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## Letter From the Editor

Spring is in the air, and that means the 2021 PAGE Awards competition is in full swing! Our Late Entry Deadline is just days away, so scale back your scrolling time and step up the writing to finish that draft and send it off by March 15. Helen of Troy may have been the face that launched a thousand ships, but this is a contest that has launched countless careers. Look no farther than the Latest News below to find recent examples of PAGE winners making a name for themselves.

Would you like to learn more about the criteria the judges use to evaluate your script, and find out what you can do to get a leg up both in the contest and the industry? Our [Insiders' Guide to Screenwriting](#) breaks down each element of a spec script, from what the best ones share to what drives readers batty! It spans the nuts and bolts of the biz to pro tips that working writers use to wow reps and buyers. Check it out!

The **LOGLINE** eZine is another great way to stay up to date on the art and craft of screenwriting. This issue begins with 2020 PAGE Gold Prize winner Eileen Alvarez sharing lessons learned on her path from hopeful to represented writer. PAGE Judge Spike Scarberry offers advice on cracking the critical first act of your spec. Script analyst Ray Morton poses four questions every scribe should answer in the early stages of the writing process. Our in-house expert on script format, Dave Trotter, branches out with a discussion of dramatic action. Career coach Lee Jessup helps you assess the true value of reader feedback and what to do with it. Capping things off are a three-pack of "hot leads" from producers, thanks to our good friends at InkTip.

Happy reading,

## Latest News From the PAGE Awards

◆ 2009 Gold Prize winner Rob Sudduth is now a co-executive producer on the NBC series **Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist**, and he wrote the January 26 episode, entitled "Zoey's Extraordinary Employee." Since winning his PAGE Award, Rob has worked as a writer and producer on such shows as **American Princess** (Lifetime), **On My Block** (Netflix), **Telenovela** (NBC), **The Real O'Neals** (ABC), and **The Crazy Ones** (CBS). He is represented by MetaMorphic Entertainment and UTA.

◆ The new feature **Muddy Shoes**, co-written by 2010 Bronze Prize winner Laurie Weltz, is being produced by Ephor Pictures in the U.K. Directed and co-written by Czech filmmaker Patrik Krivanek, the movie features Czech actors Ivan Franek and Eva Holubova in the starring roles. Previously, Laurie's PAGE Award-winning script **About Scout** was produced by PAGE Judge Beverley Gordon and Brownbag Pictures. Laurie directed the film, which starred India Ennenga, Ellen Burstyn, Danny Glover, and James Frecheville.

◆ The sci-fi novel **The Future Is Yours**, written by 2011 PAGE Gold Prize winner Dan Frey and published by Random House, is now in development as an HBO Max original series. Dan will also executive produce the one-hour drama, which is being produced by Matt Reeves (**The Batman**) and Aneesh Chaganty (**Run**) for Warner Bros. TV. Dan is represented by ICM Partners.

◆ More PAGE Award winners getting signed... 2020 Silver Prize winner Craig T. Williams has signed with Sola Fasehun at Fasehun Films. 2008 Gold Prize winner Simeon Goulden has signed with Nick Baron at United Agents. 2015 Silver Prize winner Theo James Krekis is now repped by Francesca Devas at Independent Talent Group. And three-time PAGE Award winner Jeffrey Field and 2018 Silver Prize winner Michelle Davidson have both signed with PAGE Judge Cameron Cubbison at Zero Gravity Management.

**2021 Late Entry Deadline: March 15**

## My Journey to Representation

by Eileen Alvarez

One thing that has become clear to me on this path towards becoming a professional writer is that no two journeys are the same. Each writer's path to getting representation, scoring their first staff-writing job, or selling their first project is as unique as their screenplays. Today I am sharing my own journey, as well as a few things I learned along the way. I hope my story will help you.

