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Letter from the Editor

It's a new year and a new opportunity to launch your screenwriting career. The [2016 PAGE Awards](#) contest is off and running! Hurry, the Early Entry Deadline is Friday, January 15, offering the lowest entry fee of the year. We're excited to help another group of talented writers make industry connections and reap the benefits of winning one of our 31 Awards.

This issue begins Volume 9 for the **LOGLINE** eZine and gets 2016 off to a great start. 2015 Gold Prize winners Monica Byrnes and Toria Sheffield share the ups and downs of writing as a team. PAGE Judge Jennifer Barbee exposes clichés and stereotypes that are all too common among female characters. Genre guru John Truby charts the evolution of screenwriting from film to television and from stand-alones to serials.

Dr. Format himself, Dave Trottier, helps you handle dialogue spoken at different volumes and split-screens in your script. Industry insider Marvin V. Acuna tells a cautionary tale about a writer who walked away from a great opportunity. And, as always, we close the issue with the latest leads from InkTip!

Happy reading,



Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ 2014 PAGE Grand Prize winner Matias Caruso and 2015 Bronze Prize winner Michael Lee Barlin have landed on the 2015 Black List with their PAGE Award-winning screenplays. After winning the 2014 PAGE Grand Prize, Matias Caruso's script *Carnival* (aka *Three of Swords*) was optioned by PAGE Judge Mitchell Peck of Peck Entertainment and Matias was signed by CAA. And after winning the 2015 Bronze Prize for his drama *Final Journey*, Michael Lee Barlin was signed by PAGE Judge Lee Stobby of Stobby Entertainment.
- ◇ The 2010 Silver Prize-winning Thriller/Horror script *The Narrow*, by Shane O'Neill, has now been optioned by producer Giacomo Ambrosini of Sanguine + Smart. Giacomo discovered Shane's screenplay through our terrific co-sponsor InkTip.
- ◇ It's been a great year for 2010 Gold Prize winner John Scott III. John's PAGE Award-winning horror movie *Maggie* was released earlier this year and his new script, *Parable X*, appeared on this year's Blood List. In addition, John was just named to the *Variety* list of "10 Screenwriters to Watch." He is represented by ICM and managed by Sly Predator.
- ◇ As a result of winning the 2015 PAGE Awards contest, Gold Prize winner Lauren Sweeney and Silver Prize winners Jerome Kruin and Andrew M. Henderson have been signed by PAGE Judge Joe Riley of Velocity Entertainment. Joe discovered these talented writers through the contest judging process.
- ◇ As a result of her PAGE win, 2015 Gold Prize winner Heather Faris has just inked a contract on a paid screenwriting assignment for Perdomo Productions. Heather tells us: "Within two months of winning Gold for *Ripple*, I was hired by Perdomo Productions to do a rewrite for one of their stories in development. This would not have happened without the PAGE Awards. I am deeply grateful to everyone affiliated with PAGE for your support, professionalism, and dedication. Thank you!"

2016 PAGE Awards Early Entry Deadline: Friday, January 15

Working With a Writing Partner

by Monica Byrnes and Toria Sheffield

When people hear that we're writing partners and have written five screenplays exclusively with each other, one of the first questions they usually ask is, "How do you do it?" This is also a question we've asked ourselves from time to time, especially because we know that for many writers, writing is something best done (and best enjoyed) in solitude.

Monica Byrnes and Toria Sheffield won the 2015 PAGE Gold Prize for their feature comedy *Mannish*, which has been optioned by Mitchell Peck of Peck Entertainment. Freelance writers living in Brooklyn, they have managed to write several screenplays together while raising two cats and sharing a one-bedroom apartment for four years.

The short answer is probably pretty uninteresting: we think of an idea we're excited to write, we outline meticulously together in the same room, and then we split up scenes to write and flesh out individually, coming together again to punch up and hash out until we have a completed screenplay.

We've found that by far the most important part of this process is the thorough,

scene-by-scene outline; it serves as an invaluable map for when we actually sit down to write, and it ensures that we absolutely never write ourselves into a corner. It also means that we never lose track of what the other person is doing. The divvying up of scenes goes like clockwork.

This stage is also where we like to jot down key jokes or lines of dialogue that we want to ensure make it into the script, regardless of who actually pens that particular scene. The process has gotten faster and more refined with each screenplay, and if it's not working, we've found that it usually means there's something flawed with our initial concept.

