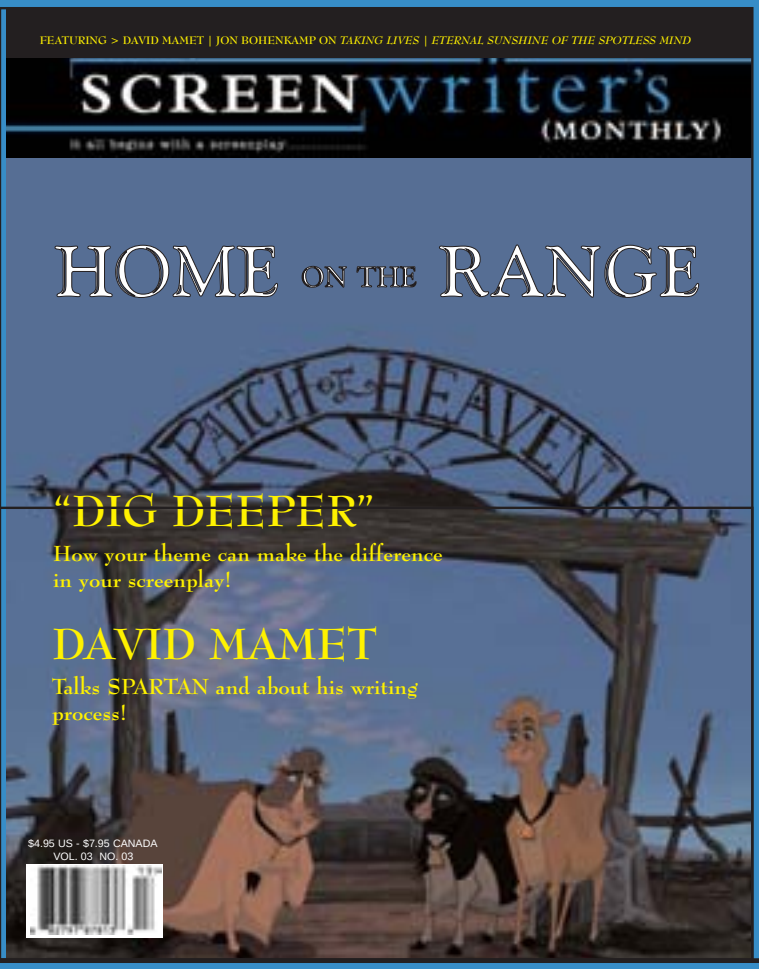
www.screenwritersmonthly.com

SCREENwriter's (MONTHLY)

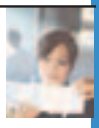
it all begins with a screenplay.....

MARKET

FEATURES



INTERVIEWS



ADVERTISING

Melfi & Associates handles all web and print advertising for *Screenwriter's Monthly*. If you would like more information about advertising please call Phil Melfi @ (818) 332-1633, ext. 3.

SUBMISSIONS

For content submissions please see our web site: screenwriters-monthly.com or write to our editorial offices:

Screenwriter's Monthly
2139 North 12th Street #10
Box 9010
Grand Junction, CO 81501

Or contact our editor by email:
SM@iscriptdb.com

MERCHANDISE

For *Screenwriter's Monthly* merchandise, please see our web site.

STAFF/CONTRIBUTORS

Publishers
Chris Wehner
Phil Melfi (phil@melfi.com)

Editor-in-Chief
Chris Wehner
(editor@screenwritersutopia.com)

West Coast Editor
Fred Topel

News Editor
James Vejvoda

Associate/Copy Editor
Chris Newton

Art Director
Chas Weygant

Interviews
Fred Topel
Daniel Robert Epstein

Contributors
Philippa Burgess
David Landau
Craig Griffin

Production/Advertising
Joe Melfi/Patrick Costello

March 2004 Issue

Screenwriter's Monthly (ISSN 1542-3883) is published 10 times per year (January and July are off months). All articles and interviews represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the editors, publisher, advertisers or producers. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please write to us: phil@melfi.com or by mail:

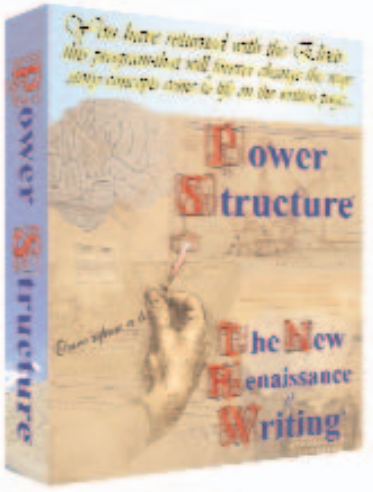
Screenwriter's Monthly
c/o MoviePartners, Inc.
4821 Lankershim Blvd
Suite F-239
North Hollywood, CA 91601

AGT AD
HERE

Do you already own screenplay formatting software?

You're halfway there.

PowerStructure starts at just $129.95 for owners of *Final Draft* and *Movie Magic Screenwriter*.



Formatting software is critical to a Hollywood screenplay. If you own *Final Draft* or *Movie Magic Screenwriter*, you own the best. But a perfectly formatted script with an average story won't make it far. *Power Structure* turns your "great idea for a movie" into a "great screenplay".

With *Power Structure*, you can:

- Develop each character with his or her own arc, back history, and relationships.
- Carefully outline each act including plot points, inciting developments, climax points, and scene endings.
- Track story beats and pace of your story.

Visit our *Power Structure* page at **Screenstyle.com** to:

1. Download a fully working demo.
2. See our interactive Flash presentation that walks you through *Power Structure*.
3. Get the best deals on *Power Structure* including prices starting at **$129.95** and a 30-day money back guarantee.

Screen Style

We're open Monday - Friday 9 A.M. - 5 P.M. Hollywood time.

Order online at www.screenstyle.com or call us TOLL-FREE at 1.888.627.8812

3010 Hennepin Avenue S. #278 - Minneapolis, MN 55408 - 612.275.7407

Home on the Range

Writing the Animation Screenplay!

INTERVIEW BY FRED TOPEL

All movies are massive collaborations but particularly animated films. It's not just a script that people go out and shoot. It's a constantly evolving process of revising story points and drawing images to go with them. The same character will be handled by an entire staff of people simply to complete the amount of work necessary to complete the film in as much as three to four years.

Will Finn and John Sanford are the credited writer-directors of Disney's *Home on the Range*, announced to be their last traditional 2D animated film. The duo has been friends since *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Finn was working on story and animation, and Sanford was a trainee. Both were already Disney veterans though Finn's career was spottier.

Finn was a trainee at Disney 25 years ago until he was fired from *The Fox and the Hound*. He returned in 1987 for *Oliver and Company* and worked on story and animation until *Hunchback*, after which he left to make Dreamworks' *The Road to El Dorado* after which he returned again. Sanford was hired out of the California Institute of the Arts when *Beauty and the Beast* directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise saw his student film. When Finn returned from Dreamworks, Sanford was head of story on *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, and the two became friends and partners.

We always ask writers about their typical writing schedule. Does that even apply to animation?

John Sanford: It kinda does. There are creative times of day for us and noncreative times of day for us.

Will Finn: Our situation was unique because we were asked to take over writing and directing this movie at the same time. There was a concept, and there was a premise, and they'd even cast some of the voices, but we were actually asked to take over the picture from some guys who were working on numerous other incarnations of a western cartoon. And they came up with this premise. There had been some storyboard work. It had been in the works for about a year when they asked the two of us to take it over. But at that point it was ready to go into production. They were finishing up *Treasure Planet*, and they needed something to go. This one really should have been ready long before we got involved, but they finally hit the story premise that the studio approved right around the time they really needed to get into production. So we had to be writing and directing at the same time.

Who nailed the premise, and what was your writing job?

JS: The premise was nailed by a story man named Michael Labash. He pitched the idea of three cows going to save their farm by catching a cattle rustler and bringing him in. There were two other directors who were directing a different version of the movie. Then Mike pitched this premise, and the studio liked this premise a lot better. The two other directors—

WF: They weren't really enamored with the premise. They were actually doing a sort of ghost story, which was quite interesting, but for whatever reason, the studio lost interest in it. They were doing a western ghost town story. The studio just over the years gradually lost interest in the ghost story. They wanted to do something else that was more of an animal picture. Michael Labash, who's new to the studio — he'd only been here about a year — pitched that idea. He's the guy who came from working on storyboards on *Pinky and the Brain*, and he'd done some boarding on *Beavis and Butthead*. Now he's co-directing the *Lilo and Stich* sequel. So he'd come up with that idea and been playing around with it for about a year. I got into the storyboarding phase about three months after he came up with the premise. I liked the premise right away when I heard it. It seemed original. We don't have the ingenue characters.

JS: It's not a prince and princess falling in love and getting married.

WF: It's not a "Who am I? Where do I fit in?" kind of story.

JS: It's a classic adventure story, so it immediately generates ideas.

WF: And it was a genre story told from sort of an upside down angle that you're taking these animals that are very passive, but they're ubiquitous. You're taking cows and making them the heroes of a western. You're making the bad guys cowboys. That's a funny idea. A sort of general sense of the story was established, but we had to sort of jump on and start conceiving arcs for characters and working out the outline for the story right away.

