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Letter from the Editor

The Late Entry Deadline for the 2009 PAGE Awards competition is coming up fast, so finish polishing up that draft and get it in to us by Wednesday, April 1st to ensure that you qualify for this year's contest. In the fall, another crop of talented screenwriters will join our growing list of winners who have parleyed their prizes into agency representation, option agreements, writing assignments and script sales. And of course, one skillful and fortunate screenwriter will win our huge new \$25,000 Grand Prize! Will it be you? There's only one way to find out – as the saying goes, you can't win if you don't play!

In this issue of *LOGLINE*, we're introducing a terrific new column: "Industry Insider," by accomplished manager and producer Marvin V. Acuna. This month, Marvin describes the ever-forward-looking mindset of a professional writer.

The rest of the issue is packed with insights and encouragement. My article (below) urges you to identify the strengths and weaknesses in your craft so you can capitalize on your biggest opportunities for improvement. Our 2007 Gold Prize Winners, Amy Garcia and Cecilia Contreras, offer an inside look at their successful writing process. PAGE Awards judge Sheri Brummond describes "character magic" and what it can do for your screenplay. John Truby takes *Revolutionary Road* to task for being a "drama of inaction." Dave Trottier explains how to handle the sluglines for locations within a location. And finally, in InkTip's Hot Leads column, you'll find a list of film producers seeking new material. Take a look!

Happy reading,

John Evans

Round Out Your Game

by John Evans

It seemed like Michael Jordan could do just about anything on the basketball court. It's pretty hard to criticize William Shakespeare's skill-set, either. But most of us mere mortals – even Oscar-winning screenwriters – are better in some areas than others. Many successful writing teams combine differing strengths to cover all the bases in a script. One writer may specialize in dialogue while the other is a whiz at plotting. Or one is a character specialist and the other focuses on structure. Few writers are equally proficient in all areas. So when you're flying solo, it's especially important to identify where there is the most room for improvement in your writing.

Which aspect of the process is hardest for you? Do you conceive vibrant characters, but struggle hitting the key beats of three-act structure? Do readers compliment you for your vivid imagery, but question the naturalism of your dialogue? Whatever the case may be, you probably have at least one or two weak spots that are holding you back. Don't feel bad! Nobody's perfect. Identifying a weakness is actually a great opportunity for improvement. If you work on this area, or learn how to better work around it, you will receive better reactions from the all-important readers who say "yea" or "nay" to your script (and thus, your career). Oftentimes, one key flaw in a script prevents it from getting a "Consider" or "Recommend" and moving up the ladder at an agency or production company. Notes such as "passive protagonist," "cliché dialogue" or "lacks a third act twist" often torpedo a spec with a great commercial premise. As in sports, where games are often won or lost by a single point, the fate of your script may come down to a single point of execution.

When Michael Jordan entered the NBA, he didn't have a three-point shot. Extending his shooting range helped take him to the next level of greatness. Jordan never stopped fine-tuning his game. Late in his career, when his legs lost their superhuman spring, he developed a nearly unstoppable turnaround jumper. Similarly, the industry's top writers continue to hone their craft throughout their careers. So should you! Though talent is important, relentlessly chipping away at your weaknesses will elevate your craft at any age and regardless of where you started out.

The first step is zeroing in on the area that needs the most work. Complete our brief [online survey](#) and next issue we'll reveal what our readers feel most and least confident about (structure, characters, dialogue, etc.). We'll also discuss the resources available to writers seeking to master individual aspects of screenwriting. Who knows? You may turn your greatest weakness into your greatest strength! And if not, you can certainly learn how to make the best of the game you've got. Though "His Airness" never did lead the league in threes, long-range marksmanship sure didn't hold him back – Jordan won six NBA titles.

The Writer's Perspective: Our Process

by Amy Garcia and Cecilia Contreras

When we decided to teach ourselves how to write screenplays, we didn't have much money or any film experience, but we loved movies and loved storytelling. So we scoured every book on screenwriting we could get our hands on, memorizing and taking notes at bookstores and libraries.

Northern California-based writing team Amy Garcia and Cecilia Contreras wrote the 2007 PAGE Gold Prize-winning family film *Amelia Earhart and the Bologna Rainbow Highway*, which is being produced by Harry Ufland, with Jamie Babbit attached to direct and Marcia Gay Harden to star.

Our two-person film school convened at the kitchen table, along with plenty of Cheez-Its and cinnamon rolls. It's where we practiced dialogue, character development and three-act structure. After a million words, a million snacks and a million hours of patience, we found our voice.