However, we think when people pose the question, "How do you do it?" what they're really asking us is, "How do you do it *without killing each other*?" This one is a more complicated bear to tackle, and we'll try to explain with something more substantial than chalking it up to luck and basic chemistry.

The first thing we'll say is that we firmly believe a writing partner should make writing easier, never harder. Ideally your particular set of skills will complement your partner's, and vice versa. If you're both great with dialogue but struggle with plotting, you just may find yourselves in a creative rut.

And if you decide to write with someone but end up spending a ton of your energy arguing over basics, like where the screenplay should take place, or if your protagonist should be a 17-year-old boy or a 90-year-old grandmother, it's probably time to reevaluate the partnership.

Bottom line, there are a lot of challenges involved in

completing a screenplay, and not being creatively in sync with the person with whom you're supposed to be collaborating is a big red flag.

What's more, you can't assume you'll work well with someone just because that person is a good friend. We have several friends we consider to be amazingly hilarious and



very talented people, but actually sitting down and trying to create something with them has proven disastrous. Minor disagreements can become heated and uncomfortable and no one is willing to compromise. There are just some people who will bring

out your argumentative and hardheaded side, and unfortunately that's not something you can always predict beforehand.

One thing that really helps make our partnership work is that we're both very verbal people, which goes a long way in our particular creative process. We actively enjoy going for long walks and hashing out minor character points, potential jokes, and why we think the first draft isn't holding up in the third act. We can slip into conversation about it at almost any time or place (which is usually at home in the kitchen in our pajamas, because we also happen to be roommates) and it honestly makes the whole process way more fun and enjoyable.

The truth is, neither of us would enjoy writing half as much if it meant each of us being holed up in different rooms by ourselves all the time. This is a big reason why a creative partnership works so well for our particular personalities.

The last thing we'll say is that, as writing partners, you have to share a basic work ethic and a commitment to an organized process. That's perhaps the most important thing of all. Beyond that, it comes down to a few intangibles, like sense of humor and how much time you're able to spend together without biting each other's heads off.

It's a lot like love and marriage. There are plenty of people you might be crazy about for a short period of time, but who would never work out for you long-term. And then there are the few people out there who, for whatever reason, have a specific combination of traits and tendencies that help bring out your best.

That's what makes for a great partnership.

So You Passed the Bechdel Test! Now What?

The Next Step in Building Better Female Characters

by Jennifer Barbee

The rising popularity of the Bechdel Test, a set of rules at first jokingly applied in Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch* in 1985, has given audiences a new, clearer awareness of the limitation of female representation in film. According to the Bechdel Test, the standard for female inclusion is held to the following three rules:

Jennifer Barbee has been a freelance script analyst for over a decade, working for such companies as CinemaTexas, SXSW, Fox Searchlight and Film Independent's mentoring workshops. A published writer, her first nonfiction book was released by Soft Skull Press/Counterpoint Media. She is a graduate of the University of Texas.

1. The movie has to have at least two women in it,
2. Who talk to each other,
3. About something besides a man.

As of 2015, only about 58% of produced films pass all three qualifications, which shows that we still have a quite a long way to go.

Meanwhile, while the Bechdel Test is a great place to start when creating and assessing

your screenplays for greater diversity in gender representation, I would also argue that this test is merely a jumping off point for the more concentrated inclusion of strong, original and realistic female characters. Simply having women present and talking to each other doesn't necessarily hold those characters to any qualitative standard. So, now that you've got women hanging around your pages, what do you do with them?

As a longtime script reader and analyst, and a female one at that, I feel like the best place to start when considering what to do with the women in your story is to challenge some of the knee-jerk, "go-to" characteristics that have dominated many modern narratives. If your goal is to build your female characters with complex humanity, there are four things you can look at in order to help begin this process: **archetypes**, **function**, **motivation**, and **skillsets**.

First, ask yourself, can any of the characters in your script be reduced to the following **archetypes**: the slut, the nag, the crazy ex-girlfriend, the ball-buster, the just-one-of-the-guys best friend, etc.? If so, get to know them a little better. Is there more going on with the crazy-ex than that one characteristic? Why does loving *Star Wars* and the Green Bay Packers make a female character either sexually invisible if she's plain or a total fantasy if she's "hot"? What if her tastes have nothing to do with caring how the male characters relate to her?