JS: We jumped on, and on the very first day, we were working on a beat outline. We had scraps of paper and markers and were throwing stuff up. We just ground through it really fast, pitched it to the executives, got a buy off and then, boom, just went in. And our writing method on it was we would sit in an office and just spitball ideas on certain sequences. We had the beat cards. We'd just take one — like say we needed to assign sequence one to a story artist. We would go into Will's office, and we'd talk about it. And we would just write sometimes a page, sometimes two, an outline, beat for beat everything we wanted to have in the scene. Then we'd write some suggested dialogue, and then we'd hand that off to a story artist. They would board it and bring it back. Once that was approved, we would go back and polish dialogue.

Is there any point where there's a standard script?

WF: Going about 15, 20 years ago they used to want to start with a formal script. They did that with *Little Mermaid.*

JS: Yeah, back with *Mermaid* there was a final script that was very solid.

WF: And it grew on the boards, but you had an established story. On this we didn't. We had to keep making it up as we went along, and of course the outline we started out with isn't the outline we wound up with, because we made discoveries just as you would writing anything. But instead of throwing pages away, we were sometimes throwing production away. So we had stuff recorded and animated and in some cases even in color, but the studio was very supportive. They understood. We certainly had to be responsible to a budget, but they understood that the important thing was making the film great, and they actually encouraged us to keep making the movie as great as possible because they could sense it was a terrific premise, and they wanted to do justice to it. It required a lot of patience on the part of the animators because animators aren't used to throwing out as much as story people are.

Will Finn, John Sanford, and Alice Dewey

JS: That's the process on this one as well as most of our movies. It's just kind of the way for some reason these films have come to be made. It's funny because these days the studio's going back to more a script is written, and that's approved, but even then it's getting changed.

WF: And it should. They should grow. I think when a film doesn't expand from a screenplay, it can get really dry.

JS: A lot of folks ask us, "Why don't you have a script that's solid? Why don't you work on the script until it's perfect and then make that?" To them, I would say every live action movie I've ever read about that I think is really great, like for instance *American Beauty*. The writer and director talk about how there was this big story about how the movie was really about these kids who killed this guy and this trial. It was bookended by this trial, and the opening shot where you're going over the town was really supposed to have Kevin Spacey blue screened into it flying. None of that's in the movie. They found in the editing process that that's not what the movie was about.

WF: A movie takes on a life of its own, and you really have to be responsive to that.

Do you consider yourselves more writers or directors?

WF: I don't think there are many animation directors who don't have a strong story spine who are very successful.

JS: The ones I always think about, like Chris Sanders, began in story. He wrote the screenplay for *Lilo and Stitch.* He generated that idea himself. And on his next movie, he's generating that idea himself, and he's writing the script. Miyazaki always writes and boards his own movies pretty much.

WF: John Lasseter's a terrific story guy.

JS: Pete Doctor, Andrew Stanton.

WF: If you don't have a good sense of story, it's very difficult to direct animation because the story is the single most important thing. Of course it is in any movie, but terrific animation won't buoy up a weak story, and I think we've seen that a lot with very terrific animated movies, that the story just didn't have any sizzle. It really is one and the same. I think something that helped us as writer-directors is that John and I are both big readers. We read a lot of fiction. One of the things you come up against when you're working on a film a lot is you work with people, even in the writing of it, even in the story planning of it, who have read a lot about writing, but they haven't read that much writing. They've read the Robert McKee and the Syd Field.

JS: But have you read *Confederacy of Dunces*? Have you read Kurt Vonnegut?

WF: Have you read Dickens? Have you read Tolstoy?

JS: They just kind of stare at you, and you're like, "How could you be writing and not have read writing?"

WF: The great thing about fiction is you really do learn that there's as many ways to skin a cat as there are great storytellers, and it opens up your mind to what a story can be. McKee and Syd Field and all those things are really important things to know. They're great tools to have of course. But sometimes when you work with younger people, they've just learned this. It becomes this dogma. And Disney dogma is tough to deal with because there's a sort of dogma to making a Disney movie that this movie broke all the rules about. And we knew that coming in. It's not the princess character. We're not going to have the "I Want" song. We're not going to do the fairy tale sort of thing. It's set in the west, so we're allowed to be more irreverent because they're cows. Immediately, when you say the cow is a hero of a western, it's like a Gary Larson cartoon. You've got a Far Side western. So we're going to be satirical. We're going to be irreverent. We're going to be more knockabout with the humor. Disney pictures don't often get to do that, but we both love Disney stuff. It's just like the great Disney pictures were all originals. There wasn't a pattern for something that came before. Walt Disney usually innovated it and sort of went wherever his creative instincts took him, so we were allowed to do that here.

How do you leave room for songs?

JS: It's funny because there was an old rule that was actually stated by Alan Menken's old partner, Howard Ashman, to place the songs where the story turns are. In this movie, it's a little different. We kind of placed the songs where we felt we needed to. Many of the songs are introductions, like "Little Patch of Heaven." The second song in the movie is an introduction of the farm. It introduced you to the world, what a happy place it is, what a great farm. That's where that is. The opening song sets the tone.

WF: They're almost all atmosphere songs. It's sort of like *Bambi* in that.

JS: It's one of the ways we were able to make a genre that was kind of retro contemporary. We were able to use more contemporary artists to

bring the songs to the script and to the screen.

WF: Woe to the animated movie that doesn't have some decent music and songs in it, but at the same time, we didn't want to get into a thing where there was a pattern to sort of writing the Disney musical for a while that audiences kind of caught onto, and it's been heavily satirized and we really didn't want to fall into that again.

What are the patterns?

JS: There's the villain song. There's the big show stopping crazy song. The secondary characters get to sing their big wacky number. The love song, the big romantic love ballad, which we avoided, thank God. It's funny because the first time I became aware of that form was *The Wizard of Oz*. It has all that stuff. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is Dorothy's want song. You've got the crazy midgets singing "Ding Dong the Witch is Dead."

WF: And *Snow White*, which predates that, is kind of like a musical. It's actually more like a latter day Rogers and Hammersteinn musical before they even had done *Oklahoma*. So it's a great tradition to be a part of that, but we also wanted to make sure the music felt contemporary and integrated into the movie in a way that the audience wouldn't feel was overly familiar, overused. And Alan rose to the occasion. He and Glen had written this theme song when it was called *Sweating Bullets*. We were asked to look at different titles, and we came up with *Home on the Range*.

JS: Alan was heartbroken. He said, "You've chosen a song title and it's not one I wrote," but he turned around, and they wrote a version of "Home on the Range" that is completely their own.

WF: It's a big rousing Marlboro Man type song, and it's called "You Ain't Home on the Range," so it's sort of like Not Necessarily the News.

Is another *Lion King* success possible in 2D animation?

JS: I don't know. People couldn't predict *The Lion King*. This is the thing everybody forgets. We were all standing around. We'd all seen the movie. We were all standing around in the hall back in the warehouses in Glendale. Some of us really loved *Lion King*, and some of us in the hallways were like, "That's the worst thing we've done since *Black Cauldron*." None of them will admit that now. A bunch of us were just kind of talking. "What do you think it will make?" And I said, "It'll do what *Beauty* did — $150, $156. Then it'll top out." And another guy said, "I think it'll make what *Oliver* did," which is like $80. Then someone else said, "Nobody's going to see this. Who cares? Talking lions. It's been done. Who cares?"

WF: Neither one of us worked on it. We were here at the time working on different stuff, and we'd worked together on *Hunchback*, but the thing was, "Who cares about a lion's angst about whether he killed his father or not? The whole second act was a stall."

JS: Everyone always considered it to be the B movie. The movie was so hard to make that I remember at the wrap party, I really enjoyed it.

WF: Yeah, it really came together.

JS: I really thought it came together, and I thought it was a stronger comedy than Aladdin because it was consistently funny throughout. I remember walking up to both Brenda Chapman, who was head of story, and Chris Sanders, who was over in story and production design, and I said, "It's really good, guys." And they both went, "Really? I don't know."

WF: I think not being on it and then seeing the finished product — it just knocked your socks off. But even the studio heads said, "Now we've had a lot of success. We did great with *Aladdin* and *Beauty* and *Mermaid* and all that, but don't expect much from this. We're thinking maybe it's an $80 million."

JS: "If it makes $50, we'll be happy." Then when it exploded, everyone was like, "Wow, this is pretty cool." Then at $200 million, "Well, that's done." And then it just kept climbing. You can't predict something like this.

You can predict Pixar.

JS: You can't predict those either because I remember everybody when *Monsters, Inc.* came out. There was a lot of hand wringing because, "Oh, that opening sequence, they had so much trouble with that opening sequence. I think they lose them in that opening sequence. It's so complicated." They thought, "Well, it'll maybe make what *Toy Story* did." This is not a tradigital movie.

