

# LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

March / April 2010  
Volume 3: Number 2

Published by:

The PAGE International  
Screenwriting Awards  
7510 Sunset Blvd. #610  
Hollywood, CA 90046  
[www.pageawards.com](http://www.pageawards.com)

## In this issue:

- [Everything You've Heard is Wrong: How to REALLY Sneak into the Biz](#) **1**  
*Bill Grundfest*
- [The Writer's Perspective We Want Answers: Paying off the All-Important Dramatic Question](#) **2**  
*Michael Coleman*
- [The Judge's P.O.V. What Your Script Must Do to Open Doors](#) **3**  
*John Evans*
- [What's Your Genre? Writing the Mythic Movie: Avatar](#) **4**  
*John Truby*
- [Spec Writing Tips Wrestling with Action Description](#) **5**  
*Dave Trotter*
- [Industry Insider Money, Money, Money!](#) **6**  
*Marvin V. Acuna*
- [Sell Your Script Hot Leads from InkTip](#) **7**
- [Recommended Resources](#) **8**

## Letter from the Editor

Baseball season and the late deadline for the 2010 PAGE Awards are close at hand! The big day is April 1 (no foolin') so you have the rest of this month to get your script(s) ready for the majors. And to give yourself the best shot at "making it to the show," take advantage of our Judges' wealth of expertise – they are working Hollywood – and order Feedback with your entry. You'll be glad you did!

Now, **LOGLINE** is back with another hard-hitting lineup... Batting leadoff is accomplished writer/producer Bill Grundfest, who gives you the straight dope on selling your wares. In the two-hole, 2009 Bronze Prize Winner Michael Coleman posits that when a dramatic question is posed, a satisfying answer must follow. Next to the plate is yours truly, and I explain how to think of a screenplay the way reps and buyers do. Our cleanup hitter is John Truby, who breaks down the mythic structure that made *Avatar* the highest-grossing film of all time. Driving in runs and dropping science are Dave Trotter, who demonstrates how to write great action sequences, and producer Marvin V. Acuna, talking the dollars and cents of a script deal. As always, InkTip's Hot Leads column completes our order with a call for submissions from active producers!

Happy reading,



## Everything You've Heard is Wrong: How to REALLY Sneak into the Biz by Bill Grundfest

Are you sitting down? Then stand up, this is no time to sit down. This is not the writing part of writing, this is the "get out there and shake what your mama gave ya" part of writing. And, as unfair as it might seem, the writers who succeed are usually the ones who do this part well. To be a successful scriptwriter, for TV or film, being a good writer is insufficient.

To become a pro (not to be the best in your class/workshop/writers' group) requires that you get out your big purple hat and your Cadillac with the dice hanging from the mirror and sell it on the streets. The opportunity is not going to come to you. You must use the same imagination you used to create your scripts to create your career. How? It's not for everyone, but here's what worked for me and others:

**Push your material.** Everywhere I went, I brought copies of my script with me in envelopes. I went to any event where showbiz folks might be – opening night of a play that had a star in it, movie premieres, seminars, lunches, Starbucks near the studios, etc. I'd chat people up and ask what they did. Since the town is pathologically polite (to your face) they'd have to ask what I did and I'd say "writer." They'd ask about what I wrote and I'd just hand them an envelope. About 20% of the people I gave envelopes to would call me. Only one called me with real interest. I said I'd have my agent call her. Now all I needed was an agent. It was easy to get one when I already had the job and just needed someone to negotiate the deal. Long story short, that agent would rep me for years and helped me get further in and up.

**MAKE something.** Make a two-minute trailer for your project. Or a 10-second promo. Then get what you made in front of the decision-makers or the decision-maker's assistant. Assistants are much easier to get to (because they don't have assistants making them hard to get to). They all have a million scripts to read and don't really want to read any of them. It's much easier to get somebody to spend 10 seconds to two minutes on you than to spend the time it takes to read a script. And it works. Just ask that director from Uruguay who put his trailer for an alien invasion movie on YouTube and now has major representation and a million dollar deal.