Unbeknownst to us, we had been preparing for this job our whole lives. We were ethnographers and we didn't even know it. We began as

sneaky little kids eavesdropping on conversations anywhere we could... stealing paper and pens... hoarding words we liked. (When we met, we exchanged lists and found out we both liked "omelette.") We paid attention in Social Studies and got A's in Shakespeare. We studied *Sunset Blvd.* to learn the pitfalls of screenwriting and *Mulholland Dr.* to learn the pitfalls of Hollywood. We were the Tracy Flicks of our day, and we weren't going to end up floating face down in a pool. But even with all of this preparation, nothing could prepare us for the rough roads of character arcs and leitmotifs... all encased in 120 pages (preferably 110).

The books instructed us to "Write what you know." We looked around and said, "We don't know anything!" But after a while, we realized that we knew a lot. We knew about the old woman who walked down the street every morning wearing knee-high purple socks, and how one of those socks inevitably would fall to her ankle because the elastic was shot. We knew how beautiful the almond orchards looked when the sun broke through the

treetops, and we knew how lonely a neighborhood could look when the foreclosure signs go up.

Script by script we learned something new. We learned about telling and completing a story within a parameter. We focused on dialogue and making sure our characters didn't all sound the same. We concentrated on character development and arcs. And one day we figured out that there was such a thing as screenplay story structure! And theme! We got it! We were then able to juggle all this information in our brains and use it all at once.

Sometimes we begin a new project based on a compelling image. The image can present itself when we're least expecting it: on a walk, visiting a friend's house, just before sleep, or looking through a book. Dorthea Lange's photographs of the Dust Bowl migrants led us to our historical fiction piece *The Bologna Rainbow Highway*.

But sometimes it's not an image at all. Sometimes it's just a feeling of a story that's difficult to articulate. This feeling will lead us in search of music that sounds like the feeling and fits the tone we're attempting to decode. Music helps us step inside the world we want to create. We listen to a lot of Arvo Pärt and movie scores like Philip Glass's *The Hours* as well as A.R. Rahman's and Craig Armstrong's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*. But we have to be careful. Sometimes the music is quite dramatic, making everything we write sound better than it is.

We are always reading screenwriting books, refining and absorbing new information that resonates with us. If

it doesn't resonate, we keep searching. Believe us, even though we've found our "voice," writing is still hard work. And for a good portion of the time you can find us rolling around on the floor in misery making bargains with the Devil. "Devil, if you help us figure out Alice's temptational arc and inner conflict, we'll be moles for TMZ."

Writer Gloria Anzaldúa said, "Write with your eyes like painters, with your ears like musicians, with your feet like dancers."¹ That's what we attempt to do every time we begin a new story. Writing is a process, and hopefully, one day, we'll write just like that.

"Writer Gloria Anzaldúa said, 'Write with your eyes like painters, with your ears like musicians, with your feet like dancers.'"

¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Speaking In Tongues: A Letter To Third World Women Writers*. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*. Ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. 2nd ed. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of ColorPress, 1983. 165-173.



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The Judge's P.O.V.: Character Magic

by Sheri Brummond

A phenomenal script contains numerous elements, but in my opinion, *inspired* characterization ranks as most important. A memorable protagonist infuses a great story with a visceral connection to the audience. This is imperative because an audience needs to feel emotionally attached to the main character. If they do not, they will not ultimately care about what happens to him or her, and if this happens, nothing else (i.e. plot, theme, etc.) will matter.

Sheri Brummond worked in development for Frank Yablans at Paramount before serving as Director of Development at Rosemont Productions, an independent prodco noted for award-winning MOWs. While there, she helped shepherd many films into production, including one Emmy winner. She has also done script analysis for such companies as CAA, Turner, CBS and Gorfaine Schwartz.

“Character magic” is the phrase I use to describe the difference between an *irresistible* character and a merely good one. I can’t even count how many times I have heard producers I worked for say, “The plot is good, the main character is good, but I am going to pass.” On the other hand, no one ever passed when I heard, “I couldn’t put it down!” Character magic is very often the reason for the “I couldn’t put it down” reaction. It transcends the page, making the screenplay’s characters come *alive* in the reader’s mind. It makes them unforgettable.

Here are three ways to concoct some character magic for your protagonist:

1) **Specificity.** When you birth a character, you compose a being with a specific history and a specific personality. You take into consideration that individual’s loves, hates, weaknesses, strengths, fears, dreams, pet peeves, pathologies, family history, etc. It’s so important to craft rich, believable, interesting, vibrant characters with a colorful history and distinctive personality traits. Remember, life in a film is heightened reality. That’s why people agree to pay \$10 to go to the movies – to inhabit the life of an interesting person for an hour and a half or more.

