriters are always asking Hollywood professionals to read their scripts. And we are inundated with material. But let's say we DO tell you, "Okay, tell me what your script is about." More often than not, after your pitch, we still don't know what the story is about. Don't be that writer!

So take a video camera, reduce your screenplay to a sizzling, pithy pitch, then watch it. You may be surprised by what you discover. But don't stop there. Hone and refine your "sales presentation" until you can perform it at concert pitch.

It may take a little time, but I promise that it will be worth your while.



## Sell Your Script

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

## Johnson Production Group

[code: 49ecwde1y2]

We are looking for completed, feature-length female-driven Christmas scripts. As such, we are only interested in romantic comedies or dramas that involve Christmas and in which the main character is a woman.

Budget will not exceed \$4M. Both WGA and non-WGA writers may submit material.

Our credits include *Ring by Spring* and *Stranded in Paradise*, among others.

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!

## One in a Row Films

[code: c4kr3ex3cz]

We are looking for completed, feature-length, family-oriented faith-based scripts. Submissions must be set in the present day and not period.

Budget will not exceed \$2M. Both WGA and non-WGA writers may submit material.

Our credits include *Underdogs*, *War, Inc.* and *Grace Is Gone*, among others.

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!

## Level 10 Films, LLC

[code: ny51xaxc3d]

We are looking for drama, sci-fi, thriller or horror web-series pilots. Material submitted should be for series that will run eight to 10 webisodes, each being about 10 minutes in length.

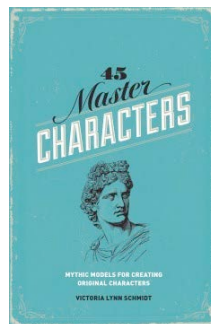
Budget has yet to be determined. Both WGA and non-WGA writers may submit material.

Our credits include *Smiley* and *Some Guy Who Kills People*, among others.

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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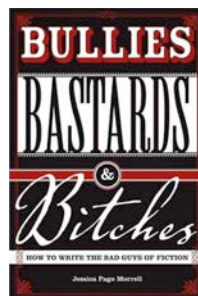


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