### Set an "Impossible" Goal

After years of pounding the pavement as an actor and feeling like I wasn't getting cast in the roles I really wanted to play (smart, assertive, transgressive women), I set out to write and star in a project that would allow me to express my talents and my vision. I wrote, co-directed, and starred in a short film called **Grit**. After seeing how Frankie Shaw's short film **SMILF** won the jury award at Sundance and scored a series deal, I set out to achieve a similar level of success with my film. The goal seemed impossible and insurmountable, but I set it anyway.

Now, **Grit** did not get into Sundance, let alone win it! But what's awesome is that when you set an "impossible goal," even when you miss the bull's-eye the things that **do** happen will often surprise and delight you!

Which brings me to...

### Be Ready

You never know **where** your opportunities are going to come from. At one local festival, I made a fan who was also an assistant to a top literary agent, and she asked if she could set me up with a meeting there. NO DOY! The meeting went great, and the agent loved my film and wanted to see/read what else I had. Not wanting to lose the momentum of the meeting, I told him I'd be happy to send along my accompanying pilot, and I did.

Listen to me when I say that the draft I sent was not ready! **It. Was. Not. Ready!** It needed professional notes, a few more rewrites, and a strong polish. But I sent it anyway, and (spoiler alert) I did not get signed by that agent. When you take the meeting, they will **always** want to see the next thing you have. It will never be enough to have written just one great project. They'll want to make sure it wasn't a fluke. Be ready. I wasn't, and I learned my lesson.

After grieving the loss of that opportunity, I got back in the saddle. I spent the next couple of months working hard on getting that pilot...(say it with me now)...**ready!**

### Do Your Research

Once I felt my pilot script was truly ready, I got to work on research. I compiled a list of literary managers to submit it to, and I listened to interviews with them to get to know them. I do think it's great to start with managers because they are more likely to take on new writers, and they can help you secure a good agent when the time is right. Many managers prefer referrals, so I checked to see if I knew anyone (or anyone who knew anyone) on their roster. I asked for referrals, and I received some. I sent a short, sweet, and targeted digital query letter to a small handful of managers I thought were a good fit for me, and I included a link to my short film **Grit**.

Why did I do that? I think managers are more likely to click a link to watch a 12-minute "award-winning" comedy starring a name actor than read an unsolicited 30–110-page script. And because there are legal implications to sending representatives an unsolicited script, I never sent my pilot during the query process. Instead, I saved it for the inevitable "what are you working on next?" portion of the interview process.

This time I was ready, and my pilot ended up sealing the deal. I received three offers for representation from those manager meetings I had set up, and ultimately signed with a great team who I love and who have been invaluable to my career.

### Get Professional Feedback

Once I began working with my managers, I began writing **Guera**, the script that ended up winning Best Comedy Pilot in the 2020 PAGE Awards. After several drafts of notes from my managers, I sent the script to a writer friend who had graciously offered to give me feedback. And it paid off. Having a really good, solid, second spec pilot along with my first sample was the one-two-punch that got me several general meetings and got me staffed in my first writer's room. Then, with the momentum of placing in PAGE and its awesome partnership with Roadmap Writers, my managers were able to secure me several meetings with literary agencies, and I signed with a great one!

Everyone's writing process is different, but I would encourage you to build a team of skilled professionals (paid or otherwise) that will give you solid notes during your process. If you don't have anyone like that in your circles, then get into a writer's group or invest in a professional script notes service. It's your career; invest in yourself. After all, a huge part of your job as a professional writer is going to be implementing notes anyway, so you may as well get some practice now.

### Trust in the Timing

Don't get discouraged. And even if you do get discouraged, always get back in the saddle. This career takes grit! And you know what? The agency I ultimately ended up signing with is the very same agency I met with two years prior who passed on me, before I was ready. Trust in the timing and know that sometimes a "no" just means "no, for now."

Everybody's journey to representation is unique, and I sincerely hope mine has provided you with a little inspiration! Keep going – you got this!



