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In this issue:

[A Brief Look at Solid
Screenplay Structure](#)
John Evans

1

[The Writer's Perspective](#)
Making It, Breaking It and
Somewhere in Between
Troy Taylor

2

[The Judge's P.O.V.](#)
They Don't Call It "Tell"
Business, Do They?
Scott Honea

3

[What's Your Genre?](#)
Writing True Stories:
The Informant!
John Truby

4

[Spec Writing Tips](#)
Reaching Readers
Dave Trotter

5

[Industry Insider](#)
The Genius of the "and"
Marvin V. Acuna

6

[Sell Your Script](#)
Hot Leads
from InkTip

7

Letter from the Editor

As producers and representatives discover the wealth of writing talent honored in the 2009 PAGE Awards season, our Judges and staff are gearing up for the 2010 competition. We can't wait to get started!

This issue of *LOGLINE* begins with my overview of sound screenplay structure. 2008 Gold Prize winner Troy Taylor examines his career in a new light and PAGE Awards Judge Scott Honea demonstrates the principle of "show, don't tell" in action. Tackling the popular but tricky genre of memoirs/true stories, John Truby reveals lessons to be learned from *The Informant!* Dave Trotter gives bad writing an overhaul for style and readability while producer Marvin V. Acuna asks you to embrace the market and your art. And, as always, we dish up the latest leads from script buyers, courtesy of InkTip.com!

Happy reading,



A Brief Look at Solid Screenplay Structure

by John Evans

Early in the year, I asked our readers which aspect of screenwriting posed the biggest challenge to you. "Structure" won by a landslide. Check out my article in our [May/June issue](#) for a list of expert resources to draw upon, but this absurdly brief rundown features fundamentals that will never let you down.

The First 10 Hook

By the end of your first 10 pages, pose an intriguing question that "hooks" your reader's interest. Wanting to get the answer to that question will keep us turning pages. This question is often the **inciting incident** – the plot event that sets the whole story in motion – but it can also be a subtler, more character-based moment, such as a life-changing decision. Establish a compelling goal for the protagonist (or a strong fear) and the reader makes an emotional investment in the outcome. We'll want to find out what happens.

Act I Break / Plot Point 1

Around page 30, Act I must end with one of the plot's key events, an unexpected shift that sets the story moving in a new direction. It's a mini-climax, the peak moment of Act I and a critical transition. When a story moves relentlessly in one direction, it almost inevitably becomes monotonous. This story-transforming event allows Act II to take characters and audience into an interesting new space. But it can be as simple as the protag realizing just **how** to achieve that compelling goal established before.

Midpoint Turn / Point of No Return

Halfway through the script, there is a fulcrum moment that obviously and irrevocably redirects the storyline. Perhaps the protag sees he/she was going about everything the wrong way, or only now fully commits. The second half is a march toward the climax that begins **here**. One story arc closes and another begins. This is often an extreme: it either seems that all is lost, or the problem is solved. Either way, appearances are deceiving. The stakes are raised and the pressure on the protag intensifies.

Act II Break / Plot Point 2

The dramatic intensity of the Act III scenario is always greatly heightened, and this key plot event sets the table for it. As the story's rising action builds throughout Act II, the audience senses a boiling point is near but the plot event that sets up Act III should still come as a surprise. As with the others, this story turn shouldn't take us exactly where we expected to go, but it always presents a powerful dramatic question to be resolved. This is usually a different question than the **First 10 Hook**, but there is a compelling symmetry to coming full circle, especially if the story has ranged far enough afield in between.

Climax

The lynchpin of Act III is a sequence or series of sequences that provide the script's dramatic crescendo. The **Climax** crystallizes the conflict that has driven the story thus far into one decisive scenario resolving the key dramatic questions that have kept us turning pages from the beginning.

Keep these principles in mind while plotting your screenplay and it's sure to take the reader on a true journey, which every movie should be.

Making It, Breaking It, and Somewhere in Between

by Troy Taylor

Years ago, when I wasn't much more than a chubby kid with grass-stained jeans and stars in his eyes, I made a decision. I sat down in front of the green and black screen of the "text editor" on my "personal computer" and wrote three lines:

Screenwriter Troy Taylor is based in Melbourne, Australia. He won a 2008 PAGE Awards Gold Prize for his eerie thriller *The Memory Shelf*. Executive Rob Neilson of Etch Media read the screenplay and became a fan of Troy's writing. Neilson then optioned Troy's next script, the low-budget sci-fi / horror feature *The Eleven*.