2) **A symbolic object.** Sometimes, an item of great significance is the extra-special something you give a character that allows his or her personality to emerge. In *Braveheart*, Mel Gibson’s character cherishes the handkerchief of his lost love and in *3:10 to Yuma*, Russell Crowe’s character sketches birds or people in his notepad.

These valued objects may or may not seem like minor details, but they help the protagonist stand out from the other characters in the story. By creating a character who needs, cherishes, or relishes *something*, you heighten their humanity and uniqueness.

3) **A problem unique to them.** Another way to create character magic is to give your protagonist a problem that he or she alone must face. The protagonist is, of course, faced with a larger problem in the inciting incident, which becomes this character’s story goal (e.g., he must raise a million-dollar ransom for his kidnapped child). But a more personal problem, such as a physical ailment, a tick, or an ailing state of mind presents another layer of obstacles for the character and makes his journey more compelling.

“Character magic’ is the phrase I use to describe the difference between an irresistible character and a merely good one.”

Think of Tom Hanks in *The Green Mile*. He has his share of problems at work, executing convicted criminals on death row, but on top of it all, he has a urinary tract infection! This complicates his life and adds to the “weight” he is already carrying.

Though the techniques to craft characters that “resonate” and seize our hearts (either positively or negatively) are many, if you get it right, you always end up with character magic. The goal is to create a character, like George Bailey from *It’s a Wonderful Life* or Rick from *Casablanca*, who will live on in a person’s memory long after he or she has seen the movie.



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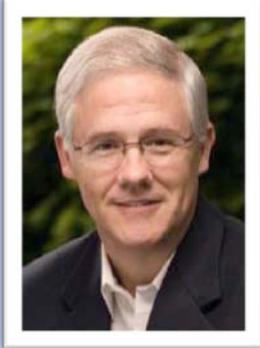


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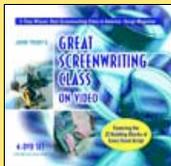
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ASK THE EXPERTS



Over the course of three decades, John Truby has taught more than 30,000 students the art of screenwriting. Using the knowledge and expertise he has applied as a consultant on over 1,000 movie scripts, he offers an approach to storytelling that has earned worldwide acclaim for his instructional courses and screenwriting software. He is also the author of *The Anatomy of Story*. *Booklist* raves, "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, visit www.truby.com

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What's Your Genre? The Relationship Drama

by John Truby

Revolutionary Road is one of those rare ambitious dramas Hollywood puts out during Oscar season to make it look like they care about people older than a teenager. They don't. If you want to see top drama, you have to go to American television, respected around the world for its excellence. I was recently in Paris to teach the 22 step [Great Screenwriting Class](#), and all the press wanted to talk about – print, radio and television – was the amazing writing on American TV dramas like *Mad Men*, *The Wire*, and *Lost*.

Everyone had high hopes for *Revolutionary Road*, since it's based on a much-loved novel of the '50s by Richard Yates. But that just makes the film all the more depressing. And that's because the writing is shockingly deficient. This film is actually a fascinating case study for screenwriters and directors, especially when you compare it to *American Beauty*. Both films were directed by Sam Mendes. Both explore the sterility of marriage in the suburbs. But one is a modern classic while the other is a sincere but undeniable failure.

What's the difference? The script, of course. These two films are yet another proof that the screenwriter, not the director, is the true author of the film. And when a film fails, we have to go to the script to find the causes.

Like *American Beauty*, *Revolutionary Road* bases its story on as ambitious a theme as a modern-day writer can take on: how do you live a meaningful life in middle-class suburban America? Suburbia promises that we're all the king or queen of our own castle. But once you are living comfortably in that castle, are you really free? Is that the true recipe for a good and satisfying life?

Revolutionary Road takes on that vast and complex theme full bore, and what power it has comes from a theme that challenges people where they live, and how they live, like no other theme can. It forces the audience to take a lifetime perspective on their own lives, and very few films or TV shows do that.

But an ambitious theme is also much harder to pull off. And *Revolutionary Road's* technique, its artistry, is simply not up to the task. In fact the film is so alienating in its techniques that it loses even those in the audience who really want it to succeed. Plot is virtually nonexistent; it hits the same beat in almost every scene (to be fair, some of that blame must go to the novelist). This forces the dialogue to carry the story, something dialogue cannot do.

