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Letter from the Editor

The final deadline for this year's PAGE Awards competition is **Friday, May 15, 2009**, so this is your last chance to submit your screenplay and win the respect of the industry and up to \$25,000 in prize money. There's no contest quite like the PAGE Awards. We are a direct conduit to Hollywood and a showcase for screenplays immediately viable in today's marketplace and movie theaters. Enter today and know that a strong showing is more than a pat on the back; it's very possibly your entrée into the business!

What awaits you in this issue of LOGLINE? Based on last month's reader survey, I direct aspiring professionals to the best sources for mastery of structure. 2008 prize-winner Stephen Carter answers the question on every fledgling writer's mind: How do I obtain representation? PAGE Awards judge Mike Lee tells you how to write a sci-fi script that will dominate the summer release schedule rather than languish on your hard drive.

Our resident genre expert John Truby exposes the failings of the ambitious disappointment *Watchmen*. Format guru Dave Trottier illustrates how to write a flashback sequence. The value of networking is producer Marvin V. Acuna's topic of focus. And finally, InkTip.com makes the latest opportunities available to writers shopping their work.

Happy reading,



Round Out Your Game: Part 2

by John Evans

In our last issue, I wrote that the way to achieve the most improvement in your screenplays is to identify the largest shortcoming in your skill-set and do your best to turn that weakness into a strength. Your biggest deficiency is also your greatest opportunity for rapid improvement – it's where the most untapped potential waits to be realized. Moving the needle here will result in a big jump in the quality of your work and garner better reactions from the countless industry professionals looking for well-rounded writers.

The responses to our online poll suggest that the area LOGLINE readers feel most confident about is their dialogue. This is not surprising, as good dialogue is more about having an ear for the rhythms of real people's speech than the demands of our highly specialized craft. The most complex and technical aspect of screenwriting is structure, and 31% of you acknowledged it as your biggest weakness. (Description/writing style came in second at 19% and characters were third at 15%.)

Unlike formatting, character arc or other screenplay-specific concepts, structure has its hard-and-fast rules (three acts, for example), but there are many nuances and variances of approach. To truly master structure, sample a range of expert sources and use your best judgment to apply their teachings to your particular script. Here is just a broad sampling of valuable texts on structure that are worth your time:

Linda Cowgill's "[Secrets of Screenplay Structure: How to Recognize and Emulate the Structural Framework of Great Films](#)" is an industry favorite.

"[Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach](#)" by Paul Joseph Gulino drills deeper than the three-act paradigm by breaking a screenplay into sequences of about 15 pages each.

"[The Million-Dollar Screenwriting e-Book](#)" by Chris Soth also divides a feature screenplay into reels with his innovative "Mini-Movie Method."

"[Save the Cat!](#)" by successful screenwriter Blake Snyder remains the book *du jour* in Hollywood because it takes a fresh but intuitive approach to the construction of movie plots, with an emphasis on the plot points a potent structure demands.

"[The Writer's Journey](#)" by Christopher Vogler has achieved bible status in the biz and remains the best interpretation of Joseph Campbell's dissection of myth and heroes for the serious Hollywood professional.

And of course, if you haven't already read [Robert McKee](#) and [Syd Field](#), the grand old men of the form, start there for the fundamentals of structure and everything else. Unlike painting, music, poetry or many other art forms, screenwriting often rewards the skilled craftsman before the gifted artist.

So You Want Representation...

by Stephen A. Carter

Every writer wants representation. How else will we ever be discovered and go on to make millions plying our passion? The first thing I discovered in my quest for a rep is that it's very difficult to attract a good agent without an introduction from a producer, executive, manager or another writer. Even then, there is no guarantee. The market is so specific right now, it almost seems that unless you're shopping the exact material they happen to be looking for at that exact moment, odds are you'll receive that dreaded "thanks but no thanks."

Stephen A. Carter is a writer/producer based in Los Angeles. He wrote the 2008 Bronze Prize winning thriller *Peeker*, currently being shopped by Zero Gravity Management. Stephen continues to write, and has several projects in development with his producing partner.