Eileen Alvarez won the 2020 PAGE Gold Prize for her TV Comedy Pilot *Guera*. Eileen is currently a staff writer on *Close Enough* for HBO Max, and is reppped by Stagecoach Entertainment and The Gersh Agency. She is an alum of UCLA (B.A) and The Actors Studio (M.F.A), as well as a multi-hyphenate Latinx writer, actor, director, and mamacita. You can meet Eileen on socials @\_eileen\_alvarez or learn more at [imdb.me/EileenAlvarez](https://www.imdb.me/EileenAlvarez).

## How to Nail Your First Act

by Spike Scarberry

When the PAGE Awards approached me about writing an article for this issue of **LOGLINE**, initially I wasn't sure if I could do it. Don't get me wrong, I've worked on the development side of the business for nine years and have judged multiple screenwriting contests. "But do you have anything new to say?" I asked myself. "Anything that hasn't been said a thousand times before?" At the time, I didn't think I did...

And then it happened. It dawned on me when I started reading the very first script that I picked up to judge in the 2021 PAGE Awards. And it happened within the first 30 pages. I knew what I was going to write about: The importance of nailing your first act.

Is this a topic that has been talked about before? Yes, at length, many times. And yet it continues to be one of the biggest pitfalls that I see young writers fall into.

At the beginning of their writing journey, many scribes are so focused on the twists in the second act or a shocking reveal in the third that they forget to properly set the stage for those big events. They forget that without a solid basis for the narrative, without a sturdy platform for drama, none of the moments they have planned for later on in the story are going to matter. As a contest judge, if you can't grab my attention by page 30 your "incredible twist" on page 90 isn't going to work, because by then I won't care.

Imagine that you are a real-estate developer and you're building a house that you hope to sell for a profit (much like you want to sell your screenplays). Each level of your building serves a distinct purpose in your quest. But let me ask you this: which is the most important?

Well, in order to entice someone to buy this house, you do need to have a great second floor. The top floor of the home is like the third act of your screenplay, and obviously you're going to need a killer ending in order to make someone write a check for your story. However, you can't have a great ending without an engaging middle (aka a good second act). If you don't have a great second act that keeps the reader interested, they will stop reading before even getting to the third. You can't build the second level without a main floor to support it (Act II), and you can't have either without a solid **foundation** beneath them.

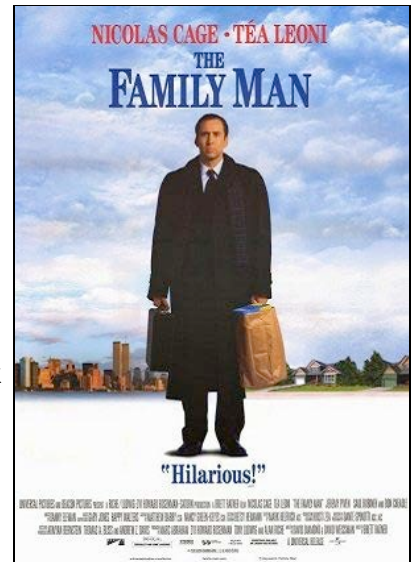
Your home's foundation is equivalent to the first act of your script – if it's strong, then you have the opportunity to build an abode atop it that will stand against the elements. But if the foundation is shaky, then you're wasting your time building the house! No one is going to buy a house with a shaky foundation, and no producer or studio executive is going to produce a screenplay with a first act that doesn't properly pull them in and set up a dynamic narrative.

"Okay, okay," you're probably saying to yourself, "I get it... first acts are important. So how do I nail mine?" I'm so glad you asked. There's a very simple formula you can use when you're outlining your first act, and it comes down to four basic steps:

1. Introduce Your Protagonist in a Clear, Obvious Way.
2. Establish Your Character's "Normal."
3. Insert Some Problem That Disrupts Their Normal.
4. Give Your Character a Specific Goal That Will Solve the Problem and Return Their Life to Normal.