WF: *Bug's Life* didn't make as much as *Tarzan* domestically. "Does the audience want to see this story? Is it fresh enough?" Certainly CG is an irresistible hook for an audience, but we really try to keep doing the things that 2D does great, which are very expressive drawing, very expressive animation, very fluid animation. A lot of the films that haven't done as well have been because they were trying to be CG movies. Not necessarily here, but elsewhere a lot of people have been trying to make the equivalent of a CG movie and filling the movie up with CG stuff except with drawn characters. We do a little bit of CG for some background shots and the herd cows. We have 5,000 cows on screen at one point, so we needed CG for that.

WF: This is a 2D movie. It's like *The Triplets of Cowville*. They have CG vehicles of that. Nobody sat down and drew those trucks, but it's basically a hand drawn movie.

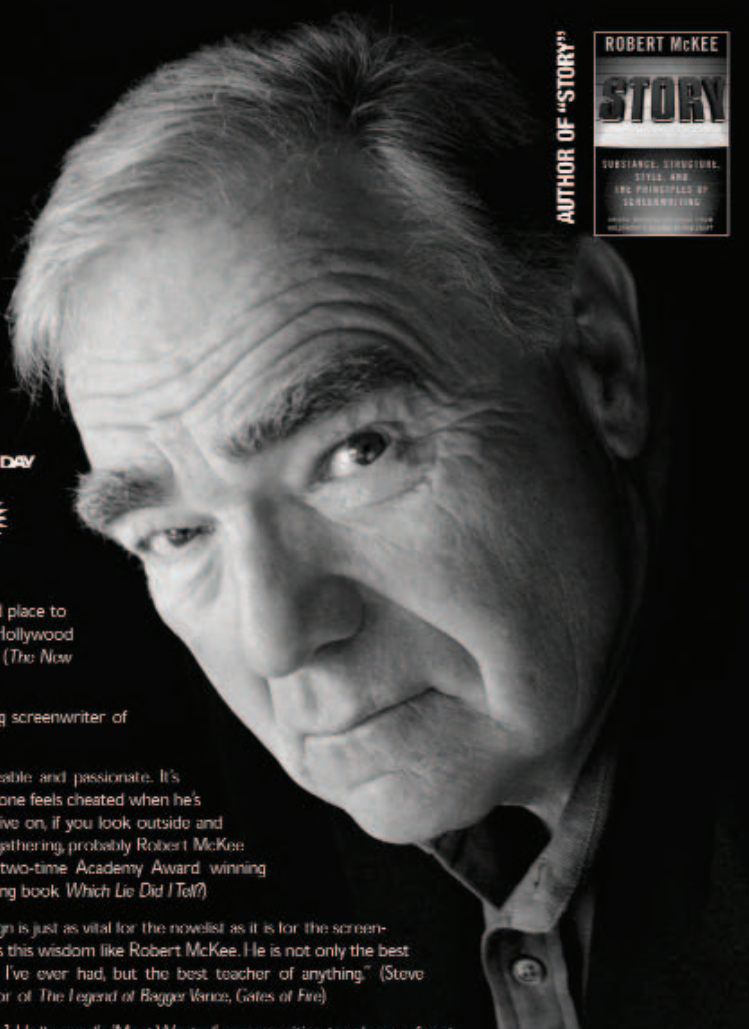
JS: But to answer your question, we don't know because they didn't know back then. The guys at Pixar, who we love and respect — if the guys at Pixar put out a movie and say, "This one's a $300 million movie for sure," that's when they're going to be in trouble because that's what happened here. You

Two Arts, Inc. presents

ROBERT McKEE'S

STORY

SEMINAR



2004 STORY DATES

New York:	March 12-14
Los Angeles:	March 26-28
S.F.:	June 11-13
Atlanta:	Oct. 1-3

2004 GENRE WEEKEND

THRILLER DAY • HORROR DAY • COMEDY DAY

New York - May 7-9, 2004

London - May 21-23, 2004

L.A. - June 18-20, 2004

TAKE ONE, TWO OR ALL THREE CLASSES

ENDORSEMENTS

"Mr. McKee's course is almost universally acclaimed – not only as a good place to start, but also for some to return again and again… About the only Hollywood notable not to have taken the Story Seminar is Steven Spielberg." (*The New York Times*)

"Insightful… concise…" (Akiva Goldsman, Oscar-winning screenwriter of *A Beautiful Mind*)

"Robert McKee's a tireless speaker, knowledgeable and passionate. It's three full days over a single weekend and no one feels cheated when he's done… No matter what continent you live on, if you look outside and see a group of writers or movie nuts gathering, probably Robert McKee is in town." (William Goldman, two-time Academy Award winning screenwriter, from his best selling book *Which Lie Did I Tell?*)

"Knowledge of story design is just as vital for the novelist as it is for the screenwriter. No one imparts this wisdom like Robert McKee. He is not only the best teacher of writing I've ever had, but the best teacher of anything." (Steve Pressfield, Author of *The Legend of Bagger Vance, Gates of Fire*)

"[McKee is] Hollywood's 'Most Wanted' screenwriting teacher… fanatically empowering… inspiring and enthralling…" (Movieline)

"McKee's Story Seminar is a phenomenal tool. Hollywood studios don't buy great ideas. They buy great stories that capture an audience's imagination. McKee teaches you how to turn an idea into a story, and a story into a screenplay." (Toby Emmerich, Exec. Prod. of *Rush Hour 2*. Toby's first script, the hit movie Frequency, was optioned for $500,000 against $1 million by New Line Cinema.)

agenda

DAY 1

- The writer and the art of story
- The decline of story in contemporary film, t.v., theatre and literature
- Story design: the meaning of story, the substance of story, the limitations and inspirations of story structure and genre, the debate between character versus story design.
- Premise Idea, Counter Idea, Controlling Idea
- Story Structure: beat, scene, sequence, act, story
- Mapping the Story universe: Archplot, Miniplot, Antiplot
- Shaping the source of story energy and creation

DAY 2

- Act design: the great sweep and body of story
- The first major story event (the inciting incident)
- Scene design in Story: turning points, emotional dynamics, setup/payoff, the nature of choice
- Ordering and linking scenes
- Exposition: dramatizing your characters, the story setting, creating back story
- The principles of antagonism
- Crisis, climax and resolution

DAY 3

- Putting the elements of story together
- The principles of character dimension and design
- The text: description, dialogue, and poetics
- The spectrum of story genres
- Story adaptations
- Scene analysis: text and sub-text; design through dialogue versus design through action
- The writer's method: working from the inside out; the creative process from inspiration to final draft
- How it all works: the principles of the previous 2-1/2 days applied in a 6-hour, scene-by-scene screening and analysis of *Casablanca*

Ideal for Screenwriters, TV Writers, Playwrights, Novelists, Producers, Directors, Story Editors, Actors, Journalists, Development Executives

LEARN HIS AWARD-WINNING PRINCIPLES

Former Students include:

Akiva Goldsman	Griffin Dunne	David Bowie	Drew Carey
Julia Roberts	Diane Keaton	Marc Klein	Carrie Fisher
Peter Jackson	Meg Ryan	Zak Penn	Betty Thomas
Steve Pressfield	John Cleese	Edward Burns	Faye Dunaway
Joel Schumacher	Kirk Douglas	Gary Sinise	Michael Connelly

McKee's former students have been honored with:

19 Oscars • **112** Emmy Awards
20 WGA Awards • **16** DGA Awards

Plus Writers & Co-writers of:

The Lord of the Rings: *The Return of the King*, Finding Nemo, Law & Order, *A Beautiful Mind*, Friends, Frasier, Monsters, Inc., Behind Enemy Lines, Sex and the City, Bruce Almighty, The Academy Awards, King Kong (2005), Ali, Nixon, Serendipity, Gates of Fire, The Simpsons, X-Men 2, Everybody Loves Raymond, I, Robot

As featured in:

Register by calling

1-888-676-2533

In Europe: +44 (0)870 080 1833

Visit our web site **www.mckeestory.com** for more information or to register with secure on-line registration

Register early as events do sell out.

can't predict it, and if you think you can, you're wrong.

JS: Everybody in town wanted to suddenly make 2D animated movies because *Lion King* made $300 million, and they all wanted in on that. Now that *Monsters, Inc.* made $250 and *Nemo* has made $320, now everybody in town is making 3D movies. Nobody can see that cycle happening again.

WF: And they're all wringing their hands over making the one that will make $300 million.

JS: Just make a good movie. Just make good movies.

How will 2D movies get financed in the future?

WF: Hard to know. I think it's going to be hard to get things financed, but something like *Triplets of Belleville* is very inspiring to see because here's a guy who, virtually on a shoestring basis, over a very long and arduous, determined length of time, put together a very personal vision and did it all in 2D.

JS: I think you'll see some stuff like *Triplets*. Not a lot. What's interesting about that is you'll see the 3D movie become the big studio movie, and every now and then someone will put out this lovingly made little 2D gem.

WF: Actually, 2D has gotten easier in a way to make for an individual because of the software that's out there and the resources. The resources for making a CG movie now have gotten so immense that, if you don't have a powerhouse infrastructure to make like they do up at Pixar, at Blue Sky or as they're developing here in Burbank, you're going to be in trouble, whereas now, it is very inspiring to see a group like Sylvain Chomet and Les Amateurs.