### THREE E-Z BONUS TECHNIQUES:

1. Register your script with the WGA, but don't put "Registered with the WGA" on the title page. It just tells the reader "Hey, you thief! Don't you dare steal my brilliance!" That's not how to start a relationship.
2. Your title may be the most important part of the entire script. It needs to make readers WANT to read it and if it doesn't, they may not. Test out a variety of script titles on friends and strangers.
3. Remember what my father used to say: "The one who gets it is not the one who's best; it's the one who wants it the most."

*Bill Grundfest is a TV writer and producer who has won a Golden Globe Award® and received three Emmy® nominations. He writes for major award shows including the Oscars®, Grammys® and Emmys, including the 2009 Emmy telecast. For more, visit his website at [www.workshopforwriters.com](http://www.workshopforwriters.com).*

### We Want Answers: Paying off the All-Important Dramatic Question

by Michael Coleman

As an audience, we want answers. Heck, we need them. That's why we sit through the two-hour cinematic ritual, hunching our shoulders and gripping our seats, until the credits roll and the lights come back on. No matter how intriguing the premise, by the end of any story, the audience expects answers.

When we learn along with the couple in *Open Water* that they are stranded in the middle of the ocean and sharks are circling, the movie couldn't possibly end until we discover their fate. Once detectives Somerset and Mills in *Se7en* face off against a serial killer, it's then mandatory to show us if (and how) they catch him.

Michael Coleman won a 2009 PAGE Awards Bronze Prize for his science fiction script *The Keeper Project*. He was hired to write *Nip-Toe's Nightmare*, an animated short that is currently in production in the U.K. Michael continues to write feature spec scripts and plans to relocate to Los Angeles this year.

That's the simple promise of storytelling. If you set something up, you must pay it off. And a screenplay's biggest setup and payoff take place in the posing and answering of the story's central dramatic question. Will the hero win or lose?

Will he get the girl? Will he save the world? Every plotline should have a compelling dramatic question attached to it and my job as the writer is to answer those questions!

As a serious fan of professional coverage, I use it often. Peer critiques are great too, but in-depth script analysis from a pro can be a writer's best friend. Recently, I received the latest batch of notes from my trusted coverage provider and was pleased to see that I had constructed a taut and enthralling first act. The problem the analyst cited landed squarely on the shoulders of my misguided third act. In the denouement, I merely hinted at an answer to the key dramatic question I had posed in the open. Blame it on laziness or an attempt to meet some looming, self-imposed deadline – either way, I'd missed a golden opportunity. When struggling to get through a draft, some obvious things can escape notice. But for an outsider looking in objectively, it all becomes easy to detect. Talk about your "lightbulb going on" moments!

I wasn't thrilled at the thought of essentially rewriting the entire second and third acts, but that's what the story required to fulfill itself. How did I tackle it? I took the first 20 pages – up to the first act break – and dissected it, scene by scene. I systematically asked myself "what is the dramatic question I am posing here?" and then listed each question on a separate sheet of paper. These questions aren't always on-the-nose; sometimes they are merely implied. Either way, if you plant a seed, water it and let it blossom.

For example, in the setup for one subplot, I showed my protagonist's teenage son in a bitter exchange with a girl at his high school. This was primarily intended to reveal important exposition, but it also posed a dramatic question for the subplot involving these two characters: Will the teenagers be able to see past their differences and develop a civil relationship? Even more interesting, will that relationship blossom into something romantic?

That one was pretty straightforward, but the central dramatic question was a bit tougher to identify. (Again, thank the heavens for coverage!)

The story deals with a man and his family who are forced from their home by anti-colonial rebels determined to bring down his corrupt corporate employer. Because of this catalyst, many of the story's early obstacles and dangers come from the rebels. The problem is that by having my hero defeat the rebels in the climax, I wasn't answering the right question.

The real villain, of course, is the corporation. This dynamic is clearly established in the setup, I just didn't capitalize on it. So the central dramatic question isn't "Will the hero defeat the rebel uprising?" It's "Will the hero learn the truth about his employers and aid the rebellion in defeating them?"

By going through Act I, scene-by-scene and beat-by-beat, I was able to determine the answers required in Act III. Even better, it made the plotting of Act II that much easier because I now know precisely where I'm headed.