I give this note in contest coverage more than any other. It's a recurring theme in the stories I read. The scripts that incorporate these four steps in the first act almost always hold my interest into the second act, and often the third. But scripts that miss one of those crucial steps will almost always leave me bored before the midpoint. Literally almost every time.

There are endless examples of this formula being used to great success in Hollywood movies. Let's take a look at one. In *The Family Man* (2000), writers David Diamond and David Weissman open the film with a scene showing Jack Campbell (Nicolas Cage) leaving his girlfriend crying at the airport. Then the second scene cuts to



10 years later, when Jack is a successful businessman on Wall Street (Step 1: Introduction of Protagonist). We watch as he walks through his New York high-rise condo, drives to work in his flashy Ferrari, and leads a business meeting with ruthless aggression (Step 2: Establish Your Character's "Normal"). However, when Jack goes to sleep that night, he wakes up not in his fancy condo, but in a middle-class house, with his ex-girlfriend (now wife) draped all over him and two small children running around causing chaos (Step 3: Insert the Problem). The rest of the film follows Jack as he tries to return to his old life. His goal (Step 4) is to return to his "normal," even though the road he is walking will lead him to an entirely different conclusion by the end of the film.

If the screenwriters of this under-appreciated gem of a movie left out even one of the steps I outlined above, the film would not work. Period. Each is absolutely essential for creating a solid basis for a satisfying story.

Study the openings of your favorite films and see if they don't include all of these steps in Act I. Then take a look at your own work. If you are increasingly frustrated that people aren't getting to the "awesome reveals" in your later acts, analyze the beginning of your story to see if it properly draws in your audience first.

Godspeed, and happy writing.



Spike (not his real name, his parents aren't that cool) likes long walks on the beach, candlelight dinners, and dynamic storytelling in all forms. His earliest memory is as a 6-year-old child, watching Luke blow up the Death Star. In this moment he fell in love with cinema and vowed to make it in Hollywood one day. Spike has spent over a decade working alongside storytellers, helping them hone their craft. His favorite films are *Saving Private Ryan*, *Dead Poet's Society*, and *How to Train Your Dragon*.



## Can You Answer These Four Key Questions?

by Ray Morton

There are key elements that form the foundation of every dramatic narrative. If you're going to construct a successful story, these elements must be firmly in place early in your writing process, because without them your story won't gel. Therefore, as you write, you must ask and answer these four questions:

### 1. What is my premise?

The premise is the core concept of your story. There are actually three facets to a premise that you need to decide upon:

**The conceptual premise:** Is this a straight story, or is it a spoof or a satire?

**The narrative premise:** The core story idea (e.g., a shark attacks a New England beach town; an idealistic veteran gets sucked into his family's life in organized crime; an alien with incredible abilities comes to Earth and becomes a superhero).

**The thematic premise:** What is the point you're making with this tale?

### 2. What story am I telling?

A premise can be developed in many different ways. For example, if your premise is "an idealistic veteran gets sucked into his family's life in organized crime," the man could join the family business willingly, perhaps because he believes he can influence the family to go straight. He could join unwillingly, because his father dies and the only way he can save the family is by taking over. He could join as an undercover operative for the FBI on a mission to gather evidence against the family. He could do this willingly, perhaps because the family mistreated him in some way, or because the authorities threaten him or someone he loves. Or he could pretend to be working undercover for the FBI but in the end reveal that he is a double agent and has been loyal to his family all along.

All of these are legitimate directions in which to develop a narrative based on that basic premise, and each one has the potential to generate great scenes and great drama. However, while these various approaches all have elements in common they are all completely different approaches, each with different narrative arcs, central conflicts, themes, protagonists, antagonists, climaxes, and resolutions. Which means that to develop a coherent narrative from your premise, you must choose one of these approaches and discard the rest.

Unfortunately, many new writers have difficulty doing this. Reluctant to let go of potentially great scenes and drama the various approaches can generate, they will instead attempt to develop a story that incorporates several into a single narrative. The result is often an unfocused, incoherent mishmash. Perhaps more than anything else, you must choose **one** story to tell before you begin writing.