Setting agent-hunting aside for the time being, I decided to try to attract a manager first. I discovered they are much more open to unsolicited queries,

and to taking on new clients, than agents. I also discovered that a good manager will likely want to get his or her new writer signed with a good agent because the more people working for a new writer, the better.

The second thing I realized is that most agents, managers and producers in the mainstream are looking for big-budget, high-concept scripts that are easy to pitch to the studios. I found that trying to sell a small film, character piece, art film, etc. reduced my chances of finding interest greatly. To almost zero, in fact. There are many great scripts that go nowhere because of this matter of economics, and it's something everyone addresses in the decision-making process, be it writing or selling.

The third thing I learned in my quest for representation is that pitch letters or email queries (many managers and producers accept or even prefer email queries) must be concise and to the point, little more than a good logline. **It turns out the movers and shakers in Hollywood don't have time to slog through a litany of hopes, dreams, or life histories. Hmm... Who'd have thought?**

Here's an example of one of my queries:

Dear Super Agent,

Below is the logline for my thriller screenplay, PEEKER, for your consideration.

Logline: Thomas O'Connor is a Peeping Tom who turns his predilection for spying on people into a thriving security service. He has it all — a beautiful wife, money and a great friend — until he witnesses a murder and it all comes unraveled when his past catches up with him.

PEEKER is a 2008 PAGE Awards Bronze Prize winner. I'm an industry professional seeking representation and feel your company may be a good fit. I have several completed screenplays and would be happy to send PEEKER as a sample of my work along with a script list of available material, my resume and a short biography, should you be interested.

Thank you so much for your valuable time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Carter

818-XXX-XXXX

stevecarter_99@XXXX.com

This query is precise and to the point, pitches one script only, and lays out the pertinent information an agent or manager may find valuable when considering a new client. Competition placements or awards can be listed, but I would avoid including anything negative or useless like, "This is my first screenplay" or "I've never done this before, but I feel I have a knack for writing." (If you listen a moment, you can almost hear a little voice singing, "Amateur!") In addition, I always strive to be polite and appreciative of their time.

But the query letter is only the beginning. Once someone agrees to read your work, your material must stand out head and shoulders above the rest.

The competition is so fierce, your script must be great — not just good, but great — to get any notice at all. I've found that the pros who are reading and writing screenplays are smart, well-educated and know their business, so I recommend you become as educated as you can on the entire process.

I read the various screenwriting sites for useful articles and to stay abreast of the market. I read books on screenwriting by Truby, McKee and so on, and I've taken a couple of classes. I also read lots of screenplays; there are many sites that post them free online. Bottom line, I've found that study and hard work are the only ways to step up to the plate on a level playing field. That, ultimately, is what got me representation.

And I've discovered that once you do get signed, you can't stop there. Marketing my screenplays is as much my responsibility as it is my agent's or manager's. I continue to send queries to producers and production companies when I have a new script. Services like scriptblaster.com, inktip.com and sellascript.com are also very helpful. These sites will submit queries to producers, agents and managers. afilmwriter.com posts a list of production companies (as well as agencies and management firms) that accept queries. I check the site for new listings once a month.

Best of luck on your quest for representation!

"Managers are much more open to unsolicited queries, and to taking on new clients, than agents."

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How to Sell Your Sci-Fi Script

by Michael J. Lee

When it comes to science fiction screenwriting, there are a lot of ways you can go wrong. Many development executives spend their time groaning over stilted dialogue, muddled plots, exposition that requires five characters and ten pages to get across, or obvious retreads of classic movies and characters. **Postal I might go, if read another Yoda wannabe I do!** But saddest of all are the writers who sabotage themselves before they even start with an uninspired logline.

Michael J. Lee has worked for several years as Creative Executive for AEI and script reader for The Vine Entertainment. He is the founder of Phaeton Management, a company devoted to writers getting the most out of their stories. A prolific magazine writer and political blogger, he has written screenplays, comic books, and novels.