***"By going through Act I, scene-by-scene and beat-by-beat, I was able to determine the answers required in Act III. Even better, it made the plotting of Act II that much easier because I now know precisely where I'm headed."***

Might the dramatic question evolve as the story plays out? Of course it can. Just look at *Minority Report* for a prime example. At the end of Act I, the question posed is "Can Anderton evade capture, find Leo Crowe, and clear his name?" But once that question is answered after the midpoint, a new question develops: "Will Anderton expose his former mentor and prove that pre-crime is fallible?" It's an extension of the original dramatic question.

We've all heard the admonitions that we must know our story's ending before we begin writing. And I agree... to an extent. I don't believe it's necessary to know how the entire climax will be choreographed. But in order to effectively develop a strong, satisfying screenplay, we need to know the general outcome (arc endpoint) for the main through-line and for each subplot. It's our promise as storytellers to pay off the setups implicit in our dramatic questions and honor our bond with the audience.

## What Your Script Must Do to Open Doors

by John Evans

Because grade schoolers aren't taught how to write screenplays (not even in Beverly Hills) and most people don't read them for pleasure, aspiring screenwriters often draw primarily on lessons learned from fiction. For the most part, it's better to unlearn those lessons! When you boil it down, your script is nothing like a novel. It's something else entirely.

Think of your script as two things...

John Evans received his MFA in Screenwriting from Boston University. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2001, he has worked in the development departments at ABC, The Donners' Company, Kopelson Entertainment and AEI, evaluating many hundreds of scripts. He has also taught writing at the university level, and served as a mentor in the WGA's Young Storytellers Program. Currently, he is a freelance copywriter for a Hollywood PR firm. John has been a Judge for the PAGE Awards competition since 2005.

### A Sales Document

Let's face it, most people don't put time and money into making movies because they're retired and it's a fun hobby. It's damned hard work for all involved. So whether it's being read for the purposes of representatives, producers or talent, your script must promise a return on the busy Hollywood professional's investment of time, money and energy.

For you, the writer, the paramount goal is to convince readers that they want to be a part of getting your script made and successfully distributed. If you make that secondary to telling a specific story in a specific manner, paying homage to a relative, exorcising your demons or

anything else, you're diminishing your script's chances of being picked up. If you want to get your movie made, making the script a highly effective sales tool is the goal that informs every choice you make as the writer.

Unless your only goals are artistic, spend some time thinking of your cherished story as a prospectus for a business and the reader as an investor. How can you convince the reader that this project will turn a profit? Keep the costs down (avoid lavish budget-busting sequences), give mainstream audiences an experience they'll be glad they had (entertain, evoke emotion, and intrigue them) and follow profitable models (remind us of past hits without copying them). Sell readers on the idea that your script will pay off that huge L.A. mortgage – or help them get into one!

Imagine that whenever anyone reads your script, it's like you're in the room with them, pitching the movie. You are making a case for why your vision should be realized and why committing to the project is a win-win for writer and reader. Of course, you're not actually in the room – only your words are – so there's nothing to stop the reader from putting the script down and seeing what's new on Hulu. Think about it. When you're flipping channels and a show doesn't grab you, do you watch the whole thing out of respect for the hard work and good intentions of its creators, or do you change the channel? Every page of your script is an investment of time for the reader, so if you haven't done everything you can to make the reading experience as entertaining and stimulating as possible, you're only hurting yourself.

As you write, and particularly as you rewrite, frequently stop to consider your audience and ask yourself questions. Is this scene confusing? Would this dialogue be interesting to the average person? How can I make the reader want to turn the page? Does

the reader have the information essential to understanding my story, but always want to see compelling questions answered? For the busy analyst or assistant, would this sequence be a quick read, or a bit of a slog?

Your script is not an all-inclusive experience, like a work of fiction. It's not even half the experience. In fact, it's actually more like...