As a result, the dialogue in almost every scene is overtly thematic, on-the-nose and on the same subject: live your passion, escape your dull suburban life. We thought we were special, we want a better future, but we find we're like everyone else.

Okay, I get it. Mendes has said, "It might be more difficult to distance yourself from the opinions of the writer and the filmmaker" if the film is set in the present, whereas "you never feel lectured to or instructed when you're watching a period film." Not so. This shows a glaring lack of understanding of what makes great dramatic writing.

With such a lack of technical artistry in the storytelling, the question of course becomes why. As always the reasons become clear when we explore the story's structure, and especially when we apply the seven major structure steps. It turns out that the battle scene – the biggest and final conflict between the hero and the opponent – which usually comes at the climax of the story, comes here at the beginning. In the opening scene the two leads meet in a bar. Each is full of promise. In the third scene, the two characters, now married for many years, have a vicious fight in which they lay out every argument the story will express. In effect, the story is over in the third scene!

In a good battle scene at the end of the story, the writer can and should make the competing values of the characters explicit. This is where the theme first pops in the mind of the audience. And it pops with power because until then it has been woven below the surface through the story structure. In the [Great Screenwriting Class](#), I talk extensively about how to express a theme powerfully, through a moral argument of action. In other words, by what the characters do in the story. Instead of sending a message, you move and inspire an audience from their core.

Another way to see *Revolutionary Road's* failure is to see it as the drama of inaction. April's solution to her and Frank's suburban paralysis is to say to her husband: maybe you could go to Paris and find yourself. Sounds good, but it doesn't mean anything. I'm not arguing that this attempt to find meaning isn't real. Our lives are full of things we might have done, along with solutions we desperately construct that are as flimsy as tissue paper. But that doesn't make for good drama.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Spec Writing Tips

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I have sequences in which several scenes occur in different rooms of the same building. Right now, the slug lines [scene headings] read something like this:

```
INT. BUILDING/JOE'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM
```

```
INT. BUILDING/JOE'S APARTMENT/HALLWAY
```

```
INT. BUILDING/JOE'S APARTMENT/REFRIGERATOR
```

Is the above correct, or is there a better way?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

The above is not correct, and there is a better way. What you have written would be partially correct if you replaced the slashes with dashes, although you're still missing two things.

1. The time. Does this scene take place in the day or night? Remember, the reader must be oriented to three things in a master scene heading: Where the camera is (INT. or EXT.), the location, and the time (usually DAY or NIGHT).

Your first scene heading would be technically correct if written as follows:

```
INT. BUILDING - JOE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY
```

But it's a little unwieldy. Also, because this is an interior location, I see no reason to even mention the building. Just use Joe's Apartment as the master location.

2. Readability. Your example is a bit difficult to read. That's why I suggest an alternative that I believe makes the script easier to read. This is the "better way" I referred to.

First set up a master scene with a master or *primary* location, then cut to smaller or *secondary* locations contained within that master location. In the example below, we begin with a master scene heading identifying the master location (Joe's apartment), then identify secondary locations (living room, hallway, kitchen, refrigerator) within that master scene by using secondary scene headings.

```
INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - DAY
```

```
IN THE LIVING ROOM
```

```
IN THE HALLWAY
```

```
IN THE KITCHEN
```

```
AT THE REFRIGERATOR
```

Putting it all together, here's another correct way to handle the same situation. In this case, I'll change the headings slightly and add some description (action).

```
INT. JOE'S APARTMENT
```

```
Joe saunters into his
```

```
LIVING ROOM
```

```
carrying his mail. He stops in the
```

```
HALLWAY
```

```
to open an envelope from "PAGE International." He smiles as he steps into the
```

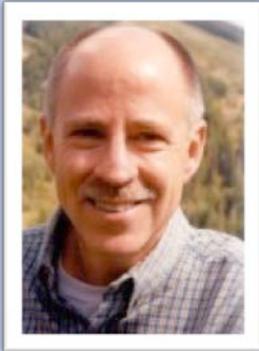
```
KITCHEN
```

```
and drops the mail onto the counter. He opens the
```

```
REFRIGERATOR
```

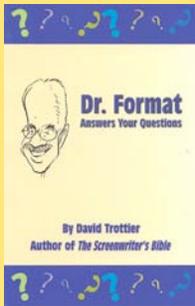
```
and pulls out a carton of milk.
```

All of these secondary locations can be found within the master location, Joe's Apartment. Once we're out of the apartment and to a new location, you will want to establish a new master scene with a master scene heading. The main thing is to make the script readable without losing the reader. Good luck and keep writing!



