

Published by:

The PAGE International
Screenwriting Awards
7190 W. Sunset Blvd. #610
Hollywood, CA 90046
www.pageawards.com

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Letter From the Editor



The 2018 PAGE Awards competition opens for business December 1, 2017! Is your screenplay ready to cause a stir here at PAGE HQ? Every year new voices wow our Judges and persistent entrants break through with bold new works or even-better versions of last year's script. Prices will never be lower, so submit your entry early if you can!

Whether you win, place or show, there's always more to learn. That's why we publish the **LOGLINE** eZine. Each edition is loaded with the latest writing tips and industry insights for beginners, experienced hopefuls and seasoned professionals.

The final issue of 2017 opens with PAGE Gold Prize winner Clifford Yost sharing his experiences from the transformative Stowe Story Labs. PAGE Judge Dan Benamor urges scribes to think of their readers differently, and write accordingly. Script consultant Ray Morton tells us why being "nice" is the worst thing he can do in his notes. Dr. Format, Dave Trottier, explains naming conventions for characters in your script. Career coach Lee Jessup discusses the importance of building up your body of work. To close out the issue (and the year!), three production companies share their wish lists for the holiday season, courtesy of our good friends at InkTip!

Happy reading,

Latest News From the PAGE Awards

- ◆ Lots of great news coming in from our 2017 PAGE Award winners! Among the first deals reported: Michael Moskowitz's Silver Prize-winning Historical Film **Wylar** has been optioned by Weimaraner Republic Pictures. Jasmer Towner's Gold Prize-winning Action script **White Tiger** and Angela Schultz's Silver Prize-winning Family Film script **Robomutt** have both been optioned by PAGE Judge Mitchell Peck. And PAGE Judge Joshua Traywick is in discussions to work with Short Film Gold Prize winner Huelah Lander on a new project.
- ◆ The new action spec **Heart of the Beast**, by 2013 Silver Prize winner Cameron Alexander, has been acquired by producer Daniela Taplin Lundberg (**Beasts of No Nation**) after a competitive bidding war. This marks three spec sales in a row for Cameron. His PAGE Award-winning script **Omega Point** sold to CBS Films and **Valley of Heavens** went to Endurance Media. Cameron is represented by Rosa Entertainment.
- ◆ The October 31 episode of the CBS series **NCIS: New Orleans** was written by 2013 Grand Prize winner Brooke Roberts, who was recently hired as a supervising producer on the show. From 2014-2016, Brooke was a writer and producer on the CW series **The Flash**. She is represented by WME.
- ◆ The October 17 episode of the new ABC series **Kevin (Probably) Saves the World** was written by 2006 Silver Prize winner Davah Avena, who is now a producer on the show. Previously, Davah wrote and produced the series **Daytime Divas** (VH1), **Devious Maids** (Lifetime), **East Los High** (Hulu), and **Medium** (NBC). She is represented by Abrams Artists and Sheree Guitar Entertainment.
- ◆ 2011 Bronze Prize winner Steve Peterson has two movies in post-production: the thriller **Skin in the Game** and the sci-fi film **Replicate**. Steve has had over a dozen of his scripts optioned and produced over the past several years, and he will be making his directorial debut with the upcoming sci-fi/thriller **Consensus Reality**.

The 2018 PAGE Awards Contest Opens for Entries December 1

The Quest to Be Better

by Clifford Daniel Yost

Human beings have used calendars since the dawn of civilization: the Mayan calendar, the Chinese calendar, the Gregorian calendar and, starting in 2004, the PAGE International Screenwriting Awards calendar.

The PAGE Awards calendar begins in December and ends each year on October 15, when the winners are announced. For me, the weeks before the start of a new entry season are a period of reflection, as I think about my projects, my goals and my emerging career, with the mantra "I will improve my writing for next year, I will improve my writing for next year..." running through my mind. I suspect I'm not alone.

But how do we do that? How do we become better writers? How do we improve at this ephemeral, and seemingly inscrutable, craft? This is the burning question for thousands of aspiring screenwriters. In the past, I've worked with script consultants like Trottier, Seger, Leacock and Gallien. I've pored over books by Gold, Vogler, Field and Egri. And most importantly, I've written, rewritten, and rewritten again thousands of pages in pursuit of my "perfect" story.

Knowing that there was (and still is) a better writer to be forged in me, I applied to attend the 2017 Stowe Story Labs in Stowe, Vermont, and I was incredibly fortunate to participate in the four challenging, enlightening and rewarding days in the workshop. Six weeks after the Labs concluded, the positive impacts on my writing and pitching are revealing themselves in measurable ways.

