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Letter From the Editor

In just a few days we will be announcing the 2016 PAGE Awards Quarter-Finalists, and I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank everyone who entered the contest this year. Conceiving, completing and then submitting a script into competition is a victory in itself.

Welcome, new readers, to the **LOGLINE** eZine! This is your bimonthly guide to the art and craft of professional screenwriting. In this issue, 2015 Bronze Prize winner Steven Canals opens the door to the TV writers' room and shares his lessons learned. PAGE Judge Simon Herbert offers personal insights into the thought process of industry readers.

The leading expert on genre, John Truby, dismantles Richard Linklater's latest feature, *Everybody Wants Some!!*, and "Dr. Format" Dave Trottier fields questions from his mailbag. Working writer Tyler Ruggieri, currently hosting a webinar on Stage 32, gives us a recipe for compelling characterization. Our summer issue concludes with three "hot leads" for writers, courtesy of InkTip!

Happy reading,



Latest News From the PAGE Awards

- ◇ Warner Bros. has acquired the action/thriller pitch *Judgment Day*, to be written by 2014 PAGE Grand Prize winner Matias Caruso, with Guy Ritchie, Lionel Wigram and Jeff Ludwig attached to produce. In addition, Matias' action pic *Mayhem* recently completed filming in Belgrade, Serbia, and his PAGE Award-winning script *Carnival* is currently being packaged by producers Mitchell Peck and Bard Dorros. Matias is represented by CAA, and he is proof positive that you don't have to live in Los Angeles to build a successful screenwriting career! Matias lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- ◇ The summer road movie *Dear Eleanor*, written by 2007 Gold Prize winners Amy Garcia and Cecilia Contreras, was just released on VOD and DVD on July 5. Directed by Kevin Connolly, the movie stars Isabelle Fuhrman, Liana Liberato, Jessica Alba, Josh Lucas and Luke Wilson. Amy and Cecilia are represented by Ampersand Management and ICM.
- ◇ The dark comedy *Middle Man*, by 2014 Bronze Prize winner Ned Crowley, premiered at the Seattle International Film Festival on June 10, where it won the New American Cinema Grand Jury Prize. Ned directed the movie, which stars Jim O'Heir (*Parks and Recreation*).
- ◇ The 2015 PAGE Award-winning family film *The Storyteller*, by Joe Crump and Rachel Noll, began filming on location in Indianapolis on June 27. Joe is directing the movie, which stars Samantha Colburn, James Snyder, Brooklyn Rae Silzer, Kristina Wagner and Cassidy Mack.
- ◇ In TV news, 2013 PAGE Grand Prize winner Brooke Roberts Eikmeier has received a double bump up to the position of producer on the CW series *The Flash*, where she has been a story editor for the past two seasons. Brooke co-wrote the show's Season 3 premiere episode, which is scheduled to air on October 4. She is represented by WME and Circle of Confusion.

2016 PAGE Awards QuarterFinalists Announced: Friday, July 15

10 Tips for Writers' Room Success

by Steven Canals

I was in my car when I received the call that would change my life forever. I picked up the phone and my manager blurted out the words, “you got it.” The “it” was a staff writer position on *Dead of Summer*, a newly created horror anthology set to air on Freeform.

Steven Canals won a 2015 PAGE Bronze Prize for his TV drama pilot *Hope Projects*, which is currently in development. He is now working as a staff writer on the new Freeform series *Dead of Summer*, and his short film *Afuera* recently premiered at the 2016 L.A. Film Festival. Follow him on Twitter @StevenCanals.

The remainder of our conversation is a blur. In an instant I went from aspiring writer to professional writer. I quickly cycled through the requisite feelings of elation and panic. Like most writers I know, I am a ball of neuroses. That unsympathetic voice in my head that emerges at inopportune times made

me question myself. “Am I good enough? Am I smart enough? Am I talented enough?” I can remember thinking, “Steven, maybe you aren’t ready.”

Let’s rewind. After years of talking about wanting to create film and TV, abandoning a career in education, moving away from family and friends in New York, and spending thousands of dollars to attend UCLA’s M.F.A. Screenwriting program, you aren’t ready? Really?