Take a look at a few of your female friends. List 10 characteristics you notice about each of them and pay careful attention to that diversity. Remind yourself of this when you are creating female characters for your scripts.

The **function** of your female characters becomes particularly important to examine when the primary characters in your script are male. Look closely at your female characters and assess their roles in your narrative. Do these women exist simply to inspire and/or motivate

the actions of the male characters, or do they have narrative autonomy outside the hero's storyline?

One of the things that frustrates me more than anything in regards to the above is the prevalence of female characters whose rape and/or murder is used to inspire the (usually violent) action of the male hero. In the late 1990s, writer Gail Simone coined the term "Women in Refrigerators Syndrome" about this trope, wherein female characters exist only to be the victims of violence and to springboard the origin story of the narrative's male hero. The hero goes on to enact revenge against the people or systems that created this violence, usually not because of the violence itself, but because of the hero's failure to protect "his" woman.

In this, the female character becomes a mechanism of motivation, rather than a fleshed-out player in a diverse drama. Is she important to the story? Yes. But only as carnage left in the wake of the inciting incident. Motivations for anger, violence and emotional trauma are myriad in real life, so why resort to this old trope that the audience has seen a million times?

In the above example, the female is the motivating factor for the male. When we look at **motivation** for the female protagonist herself, the above example applies differently. For some reason, the *de rigeur* way to portray a female character as a "badass" is to expose her to sexual violence and to allow her to triumph over it with intelligence, physicality or a combination of both. Not only does this reduce the infinite spectrum of things that **could** motivate a heroine to one element, but it also allows the attacker to define the heroine's development instead of her own free will.

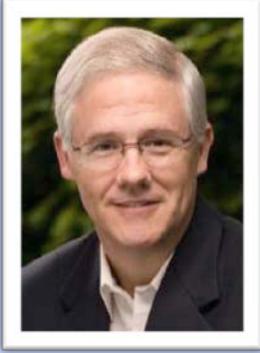
It is also beneficial to think about the **skillsets** of each of your female characters. I once read an action-packed military adventure wherein the protagonist was a female Army Ranger at the top of her field. Yet when the team is engaged in tactical exercises, the way she triumphs over her male squad-mates is by distracting the enemy with nudity so her partner can neutralize them. Here the male characters use expert level marksmanship and hand-to-hand combat, but the greatest asset of a similarly capable female character — and what she resorts to in combat — is her sexuality. Would a well-trained, highly skilled female soldier ever actually do this?

Male characters in film are CEOs, police captains, fighter pilots, archaeologists, boxers, directors and accountants. The skills that it takes to be each of these things — and almost any other profession — are skills that women can also possess, and by diversifying the skillsets of your female characters, you diversify the profile of your cast.

Beyond the Bechdel Test, if you recognize and avoid reductivism and gender stereotypes in your stories, it will help you create more interesting characters and more interesting screenplays overall.

The Evolution of Screenwriting

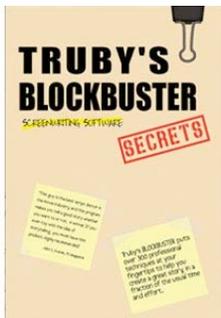
by John Truby



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his Anatomy of Story Masterclass to more than 40,000 students worldwide. He is the author of *The Anatomy of Story*. To learn more about Truby's classes and screenwriting software, please visit www.truby.com.

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I've been saying for over a decade that the best writing in American entertainment is in television, not film. What I haven't said is that this superiority of TV over film is true in almost every country in the world. This represents a massive shift, with multiple causes, and the huge effects of this shift are only just starting to be recognized.

The relative rise in the quality of TV, and the drop in the quality of film worldwide, has been decades in the making, and comes from changes in both technology and economics. It started back in the late '70s with *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. These were terrific films, but what they really did was make the Hollywood moguls realize that the true market for their films was not America, but the world. That in turn meant that the main genres for their films had to be myth and action, because these genres cross cultural and language barriers better than all other forms. And that meant that the primary audience for their films was young men in their teens and early 20's.