JS: But smaller scale. There will be smaller scale, cheaper movies, and some of them will work, and some won't.

WF: The great thing is that as they get smaller, people will focus less and less on how much they make. One of the great things about having *Home on the Range* land in the position that it's landed in is that there have been so many big stakes animated movies, not just here but elsewhere, that have gone out and disappointed, that in a way the heat was sort of off of us. It's like, "Okay, we don't even know if we're going to keep making these, so just do as good a job as you can. We want you to make a terrific movie." But we didn't have that, "Oh, it's gotta be just like this or just like that." We were really given a free hand with the content.

JS: It's actually freeing for 2D artists because a lot of the attention will be taken off of them. If you can get together a budget like Slyvain Chomet, get together that kind of funding, you can make a small little quirky independent film that people will love that doesn't have to do $200 million to show a return. I'm sure he's going to make his money back because his movie didn't cost an exorbitant amount of money.

WF: And yet he made exactly the movie he wanted to.

What's next? Something in CG?

WF: CG or live action or live action combination. We're both separately pitching ideas and developing stuff.

JS: What's also great about CG in my opinion is that people came to think of 2D as a certain thing. It's for kids, and it's going to have songs and this and that. With CG, the sky's the limit. You've got movies like *Ice Age*. When my wife and I went and saw *Ice Age* on opening night, I thought it would be kids, so be prepared for little kids in the audience. Not a kid to be seen. It was all dates. It was a date night movie. Same with all the Pixar movies. Four-year-olds are not buying 10 tickets for all their friends at half price. These are adults lining up to see these movies, and that's exciting. It opens things out. Maybe animation will become like it is in Japan, where you can make

continues on page 29

SUBSCRIBE HERE

Name:_____

Address: _____

_____

City/State/Zip: _____

_____

Shipping Address (if different): _____

_____

_____

Credit Card Type:_____ Exp: _____

CC Number:_____

SALE!!!!

6 Month Subscription (5 issues) **$15.00** [ ]
12 Month Subscription (10 issues) **$28.00** [ ]
24 Month Subscription (20 issues) **$54.00** [ ]

Total:_____
(Nevada residents will be charged sales tax)

Mail to:

Screenwriter's Monthly
A Division of MoviePartners, Inc.
3343 Stacey Lyn Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89117

Or fax to:

(801) 327-1629

Or go to the web (offer not valid on website)

screenwritersmonthly.com

Point of Entry

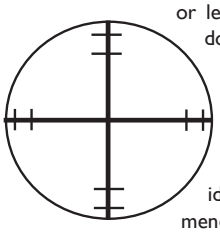
by Philippa Burgess

All About Coverage

Coverage seems to get a pretty bad wrap from writers. It seems that there is a general consensus among writers that coverage is part of a dark conspiracy against them. Often, they are wary of the qualifications of readers and feel that coverage is a hindrance, not a help, to the process. Regardless of how writers feel about coverage, it is an important part of the studio development process and a factor for writers to consider when they submit their material. The more a writer understands how it is used within the system, the more they can get it to work for and not against them.

Most if not nearly all scripts that are submitted from agents, managers or producers to studios are sent into coverage. Sometimes the executive will read the script concurrently with the studio reader while other times they will wait for the coverage to come back in order to make a decision on how they will proceed. Either way, the coverage becomes a permanent record in the studio's story department. Readers at the studios are highly qualified in that they have read thousands of scripts. They are typically well versed in the other projects the studio has done or has in development and use that information as a barometer to evaluate incoming material. They are also responsible for identifying writers that the studio will want to be in business with now or in the future.

When a reader writes coverage, the first page lists the general facts about the script. It identifies the title; author; any attachments such as producer, actor or director; who the script was submitted by; budget range; genre; location; time period; page count; date and reader. Then they list the main leads and supporting characters with their names, sex, age and a brief character description. This is followed by a one sentence to one paragraph logline of the movie that states what the movie is about as succinctly as possible. The second part of coverage is a detailed synopsis of the script that retells the story in greater or lesser detail but usually breaking it down to the beats of its three-act structure. Lastly, the reader writes their comments of the script where they share their thoughts about the overall quality of the writing, the marketability of the idea and any comments or recommendations regarding plot, characters, pacing and dialogue. At the very end of the coverage, they make their recommendation as to whether or not the script should be considered and the writer recommended.



The reader tries to be objective. However, they often arrive at their assessments based on the general overall quality of all the material they are evaluating. The better the pool of material they are drawing from, the more critical they will be of the material that falls below a certain standard. They also aim to base their evaluations on the directives of the executives and producers they work for and what their internal mandates are for projects. Coverage that meets the criteria they are looking for will be recommended for further consideration. Coverage provides a short hand for executives to prioritize the material that crosses their desk. If a script gets "recommend" coverage, it is going to get their attention in a powerful way. If the project is not for them but the writer gets a "consider" mark, they will be interested to see what else that writer has in the future.

When a script is covered at an agency, management company or production company, they are looking to evaluate the material as a writer to consider for representation or writing assignments a potential spec script, or a project for packaging. If it is a new writer, they are typically looking for spec material, which falls into the category of high-concept genre fare. A well-written smaller drama will not be identified as commercial fare but might get the writer some attention. The attention will ultimately lead the representative to want to know what else the writer has in terms of a potential spec. The readers at agencies and management and production companies vary in their level of experience, but they all have a clear grasp of what to look for when they read material.

Readers are the front line. They are the foot soldiers of Hollywood. You may feel like they are in your way, but in fact they are your friends. If they are fans of your script they are the first ones to sing its praises. If they see flaws or areas that need improvement, they will also make their thoughts known. If they don't feel that this is a script worth recommending, they are usually articulate in their evaluations as to what the issues are that need to be addressed either in the writing style, storytelling or marketability. Their insights can be invaluable to knowing the realities of the marketplace. If a writer can take the notes to heart, it can actually lead to great progress in the writer's craft or in the development of the project.

The key to being a professional writer is to know where you fall in your learning curve and understand your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. It is important to identify writers whose talent you wish to emulate and also see how far your own writing has developed over time. Writing is a process and a commitment to improving your skills at every opportunity. A writer who is going to build a longstanding career is going to need to learn how take criticism and to take notes to improve a draft. The business of writing is rewriting. Paid coverage services can give a writer that unique opportunity to know how to best develop their scripts and gain insight into the commercial value of an idea.

Historically, coverage has been something that was internal at companies and sometimes floated around companies and executives but was not something that the writer was generally privy to. More recently, companies like Scriptshark and ScriptP.I.M.P. have started to offer coverage services to writers so that they can see how their script would generally be evaluated by industry readers. It is often difficult for a writer to see that their script was "passed" on by a service that they are paying for, but this reality check is really worth its weight in gold. The goal is not just to hope for a very rare "recommend" but to take any evaluation and use the feedback to their benefit.

No matter what a writer's relationship to coverage is, it will always be there. It helps for a writer to know what the genre and log line is for themselves before they write a script. They should have an idea of how their story unfolds in a one or two page outline. They should know if it is cast-able and if it would attract star talent. They should know if they are writing a commercial genre film or something more art house. These basics are what are going to be on that first page of coverage. If a writer is consistently improving their craft and their scripts, they will also know that sooner or later the word "recommend" will be there too.

- PB

Philippa Burgess of Mason/Burgess/Lifschultz is a literary manager in Los Angeles who represents screenwriters working in Hollywood.

David Mamet

ALL PHOTOS by Lorey Sebastian. (Right to left) Derek Luke, David Mamet, and Val Kilmer in SPARTAN

Interview by Fred Topel

"One of the great things I find about working in drama is you're always learning from the form. You're always getting humbled by it. It's exactly like analyzing a dream. You're trying to analyze your dreams." - David Mamet

David Mamet is one of the greatest writers working today, if not ever, so any chance to sit down with him was an honor. I joined a roundtable interview where several journalists had the chance to ask Mamet questions. Fortunately, just about everything he said was relevant, so here is the interview in its entirety.

Mamet wears huge yellow glasses and sports a full beard, so when he gets into long speeches about the use of exposition, he feels totally professorial. Even when he dishes short quips about dialogue, it's so pointed it feels like he's prepared the answer for years. Probably, he has. Having been in the screenwriting/playwriting business for so long, he must have been asked all these questions many times before.

The film Mamet is promoting is his latest, *Spartan*, an action-thriller about a military investigator (Val Kilmer) trying to locate the president's kidnapped daughter. When the case hits a premature end, he realizes the conspiracy actually goes deeper than he imagined. Though some elements may seem like the typical motions of an action movie, it has the Mamet twist of sharp, stagey dialogue and an atypical sequence of twists and turns.

Do actors usually get your dialogue or do you have to coach them? No, they get it. I write it to be spoken, and I think that almost all actors appreciate that.

Val Kilmer and Derek Luke

How many passes does it take to create perfect dialogue? That's a really good question. I'm not sure I know the answer. I do it fairly spontaneously, and then sometimes, for various reasons, it has to be recrafted. I used to be really good at that, but it gets more difficult as I get older just because my brain is failing. I have less brain cells because long before any of you guys were born, there was something called the '60s. That's where the brain cells were.