Okay, so I was ready. **But** (there’s always a but) I still had a lot to learn. Nothing really prepares you for the experience of being staffed. What I’ve quickly discovered is that writers’ rooms are like fingerprints or snowflakes: they share some characteristics, but they are all uniquely different. Like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re going to get!

I’d like to share what I’ve learned over the past few months working on a TV writing staff so that you’ll be ready when you receive the call that will inevitably change your life for the better. So here are 10 tips to help you succeed in the writers’ room:

1. Study the room and your show. Who are the other writers and what experience do they bring to the table? What’s your showrunner/executive producer/show creator’s vision for the series? These are questions you should be asking when first hired. If you’re staffed on a show that isn’t naturally in your voice (e.g., you’re a historical drama writer working on a fantasy show) conduct research on the show’s concept. Read books, watch documentaries, and study shows in the genre.

2. Actively listen and observe. Silence is golden. Listening is a skill you really need to cultivate if you haven’t already. As a newly staffed writer you’re going to want to come out of the gate guns blazing with pitches, and that’s great, but you don’t have to pitch every idea you have. Pitch your best ideas – the ideas that will help move the story forward. Pay attention to how experienced writers are pitching. Adopt techniques that are most effective into your own pitch style.

3. Don’t take things personally. Sometimes your pitches are overlooked. As good as it sounds in your head, it may not be right for several reasons (e.g., budgetary constraints, doesn’t suit the themes of the episode, etc.). As a staff writer you can’t be precious or you’ll hold up progress. Move on and continue to generate new ideas. Actively listen and fill in gaps when you see them. A friend told me, “as a staff writer, think of your showrunner as a painter. You have to be ready with brushes in hand to contribute a particular color when needed.”

4. Develop a filter. If you’re anything like me, you get really excited talking story. When the room has encountered a roadblock for a storyline, you may have five solutions in your back pocket. Take a minute to consider whether those are all viable options. Sift through the options quickly. Will an idea blow up another arc that’s already been carefully constructed? Take a step back and look at the story from the macro perspective before making those micro suggestions.

5. Make yourself invaluable. As a staff writer you are there to help the writing team craft the best possible version of your show. At times you may feel like your contributions aren’t enough. Become the “go to” person for something. If you’re a family drama writer staffed on a science fiction show, be the writer who is tracking the characters’ emotional arcs while the other writers are discussing the cool sci-fi stuff.

6. Don’t be a jerk. Of course, this should go without saying. Be kind and polite. There are a variety of personalities in a writers’ room. You aren’t expected to love everyone, but you do have to respect everyone. This industry is very small and word gets around town quickly. Leave a good impression on everyone you work with, since you want to have a sustainable career. Also, be nice to all of the assistants. They may not be breaking story (yet), but they are part of the team, and they make your life easier.

7. Be authentic. There’s an unspoken understanding that everything discussed in a writers’ room is said with a code of silence. This code is there to make you feel safe. Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable with your fellow writers. Open up about your life experience for the sake of the stories you’re telling. Trust me, it will make the narratives you are constructing that much richer.

8. Rest your weary mind. To create an episode of TV you have to be a creative problem solver. Your brain is on maximum overdrive all day. You have to decompress. Indulge in the things that make you happy. You’ll be at your best in the room if your brain has an opportunity to rest.

9. Move your body. You’re sitting **all day!** Snacks abound. If your body is stationary, your muscles (and artistic skills) will atrophy. And you want to be sharp, right?

10. Have fun! Many people would do anything to be in your position. You’re creating TV! You are entertaining (and in some cases, educating) the masses. Be grateful to have a seat at the table. Be present and enjoy the experience.

Your Objective in a Subjective Business

by Simon Herbert

This is my first year serving as a judge for the PAGE International Screenwriting Awards, so I thought I might offer a little perspective on one or two key issues from my side of the laptop, in hopes of helping you understand how this crazy business works. I salute all you hardy souls who

Simon Herbert has worked as a script reader and story analyst for companies such as Concorde New Horizons and Amazon Studios. He received his M.F.A. in screenwriting from UCLA. Simon is an independent filmmaker and he recently co-wrote, produced and directed his first feature, *Savageland*, which is being distributed in spring 2017 by Terror Films.

have cast your scripts into the churning energy of the competition whirlwind! Congratulations on your bravery! If there is one thing that story analysts share in tales-from-the-trenches stories, it's that we all recognize just what a commitment you are making.