### 3. What is the genre of the story I'm telling?

All stories belong to a genre and all genres have specific elements that must be incorporated into the story in some way (if only by spoofing or subverting them). If those elements are not incorporated, then the story does not belong to that genre. You will sometimes see stories identified as being a mix of genres – e.g., a dramedy, a horror-comedy, an action-thriller, etc. But most are constructed in accordance with the tenets of only one of those genres, with certain elements heightened in ways that suggest the other genre. For example, most horror-comedies are constructed like a horror movie and contain all of those traditional elements, except that some are addressed in a humorous fashion.

Producers and studios tend to hate true mixed-genre scripts because they don't know how to market them. So if you want your script to be looked upon favorably by potential buyers, it's important to be clear about what genre it belongs to.

### 4. What is the ending?

The single most important part of a dramatic narrative is the ending. This is where the major plot strands come together, mysteries are solved, and plot twists pay off. It's where the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist is resolved and the protag either achieves their goal or doesn't. It's where the story makes its thematic point. All of the elements in the script's first two acts will lead inevitably to its third, so that the ending will work out properly and have the desired impact. This cannot be done if you don't know what ending you are working toward. Therefore you have to decide where you're going before you start out on the trip. At the outset you don't have to know every detail of how you're going to get to that ending, but you do have to know if you're headed for New York or Arizona.

Not every writer will answer all of these questions before they start a first draft – instead, they opt to discover the answers as they write. This is fine – everyone has a different process – as long as the questions are answered before the final draft.



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](mailto:ray@raymorton.com) and follow him on Twitter @RayMorton1.

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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](http://www.keepwriting.com).

For \$20 off your script evaluation, email Dave at: [dave@keepwriting.com](mailto:dave@keepwriting.com).

## The Importance of “Dramatic Action”

by Dave Trottier

### READER'S QUESTION:

Your reference on page 207 of *The Screenwriter's Bible* (7<sup>th</sup> edition) shows you are insensitive to abused persons. Why?

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

Thanks for asking, and rest assured that I know enough people who have been abused that my heart goes out to those who so suffer. The anecdote in the book is not about abuse at all, but about a common problem I see in scripts that lack drama and feature a passive protagonist. On page 207 I mention a client's script where the central character complained about being abused by her husband for 90 pages but took no action. Finally, a neighbor rescued her (a *deus ex machina* ending).

The script was autobiographical, and my client gave me written permission to share what she wrote and to also tell her story. In my script evaluation, I told her the main issue was the character was not volitional and thus, there was no real drama. **Dramatic action** is when a character takes willful action against opposition where the outcome is important. In the case of this script the outcome was important and there was definitely an opposition, but there was no willful action.

My client was thrilled with the evaluation and dug into the revision. Most importantly, the experience of writing the revision was liberating to her because she was telling **her** story, and she discovered that giving her character the “will to act” (rather than just complain) was very therapeutic for her personally. In particular, it was empowering to change the script's *deus ex machina* ending so the protagonist solved her own problem through dramatic action.

The result was that she also took action in her personal life. Over the years, I have noticed that resolving writing blocks often helps resolve life blocks.

I'm sorry if you were offended by the example. I was focused on making an important point about screenwriting. Please don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Utilize what you can!

### READER'S QUESTION:

Everyone says my main character is not very dramatic. What can I do?

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

I'll illustrate the principle of dramatic action with an example:

Running Bear is a Sioux warrior hunting buffalo on the wide prairie in the 1800s. This is action. The buffalo are the opposition. That's only good as far as it goes, so how can we convert this into a more dramatic action?

Suppose the white settler's son is in the buffalo's path. The white man is Running Bear's enemy, but now Running Bear must make a decision that will reveal his true character. He decides to save the boy. Now the outcome is more important. This is dramatic!