What's your writing regimen? I think I'm going to just start writing and keep writing until they throw me in jail. Other than that, I set aside all day every day for writing and break it up with going home to see my family or having lunch or getting a haircut. I hate to do that stuff, but…

Is writing a screenplay or stage play easier? It would seem that you could do almost anything on film, but that's part of the wonderful fascination of filmmaking. You say, well, okay, you can do anything you want. Now, what are you going to do? So that's the wonderful challenge of film. Theoretically, I can do anything I want, limited only by my ability to express it in terms of the shot list. So that's a fascinating challenge. So I don't find it any more freeing or any more constrictive than writing plays. They each have their own strictures. The wisdom of how to understand those strictures fascinates me.

What are the strictures of playwriting? Aristotle said it's got to be about one thing. It'll be one character doing one thing in the space of three days in one place, such that every aspect of the play is a journey of the character toward recognition of the situation. And at the end of recognizing the situation, he or she recognizes the situation, undergoes a transformation, the high becomes low, or in comedy, sometimes the low becomes high. That's the stricture of playwriting.

How did you approach *Spartan*? I just started writing it and kept writing, and it evolved and evolved. It's like filling in a crossword puzzle. You know that word has got to be abracadabra, right? Because there's no other word it can be until you get halfway through and you see that the word down the middle has a P in the middle of abracadabra and there is no P. So therefore, one of them has to be wrong. They can't both be right. And the same thing is true about structuring a drama. You go along and say, "I know this has got to happen at the end of the second act," until you realize you've spent two years, and it doesn't work. So something's wrong. Either the first and third acts are wrong or the second act is wrong. How am I going to fix it? The structure is the whole thing — getting the movie to eat up 15 lines on a sheet of paper so you can write it.

> As in any dramatic structure, the third act is really just a reiteration of the first act where the terms are clarified.

How do you make a genre film your own? Well, you can't help but make a distinct movie. If you give yourself up to the form, it's going to be distinctively your own because the form's going to tell you what's needed. That's one of the great things I find about working in drama is you're always learning from the form. You're always getting humbled by it. It's exactly like analyzing a dream. You're trying to analyze your dreams. You say, "I know what that means; I know exactly what that means; why am I still unsettled?" You say, "Let me look a little harder at this little thing over here. But that's not important; that's not important; that's not important. The part where I kill the monster — that's the important part, and I know that means my father this and da da da da da. But what about this little part over here about the bunny rabbit? Why is the bunny rabbit hopping across the thing? Oh, that's not important; that's not important." Making up a drama is almost exactly analogous to analyzing your dreams. That understanding that you cleanse just like the heroes cleanse not from your ability to manipulate the material but from your ability to understand the material. It's really humbling, just like when you finally have to look at what that little bunny means. There's a reason why your mind didn't want to see that. There's a reason why you say, "Oh, that's just interstitial material. Fuck that. That's nothing, right?" Because that's always where the truth lies, it's going to tell you how to reformulate the puzzle.

What's the bunny rabbit in this movie? Part of the bunny rabbit in *Spartan* is what does he do in the second act? He finds out that everything is screwed up, and it's not a question of manipulation. I better get on my white horse and ride off in all

William H. Macy in a © 2004 Warner Bros. production

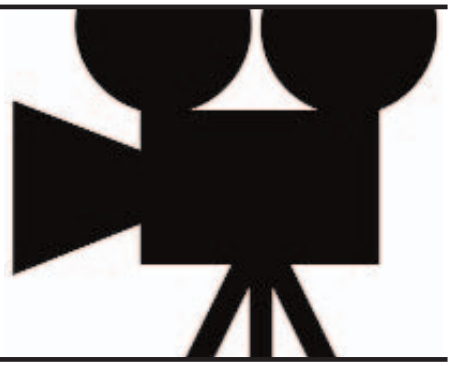
directions, but the question is what am I going to do? So the first thing he does is he says, "I'm going to get everything to the first lady, because she's the mommy. She'll solve the problem." He finds out that he's failed. He was so intent on trying to get to the mother of the victim that he overlooks the fact that he's just gotten trapped. This woman doesn't look like she's the secret service but she is, and then it turns out that that wisdom there leads him to where does he go then? First he goes to the young girl and says, "Here's the story. Can you help me; can you help me?" And what she says is, "All I'm going to tell you is what you told me in the first reel, right?" He doesn't like that, so he's going to get out of it by going to the mother. He goes to the mother first, and she says, "There's nobody there but you; there's nobody there but you. Everything you wanted to avail yourself of isn't there. There is no government. The government's trying to kill you. There isn't any unit cohesion. The unit's trying to kill you. There isn't any sense of patriotism. Your country's trying to kill you. Everybody wants you dead. You have to save her." The woman says, "You have to save her because there's nobody but you. It's just your responsibility." And then he goes to his friend, Tia Texada, and says, "What am I going to do?" She tells him the same thing, "There's nobody there but you." So he says, "I'd better go do it. Let me go back and avail myself of one of my other allies." And the other ally says, "I'm not even going to help you. There's nobody there but you." She offers him an out as we find that friends often do when we're in the midst of a moral dilemma. We go talk to our friends, right? One of our friends always says, "Listen, I understand that you wanna do what you think is the right thing, but that's really not the right thing here, and let me tell you why." It does you a credit that you said you want to do the right thing, but the really righter thing would be to do the wrong thing. And the question is, having had the problem restated to him, having understood what the problem is and having had the problem restated to him, he's now given an out. What's he going to do? That's when he has to make a decision that starts to get into the third act. As in any dramatic structure, the third act is really just a reiteration of the first act where the terms are clarified.

So personal responsibility is the bunny rabbit? Yeah, maybe that's the bunny rabbit.

How did you keep the exposition to a minimum? That's the fun of it. Anybody can write a script that has "Jim, how were things since you were elected governor of Minnesota? How's your albino daughter?" "As of course you know, Mr. Smith, your son has myopia. It's amazing that, having that myopia, he was winning the national spelling bee." That's easy; that's not challenging. The trick is to take a story that might be complex and make it simple enough that people will want to catch up with it rather than stopping them and explaining to them why they should be interested because then they might understand, but they won't care. What makes them interested is to make them catch up. What's happening here? Who is this guy? What crime was committed? Who was taken? Why is she important? Why are all these government people running around? And how is he going to get her back? They want to see what he's going to do next. That's all that moviemaking comes down to — what happens next?

continues on page 27

Script Deals



Unleashing the Mules
Pitch: Deke Edwards, a blind wrestling champion, is helped by his coach through his disability after he loses his sight at the age of 13.
Writer: Christopher Parker
Agent: Hohman/Maybank/Lieb
Buyer: MGM
Price: Mid-six figures
Notes: Spec script. Based on a true story. Alex Gartner will produce.

Mission: Impossible 3
Pitch: More adventures from secret agent Ethan Hunt.
Writer: Frank Darabont
Agent: Byrdie Lifson-Pompan of CAA, atty. Alan Wertheimer of Hirsch Jackoway Tyerman Wertheimer Austen Mandelbaum & Morris
Buyer: Paramount Pictures
Price: n/a
Notes: Writing assignment. Darabont replaced the original writer, Robert Towne. Cruise/Wagner Productions' Tom Cruise and Paula Wagner will still produce.