I'd like to share with you just two of the lessons I learned at Stowe this year:

Cut the Fat

Let me give you a little back-story... A couple of months ago I pitched a script to a company in L.A. The story editor requested the script, which I thought was polished and producer-ready, and he liked the story, but requested a rewrite before he shared the script with his director of development. I listened as he carefully explained that my script was description-heavy and would likely encounter blowback from prospective producers, directors and talent. Simply stated, my "polished and producer-ready script" was portly and needed to be put on a strict diet.

As I processed this vital note, I was packing my bags and getting ready to head off to Vermont to attend the Labs. Within hours of arriving, I experienced a *deja-vu* smackdown as Anson Mount, an accomplished actor, producer and Stowe mentor, explained to me (and 50 other Lab attendees) that description-heavy scripts leave no room for directors and actors to do their jobs – namely that of interpreting and bringing to life the story we writers wish to sell and tell. Suddenly, in that room full of talented emerging writers, directors and producers, I could feel the love handles of my script poking out of my cover pages.

Let the rewrite begin.

Back home I completed my edits and, within a day of resubmitting my svelte and chiseled script, the story editor handed it to his director of development. What will happen next? I don't know. What I do know is that the rewrite moved my script one step closer to being a story on film rather than paper.

Speaking of "Pitching"

David Pope, co-founder of Stowe, doesn't like the word "pitch." The goal is to passionately and effectively communicate your script or story idea to a producer, but when you think of it as "pitching" it sounds and feels like "hurling," "throwing" or casual "flinging."



David Pope takes questions at the 2017 Stowe Story Labs.

Throughout the Labs, David preferred to describe it as "conversations about story" or "a dialogue" as he discussed writers' rooms, creative producers and the collaborative process inherent in filmmaking.

Both imply two-way communication, yes? When I first started pitching in Stowe, I attempted to "auctioneer talk" my way through my entire story, scene-by-scene, line-by-line. 110 pages in 10 minutes. Forget two-way communication in a pitch when hypoxia is the only guaranteed outcome. Looking at my fellow Stowe pitchers, I suspect I wasn't alone in climbing Everest sans oxygen.

Ready to embrace David's teachings, I ditched my line-by-line pitch, distilled the most compelling and important aspects of my script, and shared my story from a deep and clear understanding of theme, character and struggle, rather than from rote memory. The result? My Stowe mentor was interested and engaged. She asked specific questions about my story, which I responded to with passion and confidence. And perhaps most importantly, I had for the first time internalized and communicated my story, rather than speed-reciting it. Real progress? Indeed!

With the next PAGE Awards calendar year just a month away, I'm faced with the same question I've faced since I started the writer's journey: How do I improve my writing? With thousands of options available, I think I'll start by sitting quietly, being thankful for my progress this past year, and greeting the new writing year with commitment, generosity and optimism. It's great to be a writer!



Clifford Daniel Yost is a two-time PAGE Award winner. His coming-of-age story *Malcolm X & JFK* won the 2017 Gold Prize in the Drama category, and his drama *Like Yo-Yo* took the Silver Prize in 2007. Cliff writes features, television and stage plays. He and his wife live and travel in their Airstream and yellow sailboat, *Kluane*.

The Audience Doesn't Owe You Anything

by Dan Benamor

Screenwriting is, by and large, a solitary, personal act. If your script gets traction it can become a more social experience, interacting with directors and producers and so on. But when you're sitting there alone in the wee hours of the morning, staring at the blank page, you have to write for yourself first.

The challenge, though, is that we as writers can sometimes be our own biggest fans. Some of this is vital in order to write a good script. If you aren't excited about your story, how can anyone else be? But the flipside is that you can't write **just** for yourself.

Let's say, for example, you are writing a super-twisty, complex political thriller. You as the screenwriter know that if the audience gets to that great twist at the end, they'll be floored. Or maybe you're writing a horror movie, and you figure that as long as you keep the scares coming, you're delivering on the audience's expectations for the genre, right? The same logic applies for an action film. Hey, the action sequences are awesome, so this script is therefore awesome, no?

Not necessarily. The real question is: Why should anyone **care**?

It's a question I've thought about often. Though the scripts submitted to the PAGE Awards are read cover-to-cover by judges who are paid to do so, when you submit your script elsewhere, that's often not the case. Inevitably, anyone at an agency or production company who has the clout to move the needle for a director or actor is insanely busy and is most likely reading your script as quickly as possible between bites of lunch, driving their kid to school, taking meetings and working on other projects.