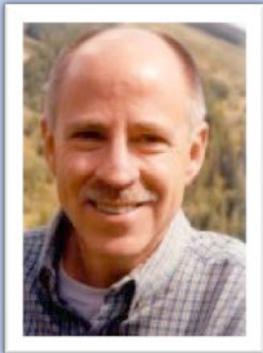
Cut to the early '90s. The use of the remote control forced television writers to go back to the future. When the audience at home could change the channel as soon as a storyline got dull, TV writers went from stand-alone shows to serials, a story form whose previous heyday had come in the 19th Century European novel. Stand-alone shows have a single hero who solves a single problem in a single episode. Serials have multiple heroes with multiple problems that extend over multiple episodes. In a serial the writer has the tremendous advantage of being able to crosscut. Any time a particular storyline grows dull, we simply cut to a more dramatic story beat in another storyline. In the '90s the best practitioner of this strategy was *ER*, where each show tracked five storylines in 43 minutes.

But a funny thing happened in the shift from stand-alone to serial: TV went from "boob tube" to art form. Instead of a repetitive story told in 43 minutes, TV now had an entire season to track a mini-society, a canvas 10 times larger than the feature film. The characters and plots of the TV serial became infinitely more complex. And the specialization of cable channels meant that the TV audience didn't have to be teenage boys, it could be intelligent adults. When you add the fact that in the U.S. writers, not directors, control the TV medium, you have all the factors needed for TV to completely dominate film in both quality and revenue.

While that explains what happened in America, what about the rest of the world? As the older medium, film had a much higher status than TV around the world, especially in those countries that bought in to the ridiculous auteur theory, in my mind one of the dumbest ideas in history. You might think that the shift in Hollywood in the late '70s to sell myth-action stories to a worldwide audience would have no effect on films from non-English speaking countries. You would be wrong. These countries were caught in a terrible vice. On the one hand Hollywood movies were taking 50% or more of their audience, while on the other the audience for their own films was limited to the citizens of their own country. Even in a country like France (with a great film tradition), they fought tooth and nail to stop Hollywood and support their own industry, but could not compete in the film market.

These countries could and do compete in television. Just as a small cable channel like AMC can create two of the greatest TV dramas in history in *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*, so can two small countries like Denmark and Israel create high quality, revolutionary shows like *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*), *Bron* (*The Bridge*) and *Hatufim* (*Homeland* in the U.S.).

It all comes down to the quality of writing in the serial form. While that doesn't require the horrendous cost of a Hollywood film, it is difficult to accomplish without training. In my [TV Drama class](#) I explain all of the beats and provide a number of tips for how to execute these beats well.

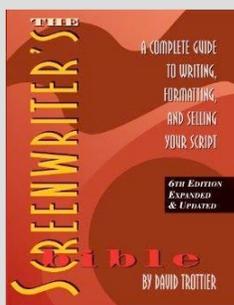


Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), 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. For \$20 off a script evaluation done by Dave, email him at dave@keepwriting.com.

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Dialogue Levels and Split-Screens

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

How do I format a scene where the characters talk, but we don't hear it (muted conversation as background music is playing)? Do I just write "A and B in a heated argument," etc.?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

In this situation, use MOS (MOS means "without sound"). So you could write something like this:

Andrea and Roberto argue MOS.

This tells readers that we don't hear the dialogue exchanged by the characters.

READER'S QUESTION:

How do I format a scene where the conversation is heard in very low volume, like we only hear "okay," "hmm," etc.? Do I just write the dialogue, or should I mention that the conversation is heard feebly?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Just describe what we actually hear. For example:

Skinny murmurs softly in the background.

Or if the audience hears the words, then write them out as dialogue, like this:

Skinny speaks so softly that his words can barely be heard.

SKINNY

There's a g-ghost behind you.

As you can see, the description tells us how loud the dialogue is.

READER'S QUESTION:

What is the correct format for a split-screen?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Handle it like you would an INTERCUT:

SPLIT-SCREEN - HELIPAD/RESTAURANT

And then keep the reader oriented as to where we are as you describe the action at both locations. If the split screen involves a phone conversation, use the same or similar split-screen special scene heading, as follows:

SPLIT-SCREEN - JO AT HELIPAD/SUE AT RESTAURANT

Write out the dialogue, as normal:

JO

The chopper is ready to go!

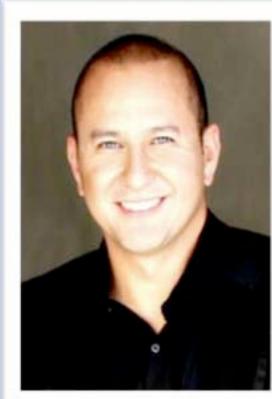
SUE

But I just got my omelet!

Keep writing!