### A Blueprint for a Movie

Think of a movie as a house and the script as its blueprint. You can't build much of a house without a blueprint, but the blueprint alone won't keep out the rain. Nor does it include the actual appliances, furniture, wallpaper or fixtures one needs to actually live in a house. The function of a blueprint is to clearly and simply present the fundamental shape and dimensions of the building in strong, clean lines.

Think of your script as a precise schematic indicating the relationship between the narrative's rooms, the measurements of its spaces... The design should be austere, but not sketchy. It must stand up to the exacting scrutiny of the professionals whose job it is to pay for and build your creation. If it's obvious to them that the second floor would collapse if built as you've drawn it up, the flawed plans will never be executed.

As the architect for a project that will one day involve hundreds if not thousands of people, your job is to envision a premise (the foundation), story (the frame), structure (the floor plan) and characters (the windows, walls and doors) that elegantly fit together in a harmonious design. A design that excites buyers and builders so much they simply have to make it real.

Believe me, that's enough work! Don't take on the duties of people whose jobs are done later in the process. It only makes you look like you're an architect who doesn't know how houses get built. Leave the interior decorating to the production designer, art director, and costumer. Banish from your description all excessive detail, camera directions and music choices, which are up to the director and editor. Avoid comments on what characters are thinking or feeling and facts from their pasts, which are the job of the actors to convey.

The most successful screenwriters have learned how to...

### Wear Two Hats

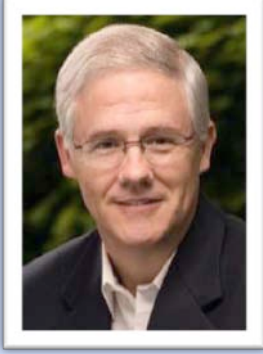
To maximize your chances of selling a script in what remains a bear market for specs, you must be able to think like an artist one moment and an entrepreneur the next. People read fiction to imagine, to reflect, to learn. But most Hollywood professionals read screenplays to find a business plan that will make money for them, their companies and their financiers. It's a different paradigm completely.

Keeping these realities of the business in mind will help you to conceive and write a screenplay that reads fast, hooks the interest of reps, talent and buyers, and promises success for everyone involved. And as one of the missions of the PAGE Awards is to pair Hollywood-ready writers with industry pros, you'll likely enjoy more success in the contest as well!

***“Most Hollywood professionals read screenplays to fund a business plan that will make money for them, their companies and their financiers.”***

## Writing the Mythic Movie: *Avatar*

by John Truby



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

### John Truby's "The Myth Course" How to Write the World's Most Popular Genre

Audio Course on MP3 CD



Myth is the foundation of more blockbuster movies than any other genre. This course tells you exactly how to write one of your own. In the most comprehensive class on myth you will find anywhere, Truby explains the huge success of films as different as *The Dark Knight*, *Star Wars*, and *Crocodile Dundee*. Learn the genre's key story beats, techniques to update the great myths of the past, and get a detailed blueprint for the 10 major myth forms that may define worldwide storytelling for years to come.

[Learn more...](#)

Now available at [The Writers Store.](#)

In all the visual splendor of James Cameron's *Avatar*, it's easy to overlook the script. In fact, it has come in for the same abuse Cameron's *Titanic* earned. You've heard the complaints: the story is a *Pocahontas* rip-off. The bad guys are just evil villains. The dialogue is stilted. In short, great visuals, bad screenwriting. The critics aren't so much wrong as irrelevant. What they don't get is that Cameron is a brilliant writer of pop culture. He is one of three or four of the best popular storytellers, and his secret, which all screenwriters need to know, is his mastery of genres.

Like *Avatar*, *Titanic* had fabulous visuals. But the key to its success was that it combined the disaster film – a sub-form of action – with the love story. These two forms are on opposite ends of the genre spectrum, which is why they are rarely combined and why Cameron showed his true genius when he put them together. The disaster film gives the audience the thrill of spectacle and scope, something no other medium can do as well. But for that same reason, disaster films have no heart. They're about the thousands of people in the maws of slaughter. They're not personal. That's why Cameron spent most of that film setting up a love story, which is about the community of two – the most personal, heart-filled genre you can get. So when the disaster finally hit, the pain of loss started at the epicenter of the two lovers and spread out from there.