One day I will be a screenwriter

One day I will make movies

One day I will have made it

I read the words over and over, took in each character again and again. I felt like I'd uncovered some ancient secret inside the words – something hiding in the space between each line. I had made a decision: I was going to "make it." I printed the document, folded it neatly and slipped it into my desk drawer, where it would remain for more than a decade.

After spending years researching screenplay structure and form, I finished the first draft of my script *The Memory Shelf*. As my printer spat out the last page of the screenplay, I found the note I'd typed up all those years before. I read it back to myself a few times and was amazed that the same spark was still there. There was still magic in those words. But, as I read it, I realized that just having written a screenplay wasn't enough. I still hadn't "made it." I needed to do more.

That's when I came across the PAGE Awards website. Something about the idea of entering a competition, rather than sending out query letters en masse, felt good to me. I figured that if by some long shot, I won – or even made it to the finals – maybe I wouldn't need to send out query letters. Maybe people would come looking for me.

It was a naive mindset. The chances of placing highly were slim enough. But to then assume that high caliber professionals would actually come to me to request a copy of my screenplay? Crazy. Impossible.

But that's exactly what happened.

I watched with bated breath as *The Memory Shelf* progressed through the First Round, into the Quarter-Finals, then the Semi-Finals, then the Finals, until finally, while riding on a ferry somewhere between Ellis Island and Manhattan, struggling to get a decent cell signal, I discovered I'd won a Gold Prize. I was flabbergasted.

Soon after the win, I started getting requests from top producers, agents and managers. I didn't have to try to convince them to read the script – they wanted to read it!

I was on top of the world. I'd won a Gold Prize in a major screenwriting competition, I had people reading my screenplay and I was able to list my script on great websites like [InkTip](#) for free. But still, still, I knew I hadn't "made it."

So, with the buzz of my win still very much in my mind, and still receiving daily requests to read *The Memory Shelf*, I jumped into writing my next script, *The Eleven*. The very minute it was finished, I began sending copies out to everyone who had read and responded positively to *The Memory Shelf*. And when Rob Neilson from Etch Media told me he loved *The Eleven* and asked to option it, things could not possibly have looked any brighter.

But still, there was this niggling sensation - something pulling at me. Sure, I'd optioned a script. Sure, I was averaging a few screenwriting-related emails a day. But I still hadn't "made it." I opened the note once more and stared at it for a long time before making another decision. I folded it up again, ever so carefully, and then proceeded to tear it up into tiny pieces.

I had set myself a goal and I was striving to achieve it. But the goal I'd set was not right. I realized that, like life, screenwriting is not about the destination, but the journey. If I kept shooting for that far-off destination – kept aiming to "make it" – I was never really going to get there.

And so today, with some great competition wins under my belt, an optioned screenplay that will hopefully go into production next year and several new projects in the works, I take the time to enjoy the space in between the achievements. Because, at the end of the day, I've come to realize that "making it" is all about doing it.

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They Don't Call It "Tell" Business, Do They?

by Scott Honea

As a judge for the PAGE Awards, I've had the pleasure of reading hundreds of your screenplays. One of the most interesting aspects of reading such a large number of entries is that I am able to discover patterns that occur from script to script. Recently, I've noticed there's one issue in particular that

Scott Honea relocated from Texas to Los Angeles in 2006 after landing an internship at Niad Management, a boutique literary management company. For the past three years, he has worked as a reader for a number of production companies and has had projects set up at Code Entertainment and Madhouse Entertainment. He began producing his first feature film in November.

plagues a high percentage of contest scripts – "telling" instead of "showing."

Remember in kindergarten when you brought your favorite stuffed animal to school for "show and tell?" Well, in screenwriting there is the eternal axiom, "Show, don't tell." Translation: Don't include information in your script that can't be seen on screen. If it's not an image, onscreen text or a line of dialogue, then the viewing audience won't know it.

A lot of new writers make the mistake of attempting to tell characters' whole back stories when first introducing them (i.e., BOBBY FANCY is an alcoholic, 44-year-old flamenco dancer from the Bronx with two kids and a bad relationship with his father). While this is all fascinating and potentially pertinent information, the only way to literally convey it in the character's onscreen introduction would be if Bobby were seen flamenco dancing down a street in the Bronx while drinking a beer and wearing a t-shirt that proclaims "I have two kids and a bad relationship with my father." Wow, talk about expository!