So, in the midst of all that, why should they care about your screenplay? There is only one reason: **Emotion**. The reader, and ultimately the audience, must become emotionally invested in your story.

I often wonder what would happen if every writer operated from this assumption: Not only does the exec reading your script not owe you anything, they actively **don't want to like** your script. Passing on a script is always much easier than championing it. So, assume that your reader is essentially hostile. Your challenge is to "defeat" your reader, in a sense, by hooking them from word one and keeping them engaged throughout.

This may seem extreme. But if you think about it, it's a function of the economics of time. As human beings, time is our most precious resource, and it's simply more efficient to stop reading a screenplay once it is no longer engaging, rather than reading it all the way through to the end in hopes that it gets better. Because the cold, hard truth is that scripts that aren't instantly engaging usually **do not** get markedly better.

So – not out of any personal malice, just a pragmatic need to clear the queue – your average industry script reader, development executive, agent or producer is only giving you a fixed page count. In fact, I've sat in offices at agencies and had this exact conversation with agents. For some people, it's 20 pages. For some it's 10. And some will say that you pretty much know in the first page or two if the person can write.

Okay, so how can you make your script immediately compelling and keep it compelling throughout? Hey, if there were one easy answer to this question, we'd all be millionaire screenwriters by now.

Personally, I think what makes a script truly compelling is emotion.

Emotion can take many forms. It can be the tugging of heartstrings (though this, if done too blatantly, can be a huge turnoff). Or it can be more subtle and nebulous.

Perhaps a character is shown doing something that we recognize in ourselves.

That something doesn't have to be altruistic, either. I'll take a hero/heroine

who backs into someone's car, tries to smudge off the mark with their finger, and then drives off sweating, over a square-jawed, perfect, idealized hero/heroine any day of the week. The former is a recognizable human being. The latter only exists in movies.

Here's a simple equation for it:

Vulnerability = emotion.

Perfection = lack of emotion.

Bottom line, it's about making a human connection – that's the key.

Looking back on the various films I've worked on, whenever we hit a big turning point (attaching a director or actor, securing financing, etc.), the phone call never started with "What a great plot! The end of Act II was awesome!" It was always, "I really connected to the story of the two brothers in this," or "I really responded to the father/son story," or "The mother role in this is too good for me not to play."

Because the other hard truth here is that movies are a big pain in the butt to make. They cost a lot of money. They take a lot of time. People say "no" a lot. You spend **years** working on them. To invest that kind of time, you have to **care**.

Our readers and audiences don't owe us that.

As writers, we owe it to them.



Dan Benamor is a screenwriter based in Santa Clarita, California. He has two produced film credits, *Stagecoach: The Texas Jack Story* and *Initiation*, as well as numerous projects in various stages of development. Dan is also a former development executive who oversaw the development of more than a dozen produced films in a variety of genres.

“Why Can’t You Be Nice?”

by Ray Morton



Ray Morton is a writer and script consultant. He was a senior writer for *Script* and is currently the author of Scriptmag.com's *Meet the Reader* column.

Ray's recent books [A Quick Guide to Screenwriting](#) and [A Quick Guide to Television Writing](#) are available in stores and online. He analyzes scripts for producers and individual writers, and he is available for private consultation.

You may contact Ray at ray@raymorton.com and follow him on Twitter @RayMorton1.

I'm a script consultant. That means I read screenplays, assess them (via a written critique pointing out strong and weak points) and (when requested) provide suggestions for correcting the problems and improving the overall piece. I perform this service for producers, development executives, established screenwriters and aspiring screenwriters. My reports are generally well received by the first three categories of clients. But some of the aspiring screenwriters whose work I critique complain my assessments are harsh, saying that I focus more on the negative aspects of their scripts than I do the positive.

“Why can't you be nice?” one asked.

It's true I (usually) pay more attention to a script's problems than to its assets. There are several reasons for this:

The first is that the good parts of a script don't need my help. If something works, it works, and once I point that out, there's not much left to say. Therefore, when I write my assessments I tend to focus more on a script's problems, explaining why they are problematic and how they can be solved.

The second is that scripts written by aspiring writers tend to have a lot of problems. When you're just beginning, you make a lot of mistakes. That's nothing to be embarrassed about – it's a necessary part of the learning process. So if I'm assessing your script, I'm going to point out those mistakes even if they far outnumber the assets. I don't think that's harsh – just the opposite in fact.