A standout logline is vital to all scripts. But if you're serious about not just writing but selling a science fiction script, your logline has to be awesome. In this genre, the logline makes the sale. Chances are you will have to convince a roomful of people, often people who have seen *Star Wars* or *The Matrix* only once rather than about 50 times, that your movie is worth producing. Your logline must do that selling for you.

Despite the importance of loglines, beginning sci-fi writers tend to mangle them. The problem may be

the genre's limitless freedom for a story's creator. When you're creating a whole new world from the ground up, it is all too easy to lose sight of the story. There are so many bells and whistles to get distracted by – flying cars, teleportation, ESP, lasers, aliens... But they are just the trappings of your story, not the foundation. These elements have been around since the 1930s. You can't use them to hang your logline on. Just the other day, I read a script with plenty of spaceships, lasers and swashbuckling heroes, but nothing dramatically engaging on the story level. The writer needs to go back to his logline and work up from there!

So what constitutes a promising sci-fi concept and thus, the core of a good logline? There should be one primary element that distinguishes your story from all the others out there. Some examples are the Force in *Star Wars*, mass infertility in *Children of Men*, instant genetic identification in *Gattaca* and the virtual reality world of *The Matrix*. These ideas are the films' main sources of conflict and/or primary story engine.

The Force is a perfect example. To quote Obi Wan himself, "It surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxies together." This is exactly what your primary sci-fi idea should do. Look at *Children of Men* in this context. The infertility plague surrounds the characters; there's no part of their world that hasn't been radically altered because of it. The concept penetrates the characters. The plague brings out the worst cynicism in the main character, which is contrasted by the desperate hope of his ex-wife. The plague binds the story together; everything that happens is a direct result of it.

Sometimes the main characters or antagonists are intrinsic to the logline. Look at *Aliens*, *Predator*, *Terminator*, *Robocop*, *Transformers* – these movies are based entirely around brilliantly conceived science fiction entities. It's not just any old cyborg that comes back for Sarah Connor, it's the Terminator, a machine designed only to kill. It will keep coming even if every last bit of its flesh is seared off! The tension begins the moment the machine arrives and ends only when it is thoroughly destroyed. In between, this powerful story engine dominates everyone and everything in the film. Without the Terminator itself, you literally have nothing – not even a title.

Equally important is the situation you inject that concept into. Your big sci-fi idea must fit the scale of the story you're going to tell. *Star Wars* is a story spanning multiple planets – it needed an idea big enough to cross interstellar distances, like the Force. *Aliens* is about a more intimate group of characters. It requires something smaller, more immediate, to act as a story catalyst (the deadly life form of the title). The Alien creature or Terminator robot would blend into the *Star Wars* universe without so much as a ripple. The Force would be complete overkill in the world of *Robocop*. Idea and setting must be in sync.

There is a big difference between a story-changer like the examples above and window dressing. A scene in Robert Altman's *The Player* neatly sums things up. A screenwriter is feverishly laying out his pitch to the studio exec played by Tim Robbins. "It's a planet with two suns," the writer blurts out. "Who plays the two sons?" the exec asks.

"If you can boil down a sci-fi opus to one central idea that is compelling to almost anyone, your logline writes itself."

Some people might think this is making fun of studio execs, but I have to side with Robbins' character on this one. What do two suns have to do with the story? The fictional screenwriter in this scene makes a mistake that afflicts many real writers of science fiction – getting caught up in neat but ultimately insignificant ideas. They forget where the story is. Who cares that the planet has two suns? There were two suns in *Star Wars*, and it was a throwaway shot.

If you have the good fortune to pitch to a real executive, only tell them what is vitally important to the story. Unlike fiction, screenwriting is a form that is all about clearly focused ideas. If you can boil down a sci-fi opus to one central idea that is compelling to almost anyone, your logline writes itself.

What separates this particular world of spaceships and laser blasts from all the others? What makes this cyborg story different from *Robocop* or *Terminator*? Answer these questions in a clear and direct manner and you have the beginnings of a good, sellable sci-fi script.