A screenplay is a unique beast in that it's essentially a blueprint composed of just two types of information – action and dialogue. These are the only two outlets you have to give information to the reader. And yet, with only these limited tools at your disposal, you are tasked to give the reader a compelling story with interesting, complicated characters while making them feel something emotionally. Not a simple task by any means, but it can be done!

Let's take a look at a few examples of well-written introductions that effectively "show" us exactly who the characters are.

There is some quiet murmuring. The name Fischer is repeated over and over. The boys begin to look at a student in the back row.

Unlike his classmates, he wears the Rushmore school blazer with insignia on the breast pocket and a Rushmore rep tie knotted tightly. His hair is smartly parted and swept back. He is extremely skinny and pale. He is MAX FISCHER.

Max has a cup of coffee on his desk and he is reading the Wall Street Journal.

MR. ADAMS
Max? You want to try it?

Max looks up.

MAX
I'm sorry. Did someone say my name?

In this example, the introduction of our protagonist in *Rushmore* (1998, screenplay by Wes Anderson and Owen C. Wilson), we learn the following things about Max:

1. He is a student at a prep school.
2. He thinks very highly of himself.
3. He is very well read and mature beyond his years (the *Wall Street Journal* and coffee signify this).
4. He thinks he's too smart to even pay attention in class.
5. He has delusions of grandeur.

Anderson and Wilson are able to get across all this valuable information merely by showing us Max sitting at his desk in a classroom.

A REAL HORSE...

Jumping over a real fence. (TEN YEARS LATER)

JOHNNY "RED" POLLARD is sixteen now, and he looks just as graceful as he did when he was a kid. The promise of it all has bloomed in his sure hands, set jaw, perfectly still head as he glides over the jump in a beautiful moment of flight.

In this example from Gary Ross's screenplay for *Seabiscuit* (2003), what works so well about the protagonist's introduction is that Ross finds a way to not only show how Johnny has grown physically over ten years ("set jaw, sure hands"), but also how his riding skills have matured ("perfectly still head as he glides over the jump.") And he manages to do both of these things in a very succinct and poetic paragraph that is entirely based in action.

My final example is the introduction of the lead in *Atonement* (2007, screenplay by Christopher Hampton).

INT. BRIONY'S BEDROOM, TALLIS HOUSE - DAY

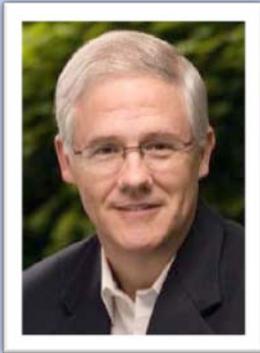
The doll's house is kept in BRIONY'S bedroom. At 13, she's the youngest of the family, an intense-looking child with a willful temperament.

Her room is meticulously tidy, with model animals arranged with military precision, all facing in the same direction, two by two, as if queuing for the Ark.

What the writer is doing here is revealing Briony's character not only by her description, but also by her surroundings. It is easy to see that this is no ordinary child, as very few 13-year-olds keep a tidy bedroom, let alone one that is meticulously decorated with "military precision." And though he does tell us that she has a "willful temperament," this cheat is okay because in the following sentence he shows us exactly why.

It isn't easy, but visual character intros are the mark of a professional and well worth the effort. So the next time you feel the temptation to introduce a character like this: "OLIVER SIMMONS is a narcoleptic bus driver from Alabama who never learned to read," remember that there's always a better way to present this information to the reader. Show, don't tell!

WHAT'S YOUR GENRE?



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his 22-Step Great Screenwriting and Genre courses to sold-out audiences in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Sydney, Rome, Toronto and other far-flung locales. Over the past 20 years, more than 30,000 students have taken Truby's 22-Step class and rave about the insights and direction it has given them. He is also the author of *"The Anatomy of Story."* Booklist declares, "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, just visit www.truby.com

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Writing True Stories: *The Informant!*

by John Truby

Spoiler alert: this breakdown of the movie's structure contains information about its plot.

Mixing genres has been the central storytelling strategy in Hollywood for at least 20 years. You simply have to write a script with multiple genres if you want any chance of selling it. *The Informant!* is a great example of what can go wrong if you don't choose the right genres and don't mix your genres the right way.