Jump forward to *Avatar*, and Cameron is using the exact same strategy. *Avatar* isn't just a big, noisy war story set in an outer space future. It's an epic romance, the grand myth combined with the intimate love story. An epic is almost always built on the myth genre, by far the most common genre in worldwide blockbusters. The key question for the screenwriter, especially when you are adding fantasy and science fiction elements, is which myth to use. In the [Myth Class](#), I talk extensively about the ten new myth forms on which a large percentage of worldwide storytelling will be based. One of these I call the eco-myth, and that is beat for beat the new myth that Cameron uses in *Avatar*.

Of course, even the "new" eco-myth has a history. For over 160 years, it has been one of America's two national myths. The first is the Western, which was dominant from about 1850 to 1960. The Western is the story of the building of the nation by taming nature and "civilizing" the "savages." The second American myth was the anti-Western, also known as the "Eastern," starting with Thoreau and working its way through *John Henry*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. It broke into the forefront of American storytelling during the Vietnam War in films like *The Wild Bunch*, *Butch Cassidy*, and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*.

The anti-Western has been described in one line as "the Machine in the Garden," and that is the myth on which *Avatar* is based. It is the dark side of the American story, but more generally is the story of any technologically superior, male-god culture that wants the land of a nature-based, female-god culture. The downside of the anti-Western myth is that it ends badly for the hero and that is not going to work if you want an international blockbuster. That's where the eco-myth puts a new twist on the anti-Western. Instead of ending with inevitable destruction, the eco-myth finds a way to rejuvenate the world by creating harmony among people and between people and nature.

The great strength of the eco-myth as a foundation for a blockbuster – besides the happy ending – is that it combines the myth story structure with a detailed story world. Story world has been a major element of blockbusters for at least the last ten years, as we vividly saw with *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. The eco-myth is a celebration of the interconnectedness of all things in the world, and the cinematic medium is unmatched in showing this.

Like Tolkien in *Lord of the Rings*, Cameron creates a lush story world that emphasizes trees and plants. Any fantasy world, if it is to be successful on a grand scale, must have the qualities of a utopia. And in the history of utopias, the single most important quality is floating or flying. Think of the floating tea party in *Mary Poppins*, Harry Potter playing Quidditch on his broomstick, or the floating house in *Up*. Cameron understands this deeply. So his jungle world of Pandora is much more like an ocean floor. Plants float, as do entire islands, and the Na'vi fly everywhere on the backs of the giant bat-like "banshee," infinitely more agile than the most advanced fighter plane.

This element of flying is also crucial to the second major genre in *Avatar*, the love story. One of the unique beats of the love story is the first dance. Here the dance occurs while the would-be lovers fly on the backs of a banshee. It's a beautiful orchestration of dance, love, flight, action and story world, and that scene alone is worth the price of admission.

As *Avatar* moves to its final battle, Cameron brings all of the story threads together. Of course, this is not a tragedy, so the battle does not go the way of history, with the technologically superior Europeans wiping out the natives. It's a glorious scene where Cameron pulls out every trick in the story book, including a charge on horseback that is right out of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

If you want to understand *Avatar's* success, you have to see it as screenwriting without the traditional standards of "good writing." Great popular storytelling comes from mixing genres that take maximum advantage of the film medium. True, the rest of us don't have the advantage of \$300 million to realize our screenwriting dreams. But if you think *Avatar's* success comes primarily from all that money on the screen, you will miss some truly invaluable lessons in story.

### Wrestling with Action Description

by Dave Trottier

#### READER'S QUESTION:

I'm writing a screenplay about the world of professional wrestling, and I'm wondering how specific I have to be in wrestling and fight scenes. Do I need to write them out move by move, or is that considered amateurish? Is it enough to give a general description and maybe specify only key moves?

#### DAVE'S ANSWER:

I think you have the right idea in that last question. You don't usually need to describe every specific action, but you need to describe enough of the action that the reader can "see" what is happening. Thus, you will use specific language and describe specific details, but you will not usually need to describe every detail.

In dramatic moments, such as the end of the fight, you might want to describe all of those last specific moves.