Screenwriters are sometimes intimidated by the blank white first page of a new project. Script analysts are sometimes intimidated by

what the writer has created and submitted, as well. As we open each file, we are entering someone else's universe, with its own rules and aesthetics. We're like astronauts donning helmets and entering the airlock, not entirely knowing what to expect. Danger? Laughs? Sex? Buffalos? Ice cream?

The first thing to realize about submitting a screenplay to a competition is that this is a subjective process. Contrary to what we like to think about competitions (and the world in general, come to that), there is not some nebulous, all-powerful and all-knowing "committee of excellence" that coldly and impartially grades every script according to its merits at a sub-atomic level.

At PAGE, every effort is made to quantify and qualify a script according to measurable criteria, in an attempt to level the playing field for every project in every genre. But you are not being judged by a computer that takes all of your incredible effort during those long dark hours of writing, plugs it into an algorithm, and then ticks off a series of boxes. Your screenplay is being evaluated by a human being with his or her own subjective likes and dislikes. And that's how it should be. You don't need HAL from *2001* to assign your script to a safe docking bay or eject it into the inky blackness of rejection; you need a human response, for two critical reasons.

First, you need to know what kind of visceral gut reaction your script gets from a human being, because you need to know what effect your story will have on audiences if it's ever made into a feature film. You may be writing on a 13" laptop in 12-point Courier, but your dream, your vision, will hopefully one day be projected onto a screen 30 feet long and 15 feet high, to be seen by many thousands of people. So as a PAGE Judge, when I read your script I envision your characters in ECU, pores visible, spittle flecked on their lips, magnified in front of me as they laugh/cry/die. I take what you have written on the page and project it onto the movie screen in my mind's eye.

Second, the terrible fear that your script may be judged by someone who might not "get" your vision is, believe it or not, extremely good preparation for what lies beyond the contest stage. The process of greenlighting scripts at the studio level is just as subjective as the contest judging process. It all relies on the judgments and tastes of fallible human beings.

Let's say you place well in the PAGE Awards this year (hooray!) and as a result you acquire representation, perhaps garnering some eyeball time at a studio or production company. It's extremely unlikely that your script will go directly to the studio head or production company CEO who can pull the trigger and send your movie straight into production.

Your script's chances of success will still hinge on several more levels of human frailty and judgment, subjective checks and balances. The material needs to win over the junior development executive who reads it first. (And let's hope he doesn't do so on a Monday morning, still suffering from a weekend hangover.) Next, the mid-level development executive needs to love your script so much that she's willing to stick her neck out and risk championing your project to her boss, above all the other great scripts she has read. Then, if you're lucky enough to make it all the way up to those final decision-makers, you need to pray that a similar idea wasn't pitched and purchased two weeks ago with Cate Blanchett and Aaron Sorkin attached, scorching the earth for your movie.

As you can see, the process of getting from the PAGE Awards to the red carpet can be quite arbitrary. It's subject not only to the vagaries of human opinion but also to the timing of other, potentially competing Hollywood projects. This is the Darwinian side of the business.

So why not just give up on this weird and cruel business? Why should you subject your babies to this arcane and chaotic dynamic?

Because it's what you signed up for, whether you knew it or not. During all those long hours spent writing, as you set aside the rest of your life to create new worlds on the page, this is what you committed to. You want this.

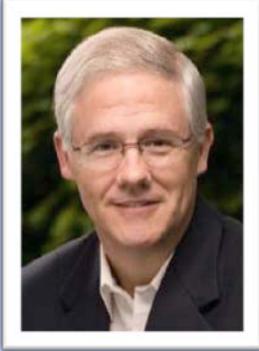
And every other person in this whole system – the competition judge searching for a winning script, the interns who want to find a narrative jewel for her mentor, the development executive looking to move up the corporate chain, the CEO seeking a new franchise to excite the shareholders – every single one of us is looking for one thing, and it's the one thing that you, the writer, can deliver with no resources other than your brain, your creativity and your heart. No CGI is needed at this stage. No A-list star. The one thing we all need?