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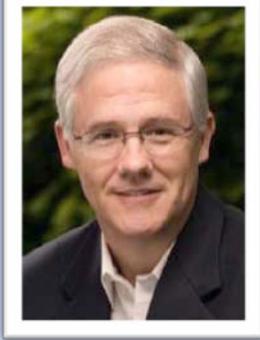
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Mixing Genres

by John Truby



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

JOHN TRUBY'S "ADVANCED SCREENWRITING COURSE" Audio CD (MP3 format)



Advanced screenwriting means creating contradictory and complex characters, inventing your own story structures, tracking the most twisted moral arcs, and expressing the big themes without preaching. This 4.5-hour course provides the detailed professional techniques needed to write a truly great script. If you are serious about being a professional writer, this course is a must.

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Mixing genres is the fundamental story technique of mainstream Hollywood moviemaking. If you want to play in that league, you need to master the technique. But be warned. If you don't know what you're doing, you end up with a big mess.

Watchmen left me with a strong sense of missed opportunity. This movie had the potential to be another deep exploration of the role of the savior in modern American life, with a shot at reaching the heights of the best of the form, *The Dark Knight*.

The challenge facing the writers was huge. They had to weave at least three stories, each from a different genre. First is the fantasy superhero story about who these characters are, why they formed their team, and why they disbanded it. Second is the detective story where Rorschach tries to uncover who is assassinating his old superhero pals. Third is the action story where someone is out to destroy the world.

In putting these three genres together, the writers have created a massive Rube Goldberg mechanism that lumbers along, puffing and wheezing, pushing forward, backing up, until it finally collapses at the finish line two hours and 43 minutes later.

Watchmen is a textbook example of how to write, and not write, a superhero origin story. The origin of a superhero is often the most fun aspect of the character and is a complete story unto itself. So the writer has to figure out how to combine a fairly long origin story with a full-blown crime or disaster tale, and make both story lines seem like one.

Batman Begins gives us a model for how to execute this job properly. There the writers begin by crosscutting Bruce Wayne's ghost as a youth (the bats and the death of his parents) with the training he receives from Henri Ducard of the League of Shadows. Then Bruce returns to Gotham to fight crime as Batman and eventually uncovers the plot to destroy the city, concocted by none other than his teacher, Henri Ducard.

But notice one huge advantage the *Batman* writers have in doing their adaptation: they have to detail the ghost of only one character. This difference is the source of all of *Watchmen*'s structural problems. The *Watchmen*'s writers tried to provide detailed ghosts for all nine of the *Watchmen* superheroes. They realized putting all of these origin stories together at the beginning would create its own movie and have little to do with the assassination/world destruction plot.

So they tried using an advanced story structure form (which I discuss in detail in the [Advanced Screenwriting Course](#)). In this form you set up a character with an intense desire line. Then at various intervals, you halt the narrative drive and explore some dramatic issue or delve deep into character. This technique was used in both *Forrest Gump* and *Lord of the Rings*.

This advanced storytelling form has some great strengths but also grave dangers. If you don't set up a strong enough desire line, the side trips eventually collapse the story. Similarly, if you go too often or spend too long in the side trips, your narrative drive stops. And if these side trips are information about the past, then your narrative drive is really in trouble because you are literally going backwards.

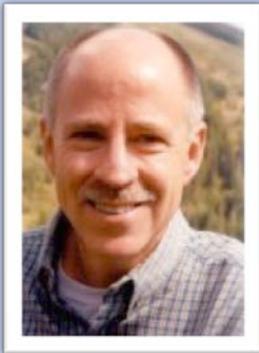
All of these problems occur in *Watchmen*. The writers use a detective story for their desire line: Rorschach wants to find out who is killing the retired superheroes. This appears to be a good choice, since the detective form has one of the cleanest and most propulsive lines of any genre. It is also a form focused on finding out what happened in the past, usually having to do with who committed a murder. So the audience is more accepting in this form of looking backwards.

But the detective form has nowhere near the narrative drive needed to support this many backwards-looking journeys for this many characters. And it cannot then flip to an action story line where a team defeats a super-villain who is trying to destroy the world.