Before adapting the original book into a screenplay, the writer and director were faced with one of the three biggest decisions you must make in the entire writing process: what genres will we use to tell this story? The book recounts a famous case of corporate crime at the Archer-Daniel-Midlands Company in the early 1990s. So clearly the primary genre of this film is True Story, with strong elements of crime drama and thriller as well.

In my [Memoir & True Stories Class](#), I talk about the obstacles, techniques and unique story beats of this increasingly popular form. One of the biggest obstacles is that true stories often lack a natural build. They typically cover many years, which tends to flatten the storyline. In structure terms, true stories are usually missing the **battle step**, the final conflict where the winner of the goal is finally determined. This causes the writer trouble all the way down the line. With nothing to build to, the storyline collapses into episodic moments.

If the writer and director of *The Informant!* had simply told a crime-thriller true story, they could have used a number of techniques to overcome this basic obstacle and probably would have made a pretty good film. But they didn't. Instead they chose to add one more genre to the mix, comedy. With that choice they practically guaranteed failure. And even a terrific comic performance by Matt Damon couldn't save them.

Telling a true story as a comedy exacerbates the genre's lack of a natural build. Comedy is experienced in explosive moments. Every time a character is punctured or abused, either in a visual gag or a comic line of dialogue, the audience (hopefully) laughs. But each laugh also temporarily halts the narrative drive. This is why it's so important for any comedy writer to know which of the eight comic story structures they are using. The comic structure is what allows you to build the story to a climax and overcome the narrative-killing power of the jokes.

The writer of *The Informant!* seems unaware of the deeper structural challenges posed by combining the comedy and true story genres, which is why this film has a promising start and goes inexorably downhill from there. Cheerfully optimistic family man Mark Whitacre (Damon) is a Vice President at Archer-Daniel-Midlands who cooperates with the FBI to uncover a mole sabotaging and blackmailing the company. The stakes quickly jump when Mark informs the FBI that ADM is also part of a worldwide price-fixing scheme.

You've probably noticed two big problems with this opening. First, the stakes start at a very high level. Given that most true stories lack a clear and strong battle scene, the story likely has nowhere to go but down. Second, there isn't a lot of comic potential in this set-up. The main opponents – the ADM executives – are a pretty bland bunch. The FBI agents also lack the inflated ego necessary for comedy. Which leaves our hero, Mark, the informant of the title. Because he is a scam artist to the audience as well as to the other characters, he remains a cipher for most of the story. That makes it very hard for the writer to puncture his pretentious bubble to get laughs. Instead of being a character clearly puffing himself up, he seems like an ordinary guy under assault from his more powerful foes. That's not funny.

Of course, Mark is a puffed-up egotist who is only out for himself. But that only becomes clear toward the end of the story as we discover the scams this man has pulled. It's too little, too late, and even here the writer commits a classic mistake. Each new revelation is about how much money the hero has stolen, from \$2 million to \$5M to \$9M to \$11M. Boosting the storyline by boosting the money never works, because all you're doing is adding numbers, piling abstraction on top of abstraction. Numbers have no emotional meaning to the audience. Even worse, just adding numbers kills your plot, because it's essentially the same beat. This mistake, combined with the tendency of true stories to have no real battle step causes this film to collapse long before the predictable last scene.

The Informant! may not be a very good movie. But it is useful to us screenwriters for the lessons it teaches. Many of the obstacles to writing a comic true story are found here. More importantly, the film shows how crucial it is that you choose the right genres to mix at the very beginning of the writing process. Most writers don't realize that nine out of 10 premise lines should never be written as scripts. Not because most premises are unoriginal, but because the genres you will have to combine to tell the story will only produce a story mess.

Bottom line: this comic true story of corporate crime should never have been a movie.

Reaching Readers

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I've heard that executives and readers don't read narrative description, only dialogue. Is this accurate? If so, what's the best way to convey the action of the screenplay?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

You have named two very different types of readers. A reader (or story analyst) is someone paid (usually a pittance) to read scripts and write coverage. Coverage consists of a two-page synopsis, an evaluation of the script and the story analyst's recommendations. In order to write coverage, the story analyst must read both the narrative description and the dialogue.

An executive, agent or producer usually does not read a script unless the coverage is favorable, in which case they may read the script, or portions thereof, to see if they agree with the opinion of the reader. Some Hollywood types read only the dialogue, some read just a few pages of the script, and some read everything. Some have law backgrounds, MBAs or otherwise little experience with screenplay form. Others have been in the business their entire lives.