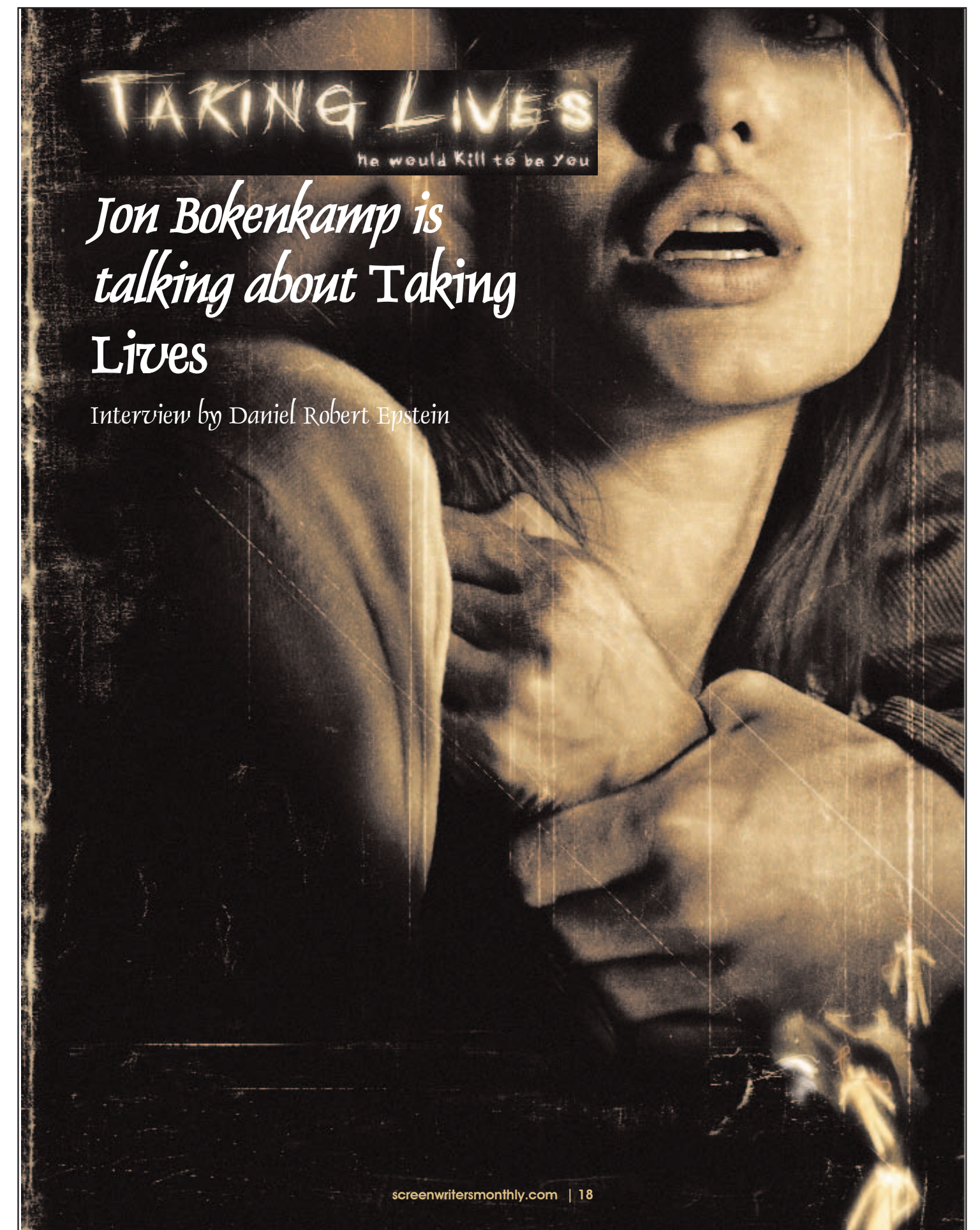
Mud
Pitch: Following three weeks of steady rain in Southern California, a group of people are trapped in a mountaintop art museum during a giant mud slide. As the mud rises, the survivors must get out of the museum and off the mountain before the whole thing comes down.
Writer: Adam Clay
Agent: Mngr. Rob Landers of The Landers Group
Buyer: Capital Arts Entertainment
Price: n/a
Notes: Spec script. The Landers Group's Rob Landers and Capital Arts to produce. Script currently out to talent and directors.

Keep Coming Back
Pitch: A clean-cut Southern man decides to join an Alcoholics Anonymous group in order to meet single girls.
Writer: Will Aldis
Agent: Jordan Bayer of Original Artists
Buyer: Maverick Films
Price: n/a
Notes: Spec script. Maverick's Rachel Rothman will produce. Will Aldis will direct.

Will
Pitch: A high school social outcast must find his way and try to fit in among the school's bullies and cliques.
Writer: Josh A. Cagan
Agent: Mark Ross of Paradigm Agency
Buyer: Revolution Studios
Price: n/a
Notes: Spec script. Revolution's Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas will produce.

Jumpshot
Log line: Three stories weave together to show how gambling and addiction destroy lives.
Writer: Robert Tannen
Agent: ICM and attys. Jeff Frankel and Scott Whitehead of Colden, McKuin & Frankel
Buyer: Stratus Film Company
Price: n/a
Notes: David Greathouse will produce. Bob Yari and Mark Rydell will executive produce. Mark Rydell will direct. Annette Bening is in negotiations to star.

Untitled McQuarrie Project
Pitch: A special forces team is assigned to test the security of the most sensitive government and military installations. Due to overzealous execution of orders, they are disbanded and the individual members expelled from the military; a year later, they are asked to reassemble to stop the terrorist activities of a group that has adopted their tactics and techniques.
Writer: Christopher McQuarrie
Agent: Mngr. Ken Kamins
Buyer: Paramount Pictures
Price: n/a
Notes: Previously titled *Red Cell*, the project has been in development for several years with scripts being written by Kem Nunn and Jim Jacks. Michelle Manning and Alphaville's Sean Daniel and Jim Jacks will produce. Christopher McQuarrie will executive produce. Mark Stefanich to co-produce.



Jon Bokenkamp is talking about Taking Lives

Interview by Daniel Robert Epstein

ALL PHOTOS by Takashi Seida. Angelina Jolie in TAKING LIVES

When Jon Bokenkamp enters the room you can't help but think that he can't possibly be the guy who wrote the new thriller *Taking Lives*, starring Angelina Jolie and Ethan Hawke. It's frankly a disturbing film at times with some of the most gruesome images seen since 1995's *Se7en*. Bokenkamp is a very young looking, clean-cut guy with a swooping haircut reminiscent of Conan O'Brien. But right now he is the go to guy for filmmakers who want a dark and edgy screenplay. Currently, he is working with Marcus Nispel, the director of the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, on a project called *Need*, which not surprisingly deals with a killer psychologist.

Taking Lives is about a "life-jacking" serial killer, Martin Asher, who kills his victims then establishes himself in their lives. He has killed over 19 people in Montreal, and Illeana Scott (Jolie) is an expert FBI profiler who is brought in to catch him.

How much time did you spend with the original novel *Taking Lives*?

I had spent nine months pitching different takes on the movie. In fact when I first went in to pitch for it, the woman who later hired me said, "This isn't what we want." So I went back and came up with what eventually became the movie. Then I spent three years writing various drafts.

How many times did you read the book?

I read it twice. The very opening of the movie is the first scene of the book. I was flipping through the book and saw the great description, Technicolor sky. So I used that, but it felt weird to flip through the book taking stuff out. Finally, I departed from that.

What will the people who read the book *Taking Lives* think of the movie?

I hate to say it, but I think it's one of those movies where if you like the book you'll hate the movie and vice versa. But that character of Martin Asher is the core.

What do you think of the casting?

The casting is great. There are only a handful of female leads who can play this part. I didn't realize when I was writing it that the main character was so limited. I didn't even think it was a problem. Who do you get to play this? Angelina is the obvious choice. I did think about her when I was writing it because believe it or not I went to film school with her brother. I thought Ethan was a very interesting choice. I went to the set and saw him working. That's where it became amazing to see. Watching him bring it to life was fascinating because each take would be different. I never knew what that meant like, "Each time they try something new." That actually gives you options. He's scared in this one; then he's angry in another. He did a great job.

***Taking Lives* producer Mark Canton has said that Angelina's character is more of the Steve McQueen type role of traditional thrillers and Ethan Hawke has the woman's role as the traditional victim. Was that conscious?**

I think what was intentional is that I'm intrigued by a strong female character, someone who has sophistication, vulnerability and strength. It wasn't intentional that those roles are flipped, but I see that in my own life. It almost seems like the audience expects the man to be the tough. He has to fight his way out of

Olivier Martinez, Angelina Jolie, Jean-Hugues Anglade, Tchéky Karyo

the situations and say the cool things. I'm not that guy. I wouldn't know how to kick somebody in the forehead and do the karate chop and all that stuff. I might be the guy who might have a glass of wine, then sit in the bathtub and cry about it. I connect with that more. In that sense I think you're allowed into the mind of the lead character. That you wouldn't be given if he was a guy because he's a wimp. I hate that that is the way it is, but it's true.

***Taking Lives* isn't exactly a groundbreaking thriller, so when the producers told you what kind of a script they wanted, you might think, "Gee, that sounds a lot like a few other movies." What do you do to try to elevate the material?**

It sounds cliché, but I think you try to find truth in what they are saying and who they are. The thing that I thought was interesting and different about this is the character of Martin Asher and how he goes from identity to identity, literally taking lives. But it's not about the people he's killed but more about those he hasn't killed and whose lives he's changed. Trying to find something that's real is part of it and trying to find twists that surprise the audience and me while I am writing. It's a long day sitting in a room. I'm not the guy with the music and all the stuff. If something sparks with me on the page, then I hold onto that and try like hell to make that work.

How do you relate to Martin Asher?

I think it would be fascinating to try to do what he does. The murder thing is going a little far, but I think it would be really interesting to charm somebody into gaining their trust then going off and trying to live their life. Identity theft is obviously a very real and spooky thing. Knowing there is a reality where that could happen — that is how I connect to him. In a different life I would have loved to have been a Jim Morrison type, this totally weird crazy guy, but I have a very dorky existence. I live in Burbank with a wife and a kid, and I'm originally from Nebraska, so it's kind of like an alter ego thing. I go to the movies to be that guy for a while, or when I'm writing, it's to be in the character's skin for a couple of months.

What did your wife think of the scene where Angelina is stabbed in her pregnant stomach?

That came about much later. My wife will close her eyes when stuff like that happens. She's very squeamish. We were joking about one time when we drove by Warner Bros.' billboard for the movie. I said, "If I hadn't written this, would you have gone to see this movie?" She said, "Absolutely not." She hates these kinds of movies. She walked out of *Scream* within the first five minutes. It's kind of odd, but it's a tough notion that happens in *Taking Lives*. My wife being someone who just had a baby, she probably wouldn't think it was very cute.