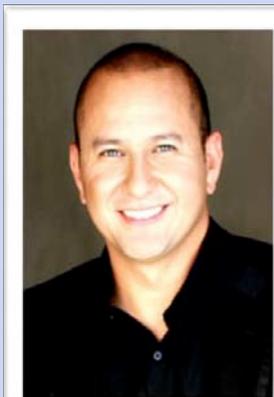
Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. His book *The Screenwriter's Bible*, now in its fourth edition, is perhaps the most comprehensive industry guide on the market. To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit: www.keepwriting.com

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Marvin V. Acuna is an executive producer of the forthcoming dramedy *The Great Buck Howard* (starring John Malkovich and Tom Hanks) and the 2003 drama *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue). His credits as producer include *Touched* (Jenna Elfman) and *How Did It Feel* (Blair Underwood). For free video access to Marvin's famous workshop, "The Seven Habits of Hollywood's Most Successful Six (and Seven) Figure Screenwriters," visit ScreenwritersSuccess.com/pageawards

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Industry Insider: The Business of Next

by Marvin V. Acuna

Out • come {out-kuhm}

- noun

1. a final product or end result

The definition referenced above is confirmation that you have total control over one outcome... **Completing your screenplay!**

Will it be represented? Will it be sold? Will it be made? Who knows, I don't. But what I do know for certain is this: If you decide to write a screenplay, YOU can determine the story, the characters, the world, and when it will be a final written product.

All other outcomes are not in your control. If you can embrace this as *truth* you will save yourself from years of heartache.

Just remember all other outcomes are out of your control.

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 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.

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.

Next time you feel this way, remember the following: You are in control of only one outcome – completing a final 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 it 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. Additionally, 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!

Submit, follow up, submit, and follow up. NOTE: If you submit material via email, **it may be helpful to attach your screenplay again when following up.**

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

Be original in your follow-ups. Maybe it's not an email, but a thank-you card for the opportunity to submit. Maybe it's an article you read about them, their movie or their client, which 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!

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES



Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from InkTip

NOTE: Please submit your work only if it seems like a perfect fit for these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with jerrol@inktip.com before submitting it.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

1. Go to <http://www.inktippro.com/leads/>
2. Enter your email address
3. Copy/Paste the corresponding code

WGA and non-WGA writers may submit.

Fairlight Pictures

[code: 2nptj69hhy]

We are looking for completed feature-length psychological thriller scripts for a female lead from writers willing to write on spec. We are not looking for "slice and dice" thrillers. Lead characters must undergo a serious character or psychological change. The story must involve supernatural-type spiritual or biblical elements, i.e. stories in the vein of *Stigmata*, *The Reaping* or *The Order*.

This is an ultra low-budget project, although the actual budget will be determined based on script. Our credits include the award-winning *Stationary Games*.

100to1 Productions

[code: 27tjm6px59]

We are looking for completed feature-length high concept/low budget action, thriller, sci-fi or horror scripts in the vein of *Memento*, *The Terminator* or *The Sixth Sense*. Please note that a high-concept script has four key elements: A great title, a fascinating subject, a strong hook, and appeal to a broad audience. If the story cannot be described in one short, simple sentence, it is not high concept. Preference is given to material that takes place in fewer locations, with unique characters and a well-rounded cast.

Budget will not exceed \$3 million. Our credits include national and regional commercials, music videos and independent projects. We're currently slated to produce two feature films in 2009.

Film Crash

[code: 3ny05wtza1]

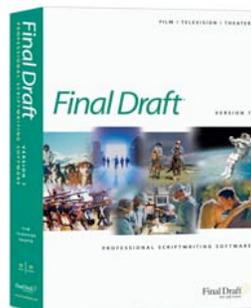
We are looking for completed feature-length romantic comedy scripts in the vein of *My Blue Heaven*, *When Harry Met Sally* and *The Devil Wears Prada*. Material must garner a PG or PG-13 rating, so please do not submit anything with violence, excessive foul language, or sexual scenes. Budget must not exceed \$20 million.

Our director's credits include *Rhythm Thief* (Jury Prize, Sundance Film Festival), *Kicked in the Head* (executive produced by Martin Scorsese) and episodes of "Sex and the City."

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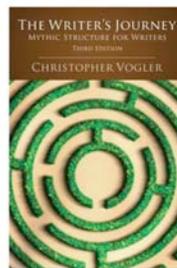


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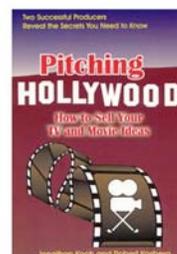
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