A damn good story.

You can't control the rest of this crazy ride, but you can control that. So write your best. If your script lands in my queue, as a PAGE Judge, I will do my best to lift it up, and I'll be grateful for the opportunity to do so. Good luck!

Truby's Take: *Everybody Wants Some!!*

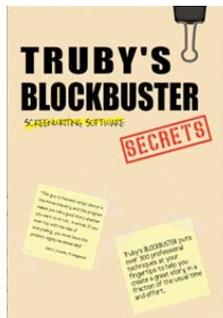
by John Truby



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 get that Richard Linklater is not interested in writing classic narrative films, loosely defined as a single main character chasing a single goal in spite of intense opposition. But Linklater's lack of interest in mainstream story structure and his heavy emphasis on dialogue doesn't mean *Everybody Wants Some!!* is without structure. Quite the contrary, the movie is part of a strain of screenwriting commonly known as non-linear storytelling. In my [Masterpiece Class](#), I go through the beats of a number of story structures that fall under that category, and each gives you very different stories and very different effects.

Everybody Wants Some!! is an example of a "branching" story structure, the same structure used in Linklater's *Dazed and Confused*, Cameron Crowe's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (and yes, I'm purposely giving the film's author credit to the screenwriter, not the director) and George Lucas' *American Graffiti*. There are many kinds of branching story structures, but generally these stories crosscut among multiple main characters and small groups within a limited period of time, often one night.

The branching structure has a lot of major effects on the story. First, it changes the focus from the single individual to the mini-society. Second, it shortens the story length and expands its breadth. Third, it changes the theme from the long-term development of an individual to an eternal utopian present. Ironically, by telescoping the story down to 12-18 hours, you stop time and experience the moment. All the characters feel a sense of intense community, and then it's gone. But for one brief shining moment...

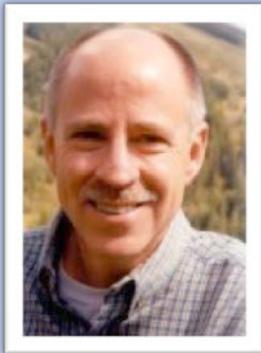
The biggest cost to this structure — and all story structures have costs — is that you lose plot. When you track multiple characters within a maximum 120 minutes of a Hollywood feature film, you limit the choreography of attack and counter-attack between each main character and his or her opposition. That in turn limits the number and depth of reveals, or surprises. In *Everybody Wants Some!!*, Linklater loses even more plot by having so many scenes where characters are talking in a group. This removes any chance of plot coming from the crosscut between storylines, and crosscut is the key story tool in the branching form.

Implied in Linklater's disdain for traditional plot is that he is making fun of the Hollywood conventional wisdom that says film is a "visual medium," and that writers must always use "visual storytelling." I couldn't be happier about that. Yes, sometimes "visual storytelling" is a good idea, especially if you are writing in the action or myth genres. But dialogue is extremely valuable in any story, in any medium, in any genre. In his highly rated *Before* movies (*Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*), I would argue there are quite a few moments of great dialogue. And those movies are a unique and major achievement in American film.

But great dialogue in film comes with at least two requirements. First, you need characters who we believe could actually come up with this stream of dense, thoughtful talk, right on the spot. Second, you have to have actors who can believably deliver that talk. In the *Before* films, he's got two highly intelligent characters and two very fine actors who can make this articulate talk seem real. None of that is present in *Everybody Wants Some!!*. The story, if you can call it that, covers three days in the life of a team of college baseball players just before classes begin. The movie is essentially three days of frat boy jocks talking incessantly while trying to get laid.

This is as annoying as it sounds, and it's all made worse by the fact that these characters strut around as if they are the wittiest guys since Noel Coward. If the dialogue sounded either real or deep I could probably find at least a modicum of interest. But it's neither. Linklater was apparently a college baseball player, so you'd think the talk would at least sound authentic. I spent a good part of my high school and college career on sports teams, and this talk doesn't even come close to sounding real. It's the cliché of what people who are not athletes think male athletes say when there are no women around.