To be honest, there's an element of subjectivity here, and you must decide how much description is enough for your particular screenplay.

In reading the wonderful sword fight in William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*, you'll notice that many specific actions are described, and that there are sections of summary descriptions.

What follows is the description of specific moves:

Inigo dives from the stairs to a moss-covered bar suspended over the archway. He swings out, lands, and scrambles to his sword.

The Man in Black casually tosses his sword to the landing where it sticks perfectly.

Then, the Man in Black copies Inigo. Not copies exactly, improves.

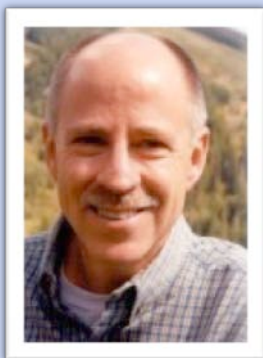
He dives for the bar, swings completely over it like a circus performer and dismounts with a 9.7 backflip.

Then, a little later, we have a summary description that describes specific details:

Inigo, moving like lightning, thrusts forward, slashes, darts back, all in almost a single movement and...

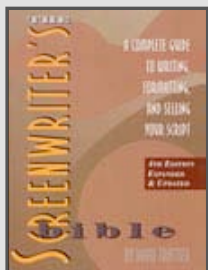
The Man in Black dodges, blocks, and again thrusts forward, faster than ever before, and again he slashes.

The bottom line is to help the reader visualize the action, and to keep the reader excited, enthralled, and intrigued without confusing her. Good luck and keep writing!



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

#### The Screenwriter's Bible Fourth Edition



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.

Buy Dave Trottier's classic reference guide at [The Writers Store](http://TheWritersStore.com).

### The Television Writers Vault



**Pitch your Television Show  
Concepts and Scripts Today!**

*Used by more than 90 top  
production companies and  
television networks*

To learn more, visit:

[www.TVWritersVault.com](http://www.TVWritersVault.com)

## Money, Money, Money!

by Marvin V. Acuna



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](http://www.TheBusinessofShowInstitute.com) "The No. 1 Online Information Hub for Screenwriters on the Business... of Show Business."

### THE BUSINESS OF SHOW INSTITUTE

If you are an ambitious writer and would like a rare opportunity to get some ongoing mentoring from Marvin, as well as advice from some of the most successful writers, agents, managers, producers and executives in Hollywood, click here:

[Thebusinessofshowinstitute.com/mentoring](http://Thebusinessofshowinstitute.com/mentoring)

Stop wondering what the industry's top writers are doing to be so successful and let them tell you what they're doing. Plus, let real Hollywood decision-makers educate you on what they desire from you and your material!

Your writing breakthrough is waiting for you...

[Thebusinessofshowinstitute.com/mentoring](http://Thebusinessofshowinstitute.com/mentoring)



I assume that all of you reading this have a simple goal... to make a living as a professional screenwriter. And though many would say that discussing money is rude, I feel strongly compelled to do just that and address the screenwriter's finances. The following is inspired by a true story (I have intentionally omitted specific names).

At the top of 2008, a screenwriter's spec script that I represented along with a major agency was introduced to an executive at a major production company. This particular entity wielded significant clout at the studio. The executive responded favorably to the spec and requested a sit-down with the writer. About a month later, the executive phoned to inform us that an idea had developed internally and they felt the writer would be ideal to execute it. They wished to discuss the idea, so a meeting was immediately set. The writer was asked to draft a detailed treatment on how he would execute the idea. It should be noted that this was to be done on spec.

With the executive's guidance and direction, the treatment was developed extensively. There were many drafts and every one was written on spec. Four months into 2008, the executive was thoroughly satisfied with the final draft... of the treatment. At this point, he committed to enthusiastically introduce the treatment and the writer's spec sample to his boss. **That's right, the boss had yet to read the writer's sample. This is not uncommon.**

A few weeks later, the executive rang to share the wonderful news – his boss was on board and a meeting was scheduled to pitch the studio executives. **It should be noted that the screenwriter had yet to meet the boss. And compensation had not been discussed.**

About 10 people were at the pitch meeting, but the boss did not attend. He simply called ahead and expressed his strong feelings for the project. The pitch was executed in just under 15 minutes, followed by a few questions from the most senior executive. About an hour later, we received the call. The writer nailed the pitch – he was hired. Finally, deal time.