Okay, let's take it one step further. The boy's father looks through the window and sees his son and the buffalo; then to his horror, he sees his enemy, Running Bear. He thinks Running Bear is trying to kill his son. He grabs his rifle and races outside. Now the outcome is even more important.

### READER'S QUESTION:

Can dialogue be action?

### DAVE'S ANSWER:

Yes, if it moves the story forward, creates dramatic conflict, or motivates action. I'll give you an example:

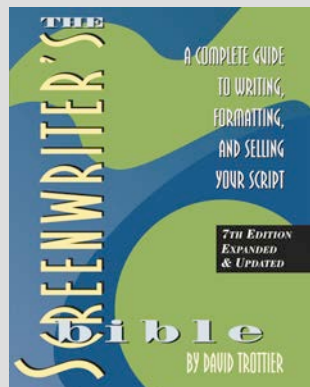
In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Darth Vader reveals to Luke, “Luke, I am your father.” I see that as Darth Vader's willful action against opposition (Luke) where the outcome is important (what will Luke do now?).

Your job is to take action (write) against opposition (distractions, blocks, fears), where the outcome is important (finishing your script). Good luck and keep writing!

**Dave Trottier's**

## “The Screenwriter's Bible”

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## Script Notes: Take 'Em or Leave 'Em?

by Lee Jessup

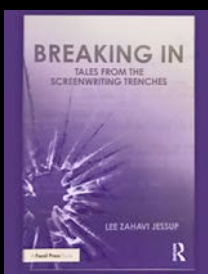


Author of the best-selling books [Getting It Write](#) and [Breaking In: Tales From the Screenwriting Trenches](#), Lee Jessup is a career coach for professional and emerging screenwriters. Her clients include writers who have sold pilots, pitches and specs; staffed television writers; participants in 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](http://leejessup.com).

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



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Getting notes and feedback on your screenplay or TV pilot can run from exciting to downright debilitating. Notes from other writers whose craft you respect, consultants, readers, and screenwriting instructors should help you, in one way or another, make your script undeniably better. But that doesn't mean that every note will be a sound one, or one that you must implement. After all, if you incorporate every note you receive you will end up with a Frankenstein's monster of a screenplay, full of contradictions and challenges.

Knowing how to distill the notes you receive is incredibly important if we want them to ultimately help you arrive at a better version of your work.

### Do the notes take your script in the wrong direction?

Writers not well versed in script analysis and feedback may give you notes that speak to how they themselves would write the story you are trying to tell. You must discern which notes would be most effective in improving the story you want to tell, as opposed to the notes that steer you away from your story and instead towards another writer's sensibilities.

Discard notes that take your material in a vastly different direction – a direction you never intended to take. It doesn't mean they are not good notes; they simply develop your material in a way that doesn't speak to your voice, vision, or story sensibilities. Not everyone will agree with your choices and storytelling style. This is a business of opinion, and most scripts will not be liked by everyone. **However** – and this is a big one – if you continue to get the same note again and again from more than one person, it's important that you consider the note and why you continue to receive it. It could mean that something is fundamentally not working in the material, and therefore requires your attention, even if you end up addressing the note in a way different than how the note-giver originally suggested.

### Do you find their fix annoying?

It's important to know what the detractors may say, consider those notes, and open yourself up to the possibility that you may hear those same notes again as you seek to gain attention and traction for your work in the professional space. As long as the choice you made is a conscious one that you are willing to continue to stand by, stick to your guns.

You may also get notes that offer an irritating, potentially ill-advised fix, but you still feel as though there's something there. This requires that you look for the "note behind the note," identifying the problem the note-giver is citing with this fix. Consider how to best use this note to strengthen your script, even though it might not be obvious at first.

### Take your time with your notes.

Never take a note and just slap it onto the page. Take the time required to think it through, consider its ramifications, and really bake it into the work. I always get a bit nervous when a writer tells me that even though the notes they received were substantial, it will take only a few days, maybe a week, to implement them. What that tells me, in most cases and specifically with less experienced writers, is that they are not taking the time required to make the note their own and therefore it is not likely to really further the script's development, as its application will be surface-level. More often than not this turns out to be the case when notes are implemented with haste.