I'm fully aware that Richard Linklater is one of the most highly regarded writer-directors in American movies today, and this film is getting a lot of praise as well. If he wants to set his writing apart from others by jettisoning plot, and can still get his films funded, that's fine with me. But I would argue that *Everybody Wants Some!!* is a powerful case study in how not to write dialogue, which is the one major writing skill where Linklater has staked his claim to greatness.

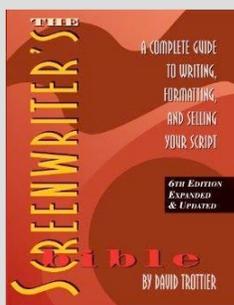


Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), 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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Pre-Laps and Chyrons

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I am at the end of a scene and want to have a character from the next scene say something before we cut to the scene that character is in. How would I format that?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

There are two ways, and I'll illustrate with two examples. In the first, use a voice over.

DARA (V.O.)
You look like Bozo the Clown.

INT. ALFONSO'S ROOM - DAY

Alfonso frowns at Dara, long red hair streaming from the sides of his head, which is bald on top. Kind of like... Well, Bozo the Clown.

As you can see, Dara's line is actually said in Alfonso's room, but for effect, we hear it before we cut to the room. It's a sound transition from one scene to the next and the technique is perfectly "legal" in a spec script.

The second method is exactly the same, except you replace the V.O. with the term PRE-LAP.

If the sound is not dialogue, you can use the PRE-LAP as follows:

PRE-LAP - A dog BARKS followed by a SCREAM and a CRASH.

INT. ALFONSO'S KITCHEN - DAY

Alfonso lies on his back -- a St. Bernard licking his face. Grocery bags are scattered across the floor.

READER'S QUESTION:

What is a chyron? [Pronounced kīrān.]

DAVE'S ANSWER:

It's the caption superimposed anywhere on a television or movie screen. Thus, it's handled much like a superimposition (SUPER):

CHYRON: "Did I just say that?"

You could also format it as you would a text message, if you prefer.

The term also refers to the text-based graphics that appear at the bottom of your TV during a news broadcast.

READER'S QUESTION:

Can you give me one good reason to format my script "correctly"?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

I'll give you two. First, it's dressing up your script for a job interview. Second, it's the language of screenplays and what your reader expects. Good luck, and keep writing!



Tyler Ruggeri is a writer with over a decade of experience on both sides of the entertainment industry. His original screenplay *The Making of Rock Hudson* sold to producers Celine Rattray (*The Kids Are All Right*, *Bernie*) and Trudie Styler (*Moon*) of Maven Pictures. He is currently adapting a critically acclaimed nonfiction book and writing an original action drama.

Prior to his writing career, Tyler was a talent manager at Exile Entertainment, where he represented screenwriters and directors while developing the company's slate of projects. He signed emerging filmmaker Damien Chazelle, whose 2015 film *Whiplash* was nominated for five Academy Awards (including Best Adapted Screenplay).

What Makes a Perfect Protagonist?

by Tyler Ruggeri

Many of today's film protagonists aren't so much characters as they are avatars, audience surrogates manufactured to be "a window into the world of the story," "our eyes and ears," or similar development exec lingo dictating that your lead character must represent **everybody**. As a screenwriter, this kind of thinking makes it awfully hard to create a three-dimensional human being who is a unique person and simultaneously a stand-in for every member of the general public. In my experience, the key to subverting this dictate is to create characters who are specific but at the same time universal.

One of my favorite features on [Stage 32](#) is the "Desert Island" section of the user profiles. For a site that's dedicated to facilitating connections between creatives, there's no better icebreaker than forcing everyone to commit to a perversely short list of only 10 films to be stranded with until the end of time. Of course, I spent about an hour putting together my list while I was supposed to be doing other things, and the end result was surprising. Each of the films I'd chosen had a strong, distinctive, and altogether singular lead character. Half of my choices even had a character's name in the title!