The result is a film of three stories in which none is done well. Of the three, the most interesting by far is the story of the origin of this band of superheroes. Had the writers focused on this, they could have had a terrific film.

Of course, all of this implies that the writers had a choice. All kinds of forces could have dictated that they somehow make the three-in-one story work. Faced with that task, you do the best job you can.

But whatever the reality of this film, *Watchmen* shows screenwriters that there are limits to how much you can hang on the narrative line. When mixing genres, the main rule is to pick one genre to be the primary one. Then be very careful how many other genre elements you hang on it. Or you'll end up with some very nasty wreckage.



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

How to Write a "Memory Hit"

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

How do you handle a quick memory hit? Let's say a man is telling a story to someone about a friend getting killed by a train 30 years ago. Do I just write the image of a train hitting him? Do I need any caption such as a memory hit or a quick flash?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

A "memory hit"? I like the term, but I don't believe it has hit the mainstream formatting lexicon yet. And a "quick flash" would actually be called a "quick flashback."

The standard response to questions of this type is this: *Write what we see.* What does the audience see? If you actually show the train, then that is a flashback. You must label it as such so that we clearly understand it's a flashback.

If your character (let's call him Zep) speaks while we see the flashback, then use voice over (V.O.) narration. What follows is one of many ways to approach this situation.

FLASHBACK - TRAIN TRACKS

David sees a train coming. In a surreal game of chicken, he places himself on the tracks.

ZEP (V.O.)
David always flirted with disaster...

With the train nearly upon him, David tries to leap from the tracks, but his shirt catches on a rail tie.

He glances up at the unforgiving mass of steel.

ZEP (V.O.)
...Then one day, disaster responded.

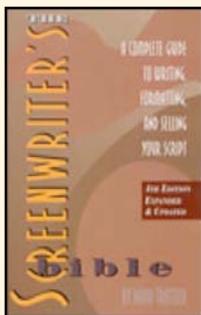
The wheels of the train slice through his body.

We can learn three lessons from the above example.

1. Notice that I avoided repeating in dialogue precisely what we already see visually. Whenever you use voiced-over narration, let that narration add something that the visual does not already communicate.
2. In narrative description, do not write something as general as "The train ran over him." Present specific and concrete visual images that we can respond to emotionally and/or intellectually.
3. Start a new paragraph when you switch to a new visual image. Generally, a paragraph of narrative description should present one visual image or one beat of action. (I hasten to add that this is a general guideline, meaning there can be exceptions.)

Good luck and keep writing!

The Screenwriter's Bible



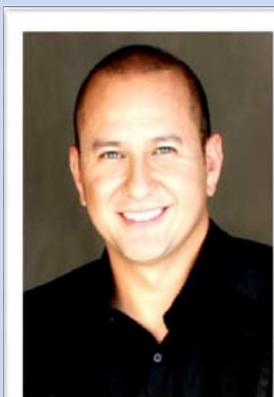
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The sixth annual Great American PitchFest takes place in Burbank, June 13-14, 2009. More than 30 free classes on screenwriting will be presented by legends such as Blake Snyder, Pilar Alessandra, and dozens of other excellent speakers, producers, and working screenwriters. You can also pitch your screenplay to approximately 100 film/television executives and agents. More than 50 writers have had their projects optioned, been hired for writing assignments, or have signed with agents or managers.

Visit www.pitchfest.com for details.



Marvin V. Acuna is an executive producer of the recent 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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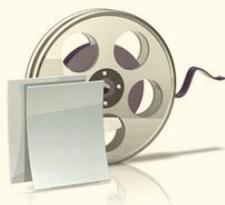
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On Networking

by Marvin V. Acuna

Last night, I had dinner with a group of friends. Beyond the tasty grilled salmon and asparagus, we were engaged in spirited conversation. Of the group, I am the only one vested in the entertainment industry. One of my friends, a scientist, made an offhand remark that the entertainment industry was very challenging because it has nothing to do with talent, but everything to do with "who you know."

While I respect her position and agree personal networking is a crucial ingredient to transforming from aspiring artist to entertainment industry professional, I also believe it's not just "who you know," but how one navigates those connections – and whether one chooses to do so at all.