In any case, you want to write narrative that's lean. When any reader sees big blocks of black ink, he or she is likely to black out. Write description that presents clear images and clear actions. Only include what is necessary to move the story forward. Generally, each paragraph of narration should focus on one main image or one beat of action, without exceeding four lines.

Let's whittle down a poorly written narrative while also describing specific images and actions.

Version 1 (poorly written):

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

We see the skyline of New York from a train. Painted on the side of it are the words Brooklyn Railroad. It's gray and going very fast.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Inside the train are all kinds of commuters. They are from every age and ethnic group and they fill the train car clean up. They are all headed to work in New York City as can be plainly seen from their working clothes. A bunch of them cannot find seats and must stand. One of them is SALLY STANWICK, who has piercing blue eyes and long, flowing locks of blonde hair. She is in her mid twenties and is wearing a silk blouse with a pink sweater over it and a plain black cotton skirt. She senses someone behind her and turns to see a young man giving her the eye and smiling at her in a very peculiar way.

Version 2 (better):

EXT. NEW YORK CITY COMMUTER LINE - DAY

A speeding silver train races down the tracks towards Manhattan.

A sign on the train reads: "BROOKLYN RAILROAD."

INT. TRAIN - DAY

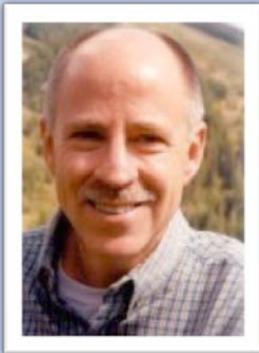
Working professionals crowd the train car. Some stand.

Among them is SALLY STANWICK, 25, pretty in a simple cotton dress. She turns abruptly, sensing someone's stare.

A young man in a suit greets her with a smug smile.

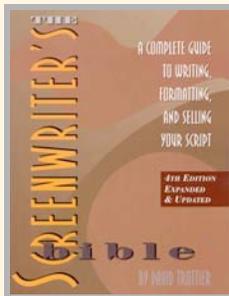
Version 2 is not brilliant writing, but it serves our purposes. The first two images are the train and sign, establishing departure location and destination. The third image is of the people in the train car. The fourth paragraph describes a character and her action. I omit Sally's eye and hair color to keep casting options open. I give her a simple cotton dress as a way to comment on her character — this is an uncomplicated young woman. The fifth paragraph describes the actions of the second character.

Dialogue and narrative description should be lean and move the story forward. This will help your career move forward as well. So... keep writing!



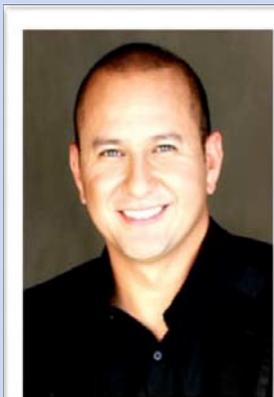
Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. His book "The Screenwriter's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

Dave Trottier's "The Screenwriter's Bible"



With a wealth of information in a single indispensable guide, "[The Screenwriter's Bible](#)" provides you with crystal clear explanations of script formatting and screenwriting fundamentals, including dozens of useful worksheets, checklists, marketing advice, sample query letters, and the latest on the new spec style. The one book every aspiring screenwriter must own.

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Marvin V. Acuna recently executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Tom Hanks, and Colin Hanks), *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), while producing *Touched* (Jenna Elfman) and *How Did It Feel* (Blair Underwood). To receive a copy of Hollywood's "Most Valuable e-Newsletter" for FREE, sign up for *The Screenwriter's Success Newsletter* at www.TheBusinessofShowInstitute.com "The No. 1 Online Information Hub for Screenwriters on the Business... of Show Business."

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The Genius of the "and"

by Marvin V. Acuna

Famed marketing professional Gary Halbert would often ask the following of audiences at his various speaking events:

"If you and I both owned a hamburger stand and we were in a contest to see who could sell the most hamburgers, what advantages would you most like to have on your side to help you win?"

The answers varied. Some audience members would say they would choose superior meat from which to make their burgers. Others wanted sesame seed buns. Others would mention location. Someone always wanted to be able to offer the lowest prices. And so on.