From my oldest pick (1938's *Bringing Up Baby*, in which Katharine Hepburn plays a daffy, leopard-chasing heiress) to the newest (1994's *Heavenly Creatures*, a creepy and moving tale about an obsessive friendship), each character and the world they inhabit would be out of place in any other film.

The best character-driven piece I've seen so far this year actually wasn't a movie. It was Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron's musical theater adaptation of Alison Bechdel's memoir *Fun Home*. Musicalizing a graphic novel whose protagonist is alive and well (and the author!) sounds like a fun task for masochists, even more so when you consider the subject matter: Alison's coming of age as a lesbian around the same time her father, a closeted gay man tortured by his repression, committed suicide.

What makes *Fun Home* great is the same thing that makes it (as our favorite studio execs might say) "difficult." The play opens with the adult Alison at her drawing table, beginning to write. A moment later, her younger self appears, a ten-year-old tomboy in '70s-era slacks. The younger Alison sings out to her unseen father: "Daddy! Come here, okay? I need you."

Strip away every other element in the scene, and we instantly know exactly what this story is about and what Alison needs to overcome. Alison's childhood self then beckons her dad to "play airplane" with her by hoisting her in the air with his feet. This want, her desire for physical contact, is a brilliant and active way of externalizing Alison's inner conflict: she yearns to be acknowledged and understood by her parent. There isn't a single person in the audience who doesn't know how that feels. *Fun Home* has only been going for **less than a minute** and already we can't look away.

This is the kind of sophisticated but accessible storytelling that illustrates how you can tell a story without succumbing to formula. The character of Alison is a middle-aged lesbian. She's from rural Pennsylvania. She grew up in the '70s. She is an artist. These are all very specific things that not everyone has experience with, yet the beauty of *Fun Home* is that its emotional drive is designed so that all people can relate. When creating your characters, it's important to remember that representation and identification are two entirely different things.

But don't take my word for it. *Fun Home* won five Tony Awards, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, AND made gobs of money at the box office.

So when I go to the movies, I'd like to see more screenwriters embrace these principles and not give in to the pressure of being "more commercial." A story well told may not automatically be a commercial one, but a universal approach to character will always broaden its appeal.

STAGE 32

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1. Go to <https://www.inktip.com/leads>
2. Enter your email address
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code

Company A

[Code: v5bxq2nehf]

We are looking for post-apocalyptic adventure scripts targeted towards kids. As such, we are interested in family-friendly adventure stories set in post-apocalyptic worlds, especially those involving fantasy and sci-fi elements.

Budget TBD. Both WGA and 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!

Company B

[Code: m2g4y0fph0]

We are looking for completed, feature-length "Blaxploitation" scripts from writers with a deep personal understanding of the African American experience, i.e. scripts in the vein of *50 Shades of Black* or *Shaft*. We need material that will be witty without being offensive, so when pitching, please include some mention of your own cultural background.

Budget TBD. Both WGA and 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!

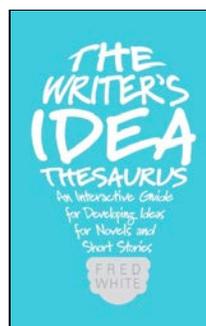
Company C

[Code: m9gnu0bbqs]

We are looking for completed, feature-length neo-noir scripts in the vein of *The Big Lebowski*, *Fargo* and *Inherent Vice*. As such, we are interested in darkly comic mystery scripts, especially scripts involving detectives, complexly interconnected mysteries, and quirky, distinctive characters.

Budget will not exceed \$5M. Both WGA and non-WGA writers may submit.

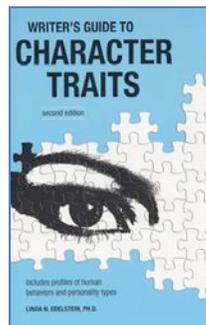
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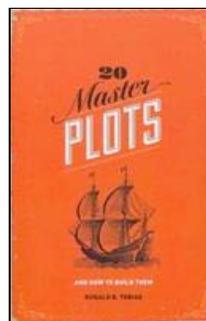


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