Did you have any reservations about putting that scene in?

My original ending was that she has the baby, and the end scene

is Angelina walking on the beach with a three year old. You kind of learn that these killers aren't born but made. It was actually (Producer) Bernie Goldmann who came up with the idea for a fake belly very early on. I resisted it at first, but after Hilary Sykes came on to do rewrites, they revisited that. I wasn't driving the boat at that point (laughs).

When writing this movie did you expect it to be so gruesome once it was filmed?

When I showed up on the set and saw all the garrote wires and the blood in the bags, I thought "Oh my god." In your head it's one thing, but when you see it, it's another. But I was just so excited to see it being made, so I was just thrilled.

Did you look at other screenplays for structure?

No, I didn't. I looked at other movies for character stuff like *Silence of the Lambs*. That's a movie that has a strong female character who's going up against a sicko. I looked at that for tone and what I want to feel like when I walk out of the movie. There wasn't one I looked at for structure.

How about reading screenplays in general?

The movies that I tend to like are 70's movies because I think they used to take bigger risks. *Klute*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *Marathon Man* and *The Parallax View*. In The *Parallax View*, he dies at the end. With the '70s movies there was a paranoia that really turns me on. *Se7en* was another film I thought was wonderfully dark.

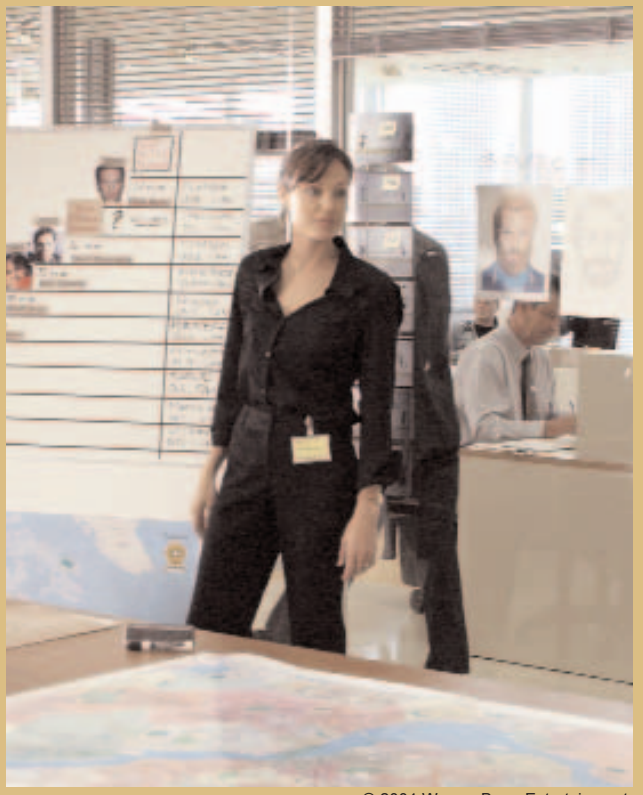
How much time did you spend on the set of *Taking Lives*?

I was only there four days. I was out of place, so people didn't know who I was. It was a generous offer on Warner Bros.' part to let me go up (to Québec, Canada). But I wasn't there writing pages or anything like that.

Would you like to spend more time on the set?

I would like, from a directing standpoint, to see how things are coming to life and playing out. I'm a movie buff, so from that standpoint, I would also. But it makes me nervous to see big changes to the script being made at the last minute. To me the script is the blueprint, so leave it alone. But I don't think I would like the challenge of last minute rewrites. It'd feel like I was working in a newsroom, and 5 p.m. is coming, and the story isn't written. That would freak me out. I like the silence and the easygoing life of the writer.

Ethan Hawke



How is it working with Marcus Nispel on *Need*?

It's going great. It's at Paramount right now, and Marcus had a hit with the remake of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. It's a story of this woman psychologist who finds out her patient is having an affair with her husband. Its kind of, what do you do when you have the keys to someone's psychological closet? She starts gaslighting this woman to get her out of her life. It's a great little story. Chloe King wrote the original story. It's based on a Lawrence David novel, and I've been doing rewrites on it for two years now. The problem with getting *Need* going is that the studio people keep asking, who are we rooting for in the movie? I say, we don't know. The one woman is the hero, but she's trying to kill another woman.

Is there more directing in your future?

Potentially, but I like the control you get from writing. When I directed (the film *Preston Tylk* in 2000), what I learned is that it's about compromise — what you would have done or wish you had time for. It taught me to be a better writer because it makes you figure out what you really need to make it work. I'd like to return to directing, but I have a lot more fun writing and not being away from home.

But screenwriting is a lot of compromise. What about being a playwright where the writer is king?

Theater spooks me because I would just feel ignorant, and I'd make a fool of myself because I'm not very educated in theater. I would like to try a novel. *Taking Lives* was more inspired by that, based on the original book**,** so in a way I feel it's an original. I've written only one other original script, and that was the one I directed. I would love to get back to that. I'm working on another script that also involves a pregnant lady. **- DRE**

IN DEVELOPMENT

By James Vejvoda

DreamWorks Catches the "Red Eye"

DreamWorks Pictures purchased the spec script *Red Eye* by writer Carl Ellsworth. The thriller is described as *Phone Booth* on an airplane. It centers on a female passenger whose captor threatens to kill her father unless she agrees to help him kill a rich businessman.

Dominik Assassinates "Jesse James"

Australian filmmaker Andrew Dominik (*Chopper*) is in talks to write and direct an adaptation of Ronald Hansen's novel, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. Brad Pitt is attached to star as legendary outlaw Jesse James. Pitt will also produce the Warner Brothers-based Western along with Scott Free Productions.

Koepp Goes to "War" for Spielberg, Cruise

Screenwriter David Koepp (*Secret Window*) has reunited with *Jurassic Park* director Steven Spielberg for a big-screen retelling of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. The Paramount Pictures-DreamWorks co-venture will also reteam Spielberg with *his Minority Report* leading man Tom Cruise who will produce the science-fiction epic. Josh Friedman (*Chain Reaction*) penned the previous draft of the script.

Mark Frost is "Electric"

Walt Disney Studios has tapped Mark Frost (*Twin Peaks*) to script *Electric Boy Genius*, based on a *GQ Magazine* article about Ryan Patterson. Mayhem Pictures will produce.

Paramount Resurrects "Pet Sematary"

Face/Off screenwriters Mike Werb and Michael Colleary will script the remake of *Pet Sematary* for Paramount Pictures. The horror flick is based on the Stephen King novel, which was previously produced for the screen in 1989. Alphaville will produce.

Billy Ray Marks "The 11th Hour"

Billy Ray (*Shattered Glass*) will script and direct *The 11th Hour* for Universal Pictures and Intermedia. The project, originally written by Bill Rotko and Adam Mazer, is a recounting of traitorous FBI agent Robert Hanssen's spying for the Soviet Union.

From the "Caribbean" to "Persia"

Jerry Bruckheimer Films has optioned the rights to the hit video game *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. Jordan Mechner will script the period adventure tale for Disney.

James Vejvoda is a graduate of the University of Southern California's Filmic Writing Program, where he received both the prestigious Jack Nicholson Award for Excellence in Screenwriting and the Abraham Polonsky Award. He has also won The Writers Network Fiction and Screenplay Contest and was a quarter-finalist in the Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting. He can be reached at jamvej@msn.com.

THE ART OF STORY

ONLINE

with

Margaret South

Bette Midler, Margaret South, Bonnie Bruckheimer on Oscar Night

"When Margaret South sends me a script, I know it's going to be something I'll love. She has that innate ability to find 'the pearl in the oyster'."
--Bonnie Bruckheimer, Producer, Beaches, Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood

"Margaret South is an enormously talented and highly successful creative producer and writer. She has that rare ability to take a script, get a green light, and get the movie made."
--Teri Schwartz, Producer and Dean, School of Film and Television, Loyola Marymount University

An Eight Week Online Intensive Course in Writing for the Screen

Begins Soon

Register Now

www.theartofstory.com

WATERSHED

by Craig Griffin

The Watershed Dialogue of Slamdance 2004

Hidden among the Rocky Mountain foothills of Park City, Utah, is a tremendous, precipitous watershed, a behemoth watershed, seemingly discernible only to few. On one side the runoff leads toward meaning and purpose onto a path of heart and soul. You must be fierce in your ways though and be a warrior of film, fiercely focused, fierce in energy, fierce of dedication, fierce of commitment, fierce in perseverance. If you indeed persevere, you'll discover obscure harbors of personal and collective heart and soul right there in the theatres of Slamdance. That's where you'll find the inspiration and the vein of gold substance in a sooty mountain of style, gimmicks and devices. The heart and soul is in the films, the films and filmmakers.