Do You Have What It Takes?

by Marvin V. Acuna



Marvin V. Acuna is an accomplished film and television producer. He recently produced the features *Chez Upshaw*, starring Kevin Pollak and Illeana 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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Gather around kids, Uncle Marv's got a story to tell. This one has a hugely important lesson, and an unhappy ending. Unfortunately, not all Hollywood stories end with a "happily ever after." And it's important that you learn these lessons so you don't make the same mistakes.

Here's the story. A few years ago, a director friend of mine, who had a studio deal at Fox, read an interesting news article. The article was about a superstar athlete and the executive from a major sneaker company assigned to "babysit" him. The article chronicled the relationship that developed, and in particular, how the two unexpectedly began to influence each other's lives.

The studio director believed there was much comedy to glean from the story, so he instructed his executives to search for a writer to adapt it. Now, I'd known the head of his development team for some time. We discussed the article and I submitted a few candidates I felt made the most sense. She zeroed in on one of the candidates and requested a meeting. It was a huge opportunity for the writer. If he landed the gig, he would begin his journey in the very lucrative world of open writing assignments (OWAs). During the meeting she was very precise on how her boss, the director, envisioned the story.

The executive and the writer worked together to develop a take for the studio, and the pitch went well. Fox commissioned the script! Everyone believed that this was a tremendous opportunity to create a great comedy. And with the director at the helm, visions of "box-office hit" were already dancing in everyone's heads.

Like a game of ping pong, the writer and executives went back and forth with drafts and rewrites. Every draft prompted a meeting in which the writer was given more instruction and more direction blending the director's vision and the studio's mandate. Another draft. Another set of notes. This went on for months without everyone being satisfied. Eventually, the writer was convinced that no one had a clear sense of the story they wanted to tell. He became frustrated.

What he didn't consider was that the executive, director, and studio were also frustrated. They knew they had a winner, it just wasn't being delivered.

Unfortunately, the frustrated writer lost sense of his role in the process, and more importantly, what he was commissioned to do.

Another draft, more notes, and... the writer was fed up.

He called all his reps to let us know that he was convinced the studio and director didn't know what they wanted, and therefore he could not deliver. Therefore, he wasn't interested in pursuing other open writing assignments in the future. In his mind it had been a horrible experience.

Shortly thereafter, he was fired by the creative team. Shortly after that, he was released by all his representatives. And knowing in advance that the writer would be terminated, the agent leapt at the opportunity to fill the assignment with another client. The writer lost out on a huge opportunity, but it was just business as usual for Hollywood.

You see, writing for the studio system is an extremely lucrative business, which has transformed the lives of many screenwriters. But it is definitely not for the faint of heart. Screenwriter Matthew Michael Carnahan wrote 37 distinct versions of *World War Z* before the film finally went into production.

37 drafts!

So here's an interesting question for you...

After that story, do you feel you are you mentally ready for success? If you're not deterred by the prospect of more hard work and psychological anguish than any human being should endure, then you may be ready to become a successful Hollywood screenwriter!



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Company B

Seeking Contemporary Dramas or Dramedies

[Code: **sfrtb4693b**]

We are currently looking for completed, feature-length, contemporary drama or dramedy scripts. We need material with elements of humor and relationships as well as love and strong characters. No period pieces, and no heavy social issue, political, dark or historical pieces.

Budget TBD. Only non-WGA writers should submit at this time.

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

Company C

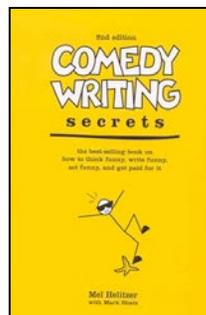
Seeking Teen PG or PG-13 Comedy Scripts

[Code: **etks44ctg9**]

We are currently looking for completed, feature-length teen comedy scripts that would probably receive PG or PG-13 ratings.

Budget won't exceed 1.5M. Both WGA and non-WGA writers may submit material.

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

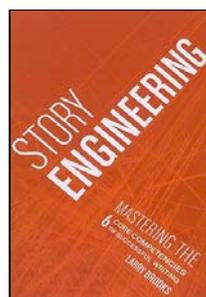


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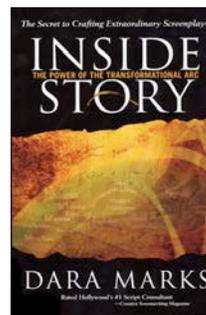
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