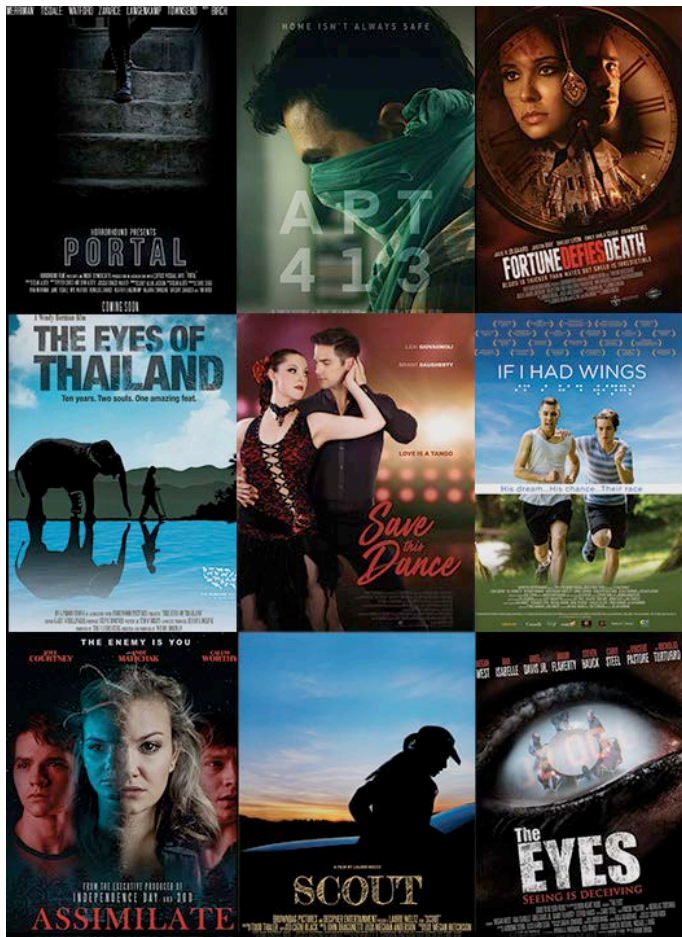
### Remember, it's your screenplay!

When developing with creative partners such as a manager or producer, it's their notes you have to adhere to above all, as it will be their role to take the material further once it's arrived at its very best shape. But when it comes to original content, you are responsible for everything that makes it onto, and is kept on, the page. You are the one who has to stand behind every word, line, page, scene, sequence, act, and character in your work. The script will bear your name, which means that the end product is reflective of your vision, voice, interest, and story sense. Therefore, don't take a note just because you think the note-giver knows better, without truly understanding the note and how to use it to enhance the story you're telling.

Ultimately, it's up to you to decide which notes to take and which to discard as you strive to make your script the sort of project that will cut through the noise and get your writing the attention it deserves.



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3. Copy/paste the corresponding code. You'll then be able to submit your work directly to InkTip's producers.
4. **IMPORTANT:** Please submit your work only if it fits these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with [jerrold@inktip.com](mailto:jerrold@inktip.com) before submitting.

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### Company B: Seeking Sci-Fi Scripts

We are looking for smart sci-fi scripts with a bit of action (but no vehicles) and minimal cast/locations, ideally to shoot in the California desert (scripts in the vein of *Stalker*, *The Signal*, *IO*, etc.).

Budget under \$1M. 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 C: Seeking High-Concept Comedies

We are looking for high-concept comedy scripts in the style of John Hughes with mass-audience appeal and high commercial value, e.g., *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* or other Steve Martin comedies such as *All of Me*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *The Man With Two Brains*, *The Three Amigos* and *The Jerk*.

Budget TBD. WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

To find out about this company and submit a query:

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