Screenwriting is a tough business. If you're going to succeed at selling your script or getting an assignment based on it, then it must be excellent. Not just okay, not just good, but excellent. So if I go easy, if I tell you something is good when it's not or if I fail to point out a problem just to be nice, then I'm setting you up for failure. And there's nothing nice about that.

So know that if you ask me to assess your screenplay, I'm not going to be “nice.” And it's vitally important that you don't take my lack of “niceness” personally.

Something every creative person needs to recognize is that **your work is not you**. If you're going to make it as a screenwriter, you're going to encounter a great deal of criticism of your work from readers, executives, producers, directors, actors, reviewers and audiences. If you take it all personally, your self-confidence will be shattered or you will become so defensive that no one will want to work with you.

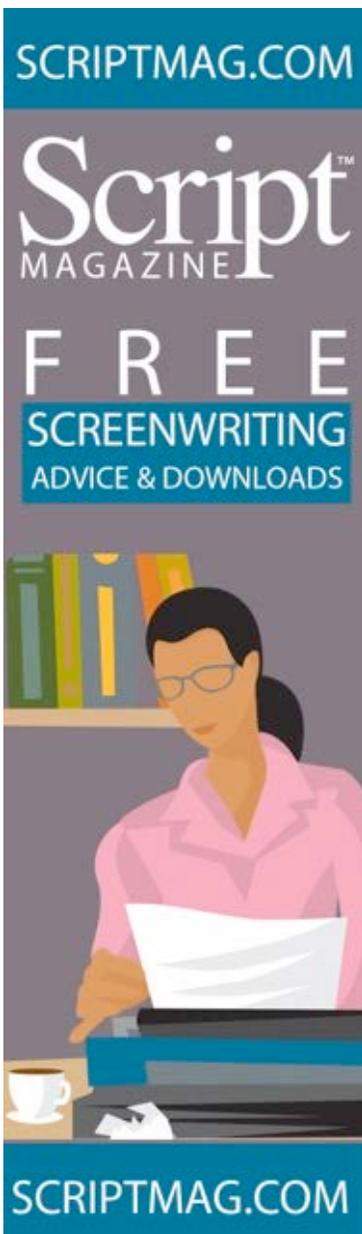
My first professional writing job was as a staff writer on a sitcom, and it was the best real-world training I could have asked for. When I was first hired, I was very precious about my writing and I resisted any hint that it wasn't 100% perfect. But I got over that very quickly.

Television waits for no one. Scripts must be churned out with predictable regularity. If a script worked, great. But if something didn't work, then it needed to be fixed quickly and there was no time to waste babysitting a defensive newbie. Everyone in the room pitched ideas for fixes. If a suggestion landed, it was used, but if it didn't, then it was rejected – not with meanness, but with ruthless efficiency. And no one (including me, once I got over my specialness) took it personally. Everyone recognized it was just the most practical way to do what we needed to do, which was to make the script the best we possibly could.

That experience taught me to approach critiques in a healthy way. I put my all into the initial draft, but when I'm done and begin receiving feedback, I step back into a more objective place. If someone has a problem with my work, I don't take it as an insult, but as a challenge. I remind myself of what I was trying to accomplish with the element in question; assess how the problem the critic identified keeps the element from doing its intended job; and then I try to come up with a fix that allows the troublesome element to better achieve its purpose, either by changing it, replacing it or cutting it entirely.

This is how I hope my clients will deal with the notes I give them – not as an attack, but as a challenge to be met with the same energy, creativity and sense of purpose with which the initial draft of the script was created. My criticism is not meant to discourage, but to encourage the writer to keep going, to make his or her script the best it can be, and to fully realize the dream he or she had for the material in the first place.

To me, that's pretty nice.





Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for companies such as 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.

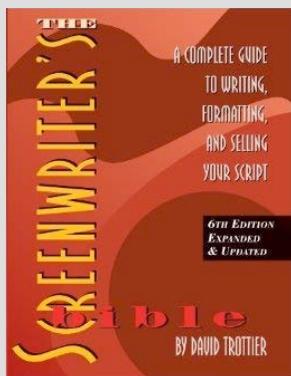
To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit his site: www.keepwriting.com.

For \$20 off a script evaluation done by Dave, email him at dave@keepwriting.com.

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What's in a Name?