"People can find their paths as long as they're motivated to do so and able to motivate people to help them. But, no matter how motivated you are, you have to be able to motivate the other person, who can put you in touch with the next person, and the next person has to do it, too," says Duncan Watts, a professor of sociology at Columbia University.

Again, personal networking is instrumental to your career. It's an invaluable tool to identify unique and rare opportunities suited to you, as well as to maximize the value of your current relationships.

Here are three basic guidelines for successful personal networking.

1. Palm Up, Not Palm Down

Networking is not all about what people can do to help you. It's all about mutual benefit.

To start with, you must understand all your strengths and weaknesses. Then always seek opportunities where your abilities contribute enormous value to others. Others will want to be a part of your network if they know that you will add value. And more importantly, your existing relationships will be strengthened if you can consistently add value to those in your network.

2. Do Cool Things

The game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon" rests on the assumption that any actor can be linked through his or her film roles to actor Kevin Bacon, but did you know that Rod Steiger is the best linked actor in Hollywood history?

Rod refused a studio contract and made the conscious choice to play a varied number of roles in numerous films. His tapestry of characters afforded him the opportunity to work with people from all walks of life, resulting in what I refer to as multiple social dimensions.

Do cool things. Do a lot of things. **The result: Your network will include people from all walks of life.**

Personally, I believe the more life experiences you possess, the more interesting **you** become and more importantly, you become a greater asset to others.

Your mission: To be the first person everyone remembers and suggests when others ask, "Do you know anyone who..."

3. Be Proactive

It's your career, so don't wait for others to come to you. If you sit back and wait for others, you're not likely to get much out of networking.

Invite people to get together.

When you travel, let people in your network know and ask them if there is anyone they feel you should meet in that specific city/town.

Network in the online world. You can easily find others with interests similar to yours. Entering the discussions traditionally requires no invitation and takes only minutes at a time.

Implement these three guidelines right away to gain more from your personal networking efforts and to discover new opportunities.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES



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IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

Please submit your work only if it seems like a **perfect fit** for these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with jerrol@inktip.com before submitting it. **Do not contact the production company directly.** Thanks!

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

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

Silver Sword Entertainment

[code: tcqsstxxwy]

We are looking for completed feature-length "magical realism" scripts – something in the vein of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* or *Big Fish*, with real characters in fantastic situations. Submissions should be character-driven material with elements of fantasy and/or spirituality present but not so much as to overpower the story. Please do not submit anything with ghosts, vampires, or other characters/elements from beyond the grave as we are not looking for supernatural stories. This is for someone in her early 40's, so please only submit if one of your lead characters is written specifically for an actress like Julianne Moore or Joan Allen.

Budget will not exceed \$5 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

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

Caruso Visual Productions

[code: 4k09c56dnk]

Our credits include *Tough Love* and *No Angel*. We are looking for completed feature-length limited-location character-driven drama scripts with few speaking roles, written by writers willing to write on spec. The story should be set in 4-to-5 locations at the most. We are only looking for scripts with 3-to-5 principal characters, so please do not submit scripts for a large ensemble cast.

Budget has yet to be determined. Non-WGA writers only.

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

Silver Creek Pictures

[code: 5daqxe1c7p]

Our credits include *CreepTales*. We are looking for completed feature-length ghost story thrillers. The story must be creepy, heavy on story and atmosphere, and light on visual effects – i.e. stories in the vein of *The Sixth Sense* or *The Ring*. Please do not submit gore/torture horror or slashers.

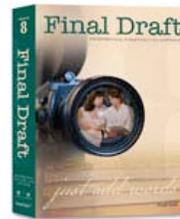
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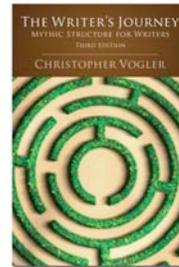
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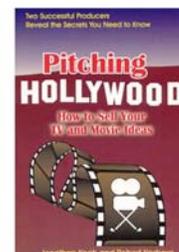
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