I can honestly say that to use the word "negotiations" would be a distortion of the truth. The studio simply told us what they would pay. Take it or leave it. We took it. A low six-figure deal closed about three months later. Studios do not pay until the agreement is fully executed and they don't pay all at once. They pay in steps. Baby steps tied to delivery of the draft(s). **Are you following me? We're almost seven months into 2008 and the screenwriter has yet to see one red cent.**

Finally, after badgering accounting at the studio, the first check arrives. Without revealing the exact number of the total deal, let's use \$100,000 as the figure to represent full payment and do a brief breakdown. The studios pay a percentage upon signature of the agreement and a percentage at commencement of the draft. Other steps follow. Payment on delivery of first draft, commencement of draft two, delivery of draft two and in some cases, a polish may be included. Traditionally, payment tiers range between 15-to-20%. For simplicity, let's assume the studio used its might and would not budge off of 15% to trigger the first series of payments. **Keep in mind, he who can walk from the deal has the power.**

Therefore, for this brief example, a check totaling \$30,000 for execution of agreement and commencement of script would be delivered by the studio. Be aware that agents (10%), managers (10%), and attorneys (5%) commission on the gross, not the net. So does Uncle Sam!

Almost 11 months later, after all those fees and taxes are paid, the screenwriter celebrates with a cool \$15K for 2008. Oh yes, there's one more payroll payment to make, to the newest member of your team... the WGA. You must become a guild member upon entering your first deal (spec or work for hire) with a signatory company. All studios are signatory. Yay!

As you can see, a six-figure deal isn't quite a six-figure payday. And payment itself can be delayed for some time. At the close of 2009, the aforementioned screenwriter was still owed approximately 20% of his total compensation. There are lessons to glean from this.

Don't quit your day job after your first sale or gig! It'll be tempting, but don't.

Schedule time to write **now**. You must **master** the discipline of scheduling time to write while you have a day job and... a life. I promise you it will come in handy.

Reward yourself, but don't go nuts, and save the rest. A screenwriter I know treated himself to an ergonomic executive chair for his writing station – he'd been eyeing it for years. You never know when you'll make money again.

My intention here is to illuminate an area of screenwriting that is rarely, if ever, discussed. It's not to frighten you, but to inform you – to empower you with knowledge. Because as James Madison, Father of the Constitution, so eloquently stated:

*"Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."*



## Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from [InkTip.com](http://InkTip.com)

### 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](mailto: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

### Hollywood Arts Society

[code: jjb36661rv]

We are looking for completed feature-length scripts that deal with autism. Submissions in any genre are acceptable and they can be for projects that are fictional or based on a true story.

Our credits include *Shakespeare's Punk Rock* and several MOW projects.

Budget will not exceed \$500K. 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](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks.

### Justin Bursch Production Co.

[code: cwkbucdvf8]

We are looking for completed feature-length adventures involving a family on a journey together. The main characters must comprise a single family. An example that fits the parameters is *The Incredibles* while on the other hand, *The Goonies* does not. We would prefer to have parents involved in the adventure as well as siblings. Action/adventure scripts suitable for a family audience only, i.e. no thrillers like *The River Wild*.

Our credits include *Love Song for Bobby Long* and *Taking Chance*.

Budget will not exceed \$10 million. WGA or non-WGA writers may submit.

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

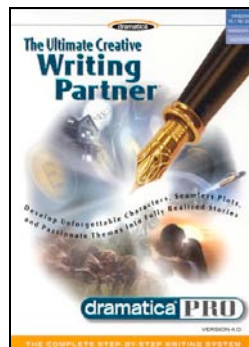
### Lane City Films

[code: 8y4fsb2g98]

We are looking for a writer to assist with the feature version of an award-nominated short film *Layla*, and as such we're only seeking writing samples demonstrating writing skill and extensive knowledge of the Middle East, specifically the cultures and dialects of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey and/or Syria. The writer selected will work with the director as a co-writer. In the resume space, please describe your background/experience in those regions. We prefer but are not limited to working with writers based in the greater Los Angeles area.