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I have a police thriller where a federal officer goes undercover. How do I set up the character name for dialogue? The name of the officer is Matthew Twist; his undercover name is Vincent Carbone. I use TWIST when conversations take place among law enforcement people. I am using TWIST (CARBONE) when he goes undercover. I do this for character clarity, but is it correct formatting?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Yes, you are doing the right thing for the right reason. Other correct options include TWIST/CARBONE and TWIST AS CARBONE as the character name in the character cue. Since TWIST (or some form of TWIST) is always in the character cue for that character, the reader will not get confused.

READER'S QUESTION:

My story features a man who takes Briana, a six-year-old girl, to the city park. At the park, Briana holds up a stuffed animal and changes her voice to speak for the stuffed animal. How do I differentiate between the two voices?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

When Briana speaks as herself, put the name BRIANA in the character cue, and when she speaks as the stuffed animal (which we will call SNOOPY), put BRIANA AS SNOOPY in the character cue. Let's assume in the following example that the man is Briana's dad and that Briana plays a little joke on him.

BRIANA
I wanna go home.

She looks at Snoopy and changes her voice.

BRIANA AS SNOOPY
Me, too.

DAD
Are you talking to me?

BRIANA
(to Snoopy)
Who's that?

BRIANA AS SNOOPY
I dunno, but we shouldn't talk to strangers.

READER'S QUESTION:

I am writing a period piece that involves introducing Native Americans throughout the story. I do identify speaking characters with proper names, but I have many scenes where Natives interact with my other characters in non-speaking roles. Am I obligated to give them proper names to keep the casting straight or to avoid confusing the reader?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

What's good for the White Man is good for the Native American or any other character. Give all individual characters a name or a label; for example, GRUFF COWBOY is a label. That helps characterize him and, for that reason, is a better label than COWBOY #1.

READER'S QUESTION:

An action scene in my script involves four girls: Hailey, Sam, Britney and Amanda. Do I need to reference all four names every time they do something?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Once they are introduced, it's perfectly okay to refer to the girls (in narrative description) as "they" or "them" or "the four girls" or "the giggling gang of four" or "the super-fine felines" or whatever you'd like, just so long as you don't refer to them in a way that might be confusing to the reader.

Good luck, and keep writing!

Build Up Your Body of Work

by Lee Jessup

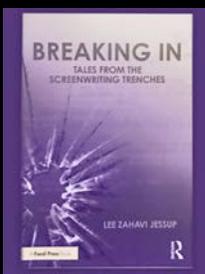


Author of the best-selling book [Getting It Write](#), as well as the newly released [Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches](#), Lee Jessup is a career coach for professional and emerging screenwriters. Her clients include writers who have sold pilots, pitches and specs; staffed television writers; participants in TV writing programs or feature labs; and, of course, writers who are just starting out.

In her role as coach, Lee serves as an industry guidance counselor, adviser, drill sergeant, cheerleader, confidant and strategic partner. Previously, Lee had her own script picked up, worked in development and ran ScriptShark.com for more than 6 years.

To learn more about Lee's services, visit leejessup.com.

Lee Jessup's Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches



A boots-on-the-ground exploration of what it takes to become a working writer in the industry today.

This book includes:

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- Insight from 20+ agents, managers and executives
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If there is one thing I've learned over my many years working with screenwriters, it is this: When it comes to making or breaking your screenwriting career, your body of work can make all the difference.

Before we go into the "why," let's address the "what": What should a screenwriter's body of work look like, at the outset? In my experience, a solid body of work should include two to three completed, vetted, expertly executed scripts, be they original television pilots or feature specs, in the same or similar space. That means two to three pieces that are all in the same or similar genre (i.e. light space vs. dark space), as well as the same or similar format (i.e. half hour vs. one hour, TV vs. features).

The industry seeks to understand where the writer is at his best. With that in mind, and especially at the outset of one's career, it is beneficial to define a brand. Think of it this way: No one calls an agent and says, "Send me your best writer!" Instead, an agent will pick up the phone and hear "Send me your writer who's great with psychological thrillers (or comedies with a heart, or dramas based on real life)." The agent will then sift through his pile and identify the writers that fit within that brand, and who have the work to back it up.

A body of work rarely consists of 15, 20 or 30 completed scripts. It is made up of those scripts that have been vetted, rewritten and developed enough to push them to the highest level. It's not about the 15 scripts a writer might have tried her hand at over the years; it's about her three or four very best ones, as well as the one she's developing currently. "Developing currently" is key: any writer should always be able to speak to the project she is currently working on, showing that she is always productive, always working towards her best success.