In any case, after the audience finished telling Halbert which advantages they would most like to have, he'd usually respond with something like this:

"Okay, I'll give you every single advantage you've asked for. I myself only want one advantage. If you give it to me, when it comes to selling burgers I'll beat the pants off all of you!"

"What advantage do you want?" the audience would ask.

"The only advantage I want," he'd reply, drawing it out... *"Is... A starving crowd!"*

Think about it. This makes sense, right?

So when it comes to your screenwriting business, the most profitable habit you can cultivate is the habit of understanding what the market needs.

Yet, for some reason, I often encounter screenwriters who draw the line in the sand. They say something like "Talent will prevail, a true artist makes his own market" or "I'm an artist, not a businessperson."

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that you discard any regard or respect for your craft. Nor should you simply become a drone and, as one screenwriter put it, "dance to the tune of the studios." I am suggesting that you both develop your talent **and** know the market's needs. There is power, **tremendous power**, in doing both. You don't have to be one or the other. There are too many examples of screenwriters who manage to do both successfully. Very successfully!

Authors James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras devoted a section of their famed nonfiction book *Built to Last* to what they called "the tyranny of the or." The authors believe that "the tyranny of the or" pushes people to believe that things must be either **A or B**, but not both. They suggest that instead of being oppressed, you liberate yourself with "**the genius of the and**" – the ability to embrace both extremes of a number of dimensions, at the same time.

So the next time you are ready to beat the drum of "I am simply an artist, hear me roar!" consider these comments by **liberated** screenwriters about their **hit movies** – people who exercised "the genius of the and" in films that satisfied the needs of both art and commerce:

Neill Blomkamp, writer/director of *District 9*:

"There's a lot about this film that's very subconscious and just in the fabric of me, and Apartheid and the segregation in Johannesburg is how I grew up." ([Read more](#))

Christopher Nolan, writer/director of *Memento*:

"...I don't consider myself to be an "art" film-maker at all." ([Read more](#))

James Cameron, writer/director of *The Terminator*:

"I was just working out my childhood stuff..." ([Read more](#))

Finally, I leave you with the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald...

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES



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IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

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HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

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

Leo Films

[code: ys27055w84]

We are looking for completed feature-length scripts with a rural setting that were written within the last year. Submissions can be in any genre as long as the story takes place on a farm, in the boondocks, small town or any other non-big city environment. We are specifically looking for something that could be shot in Iowa. Please do not submit something we've already seen and reviewed.

This is a low-budget project. WGA or non-WGA may submit.

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

Liaison Entertainment

[code: z1nt9krnag]

We are looking for completed, feature-length romantic comedies set at a beach resort. Specifically, we are looking for scripts that can be shot at a resort in Dubai. This project will be PG or PG-13, so please do not submit anything with nudity or graphic sex scenes. Our credits include *Kickin It Old Skool*.

Budget will not exceed \$5 million. WGA or non-WGA may submit.

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

Galactic Films

[code: jz10acp3ck]

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We are looking for completed feature-length contemporary dramas based on true events no less recent than the 1950s. The subject matter should center on unknown or misunderstood social or political issues. The setting must be primarily in the United States. It must be factual and well researched. Please only submit if you have obtained the rights to tell the story. Examples of stories that meet our criteria are *All the President's Men*, *Milk*, *Goodnight and Good Luck*, *Frost/Nixon* and *Erin Brockovich*.

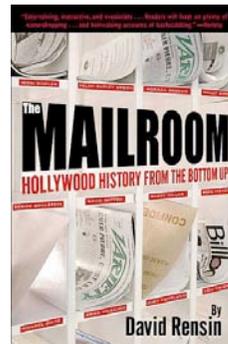
Budget will not exceed \$1 million. WGA or non-WGA may submit.

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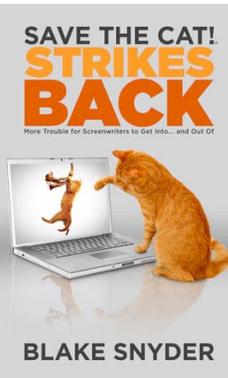
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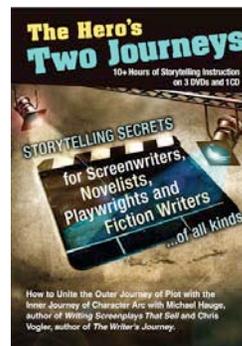


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