Budget will exceed \$5 million. Non-WGA writers only, please.

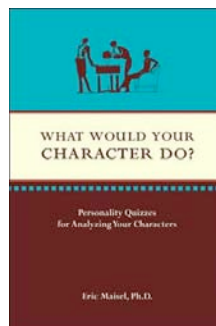
Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks.



### DRAMATICA PRO Version 4

Got an idea for a script? Work it out with *Dramatica Pro*, a virtual writing partner with a totally unique approach to story development. Together you'll solve the theme, plot, and character problems that prevent good ideas from becoming great stories that sell. Remove ineffective clutter and wasted time with a dynamic environment of analysis, workspace, and input that supports you from inception to final plan. *Dramatica* closes the gaps in classic and modern writing methods, giving your story and your audience what it really desires - the ultimate expression of your creative vision.

[Learn more...](#)

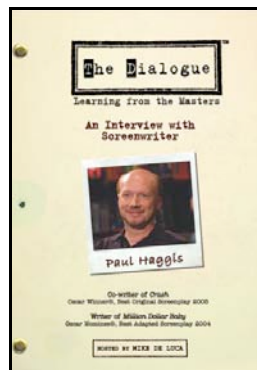


### What Would Your Character Do? by Eric Maizel, Ph.D.

Not just another dry, how-to book, *What Would Your Character Do?* is the first interactive guide to encourage you to get inside your characters' heads as you create them. Whether you are exploring how your characters react to the death of a loved one or how they learned to ride a bike, you're sure to emerge with more compelling heroes, heroines, and villains than ever before.

[Learn more...](#)

### The Dialogue: Learning from the Masters Paul Haggis DVD



Acclaimed writer-director Paul Haggis has been a fixture of television and film for over 25 years. In this wide-ranging interview, the Oscar®-winning co-screenwriter, director, and producer discusses a career that led from writing for sitcoms such as *Diff'rent Strokes* and *The Facts of Life* to his breakthrough screenplay for Oscar®-winning director Clint Eastwood, *Million Dollar Baby* (2004 Academy Award winner, Best Picture). Haggis's matter-of-fact stories of navigating the entertainment industry are an indelible primer for how to manage the screenwriting life, make a successful transition from TV to film, develop a strong story and characters, pitch an idea, and surmount all of Hollywood's more frustrating obstacles.

[Learn more...](#)

**These titles and more available  
now at the Writers Store!**

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



The 12th Annual  
Screenwriting Conference  
in Santa Fe

June 1st thru 6th, 2010

Click this link to receive our special  
**PAGE Awards \$300 Discount:**

<http://www.scsfe.com/pageawards/>

**DONE DEAL**  
PROFESSIONAL



Over 10,300 film deals & 1,100 TV deals in our database. Search our listings by title, logline, writer, representation, company, genre, date, and more. It's an invaluable tool for screenwriters who want to know what material sold to whom.

Only \$23.95 a year!

Turn PRO today: [www.donedealpro.com](http://www.donedealpro.com)

**Protect Rite**®



We accept registrants  
worldwide!

**REGISTER NOW!**

Instantly establish the date and time of creation for all your files, including film and television screenplays.

**TVFilm**  
**RIGHTS.com**™

A World Marketplace Community for TV & Film Rights.

*SELL OR SCOUT SCREENPLAYS, MOVIE CONCEPTS, BOOK SUB-RIGHTS, LIFE STORY RIGHTS, REALITY SERIES, TV FORMATS & OTHER TV/FILM RIGHTS LICENSING. A SERVICE FOR ALL ENTERTAINMENT EXECES, BOOK PUBLISHERS, WRITERS AND CREATORS.*

*The Industry Standard for Scriptwriting*

Final Draft, Inc. is proud to sponsor the PAGE International Screenwriting Awards.



© 2010 Final Draft, Inc.

[www.finaldraft.com](http://www.finaldraft.com) (800) 231-4055

Final Draft