A strong, compelling body of work does three things for the writer:

First, it establishes the writer as someone capable of developing a number of intriguing properties. Even with slight variations in quality, a strong body of work tells anyone working with the writer that the scribe can not only write one successful script, but this effort can be repeated again and again. Having proof that the writer is able to generate compelling, well-executed, interesting content again and again within the same brand assures whoever chooses to represent or work with him that the one script they read and liked was no fluke, but rather one of the many building blocks upon which the writer will be able to construct a career.

Second, it shows that the writer is passionate about storytelling, rather than eager to tell a single story. Agents and managers want to know that they are fighting the good fight for someone who will never wait to embark on writing her next great script, and who will always be prolific. New content is every writer's life-blood. While an initial script may get the writer repped or out for meetings, it's the follow-up work – an ongoing flow of new features and television pilots – that will strengthen existing relationships, shore up the fan base or one day reinvigorate a stalled career.

Third, it allows the writer to always have something more to offer. When I interviewed him for my new book [Breaking In: Tales from the Screenwriting Trenches](#), Madhouse manager Ryan Cunningham told me, "You never want to go into a meeting holding your hand out. You want to go in there showing all this great stuff you're doing."

In most scenarios, it's a script the execs have already read that got the writer into the room. Executives seek to meet the writer behind it to identify if they want to be in business together. If the writer only has that one script, that is all the viable business that will be discussed in the meeting that day, unless the writer is fortunate enough to have the executive bring a potential project to him. But if the writer is prolific and has a body of work to lean on, he will offer up a number of different opportunities. Even if an executive doesn't respond to one script, the writer has two or three others ready to pitch that can stimulate interest and deepen the relationship.

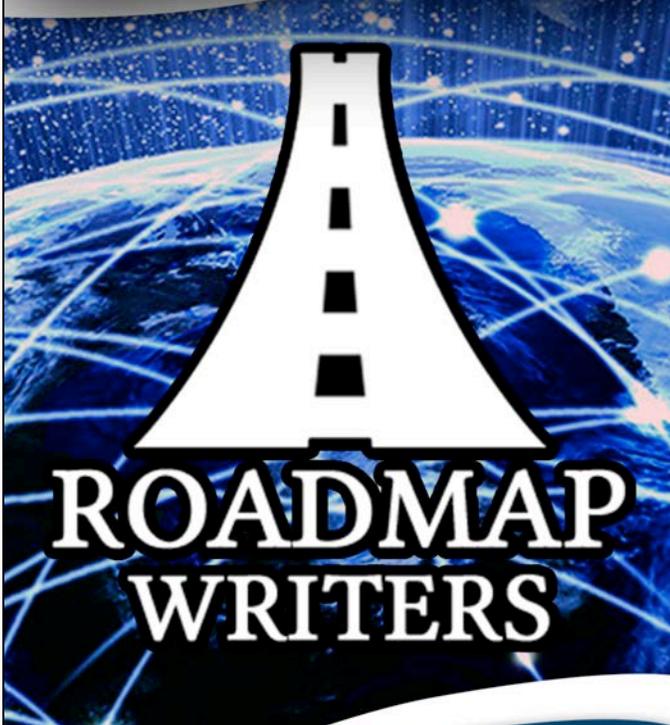
At the start of your career, you can point to your body of work as proof of your craft and commitment to brand. But careers can only benefit from the ongoing development of a body of work. It's that body of work that will become a conversation starter, provide an opportunity for you to reinvent yourself, and set the stage for a meaningful business exchange.



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Company A: Seeking Realistic Horror Scripts

We are looking for completed, feature-length horror scripts that are grounded in reality (material in the vein of *Last House on the Left*). At this time, we are not interested in paranormal stories.

Budget TBD. Both WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

To find out about this company and submit a query:

- 1) Go to <https://www.inktip.com/leads/>
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Company B: Seeking Thrillers with Unconventional Heroes

We are looking for low-budget thrillers with unconventional heroes. An example of a typical/conventional hero would be the alcoholic loner seeking redemption or the ex-CIA operative with a particular skillset.

Budget TBD. Non-WGA writers only at this time.

To find out about this company and submit a query:

- 1) Go to <https://www.inktip.com/leads/>
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Company C: Seeking Hallmark-Style, Female-Driven Romance Scripts

We are looking for female-driven, Hallmark-style romance MOWs in the vein of *Sleepless in Seattle*. As such, material should be appropriate for all ages, with an uplifting, happily-ever-after ending. When submitting, please mention any previous credits or contest wins you may have.

Budget TBD. Both WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

To find out about this company and submit a query:

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