On the other side, the runoff runs through mirage-like terrain, leaving your cup empty and dry. Fraught with the distractions of Park City's winter film-festival scene, there also lies an underbelly. Common are these scenes: film industry business executives and agents throwing their self-important weight around while gasping for thin mountain air as they trek up and down Park City's downtown incline, not to mention the stale scent of their winter sweat suits and the retro-hip stylings of their boutique accessories; local and international models, groupies and sales props crossing four foot high snow packed ridges in high heels at Main Street curbs; parties and parties galore with accompanying party animals who mock that they haven't seen a film all week; folks speaking at high volumes on cell phones in front of swanky restaurants, projecting their am-I-winning-this-cool-contest and will-somebody-please-stand-up-and-notice-me voices, boasting of this and that party guest-list containing their name.

Now, if you can pull focus, this is all high comedy. Plus, in a seven-to-ten-day ski resort festival setting, the social component is, of course, essential for survival, for endurance and for the full experience. Beware, though, so as not to get caught up in it. And keep things in perspective. Do not be moved. Do not be distracted or deceived. Keep it real. The heart and soul is in the films.

Slamdance is a respected, praised and admired year-round organization dedicated to serving new filmmakers from around the world. Started in 1995 by a group of upstart writer/director/producers, Slamdance continues to be organized and programmed by active filmmakers. Now in its tenth year as an annual festival that runs simultaneous to the Sundance Film Festival, Slamdance has established a unique reputation for premiering independent films by first-time directors working with limited budgets. If you go, though, go for the films and filmmakers.

For a complete list of Slamdance screenings, screenwriting prizes and film awards, visit www.SlamdanceFilmFestival.com. Here are some of my favorite Slamdance 2004 films:

HOMEWORK - A 16-year-old ballet dancer explores her sexual and emotional world in unexpected ways when she encounters predicaments above and beyond her controlled environment. Directed by Kevin Asher Green.

MONSTER ROAD - This film explores the life and work of visionary clay and line animator Bruce Bickford. Bickford is best known for the dark and magical clay animations he created for musician Frank Zappa in the 1970s. Bickford's films have achieved cult status worldwide even though very little of his forty-year body of work has been released to the public. Directed by Brett Ingram. www.brighteyepictures.com

THE WATERSHED documentary. Photo of the Trunk family.

CRABWALK - A 26-year-old unemployed college grad still living at home is given a final $20 allowance by his parents. His first day of trying to be a grown-up is a series of bittersweet and darkly comical mishaps. Directed by Jeremy Saulnier.

BIG CITY DICK - This captivating journey into the world of a savant street musician and his lifelong struggle to become a successful recording artist. His celebrity obsessions range from Jeff Bridges to Johnny Mathis, and then The Stone Temple Pilots discover his music. Directed by Scott Milam, Ken Harder and Todd Pottinger. www.bigcitydick.com

THE WATERSHED

The Slamdance film that consumed me and still won't leave me alone though is *The Watershed.* As did my Slamdance experiences and observations, *The Watershed* reminds me in spades that if you want to work on your art, work on your life.

A story of survival and forgiveness that shows how tragedy and deprivation can have transforming effects on individual identity. In hardly more than a decade the Trunk family moved from a life of seeming glamour, perfection, and financial success to one of welfare and isolation. Within a year of moving his family of nine from Long Island, New York to Santa Barbara, California, Jack Trunk announced to his wife, Paula, that he no longer loved her. He moved out, and a short time later, he lost his job. Devastated by the loss of her marriage and overwhelmed by the prospect of raising seven young children along with no resources, Paula Trunk gave up hope.


Photo courtesy of Paul Sanchez

Filmmaker Mary Trunk

The film focuses on how the Trunks were forced to deal with circumstances out of their control and still managed to remain a close family. The four years the Trunk children were left to fend for themselves, often living without a phone, electricity, heat and very little food while their mother spent the majority of her time in bed, drunk. Just when life seemed unbearable, all seven Trunk children were rescued and taken in by relatives who already had three children and limited resources of their own. It was there that they had a second chance at becoming a family again. I met screenwriter/filmmaker Mary Trunk in Park City and have since discussed her film with her. What follows is my *Watershed* dialogue with the filmmaker:

Mary, you wrote two versions of the screenplay for *The Watershed*. Also, from the first moment you set up camera and asked your first question, you knew this project would be a documentary. So prior to setting up camera, then, you had planned to interview your family members as research and character study for your script. According to your original conception of this idea and your vision for *The Watershed*, what would the script and film have been like?

While writing the script I wanted more details about that time from the people who experienced it. Mine seemed so limited. So I sent all of my family members questions and cheap tape recorders and a bunch of tapes. They answered the questions (except my father, who sent the tape recorder, tapes and questions back to me), and although there was a lot of good information, they still lacked the details I wanted. For example, I would ask a specific question about Christmas or something and they'd only say that it was "good." Then I decided that it might be a good idea to visit them and ask the questions face to face. They'd probably be more apt to give me details if I prompted them more.

My husband, Paul, and I took five weeks off from work (I used to own a flower shop in San Francisco), and we started in New York, where my cousin was getting married. We attended the wedding. Most of the family members were there, and we mapped out our trip. We went to Chicago, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida. I had a feeling before I left that this might turn into a documentary, but it wasn't until I sat down with everyone that I knew for sure. These people were far more gripping than any character I could write about. I also learned so much about why they are the people they are. The interviews were so intimate.

I did end up writing two scripts, one where the protagonist is a 16-year-old girl, the autobiographical approach. Some of that was okay, especially the opening scene that begins in a "Pioneer Chicken" where I was first legally employed — I babysat and cleaned houses from the time I was 10. Then I thought it might be interesting to tell the story from my mother's point of view and focus on the relationship between her and her sister. I liked the idea of a movie that was told from a middle-aged woman's point of view. There are so few of them. I even was accepted into a writer's residency in New York so I could work on that script. And I did. I couldn't tell you how I would want these films to look, but you can probably tell from our conversations that I tend to go for the less Hollywood feel.

I was told in my scriptwriting class that my strength was in writing dialogue. I don't know if that's true, but those sections in the scripts are the ones I like the most. Other than that they really aren't very good even after many rewrites. I still think the story is great and maybe a script could come of it all. I'm ready to move on to something else.

Who did you entertain in your mind playing Paula, your mother? I thought your mother resembled Sophia Loren.

I didn't think much about casting the film, or maybe I just don't remember because I wrote the scripts (two very different versions, both rewritten tons of times, etc.) about five years ago. I'm one of those people who adores Meryl Streep and is never bugged by her, so I always see her if I'm going to fantasize about an actress in one of my films. But now she's too old although she's so good she could probably do it and convince me. When I was younger people mistook my mother for Marlo Thomas all of the time. They would even stop her on the street. She did wear her hear in that flip that was so popular at the time. I remember being in a restaurant, and someone came over and asked for her autograph! When she was very young, way before marriage and kids, people said she reminded them of Audrey Hepburn. I don't see it. I think the Sophia Loren reference is closer.

You said that when you told an abbreviated version of your family's story on the first day of a screenwriting class you took in San Francisco, one of the other students made a crack that he wasn't up for reading some depressing Sam Shepard-type drama. I got a kick out of that comment, but I'm glad it didn't deter you. To complete the work of a creative project, don't you think that all artists, including screenwriters and filmmakers, really have to develop their armor against the spears of all the critics, doubters and naysayers? So tell me then, what are your top five screenplays? What are your top five films?

You have no idea that you just opened up a door you may wish you never did. I read a ton, and for the past six years or so, I've even kept lists of all the books and movies I've read and seen, and I rate them. 2002 was skipped though because I was too consumed with dealing with my infant daughter, and we moved to L.A. I have not read a lot of screenplays because I find them somewhat unsatisfying. I tend to read to escape into another world, and a lot of screenplays don't do that for me, even my own. My husband, Paul, works on feature films as a camera operator and cinematographer, and I've read many of the scripts of the films he's worked on. The only one that I thought was good was *Hurly Burly*. All the others were pretty awful although some of the films turned out okay. Funny how that works.

Having a thick skin about one's work is not easy at all. I'm terrible at it although I've certainly improved in that area. But I do think it is absolutely necessary. You just can't please everyone all of the time, and if you did then you'd be opening Wal-Mart franchises or selling French-fries. I don't think it's too difficult to figure out what the majority wants and fill the gap. Even if you're making movies or writing books. Look at what movies make all the money. What is difficult is continuing to work even if you don't get any glory at all. Working on my film was hard because it took so long and I didn't get any recognition for it for so many years. I felt as if I were working in a vacuum, much like other documentarians and writers, I suppose. I was used to putting work out there on a fairly regular basis. I had a dance company for ten years in San Francisco, and we performed at least three or four shows a year, not to mention that I could see progress when choreographing with the dancers in the studio. That kept me going. Then when I began to work exclusively in film, things slowed down. It all took longer. I made a lot of short films that showed in various shows and festivals around — mostly experimental works and far too intellectual for their own good. Some

continues on page 32

continued from page 16

How do you not become lost in power? That's a very good question. I think the answer is that you have to have the specter in front of you all the time. You have to be able to learn, and I think I'm capable of doing this to a certain extent, and I would like to be able to do it to a greater extent, to say that you have to be able to take pride in mastering your own impulses, take pleasure in gratifying them. There are a lot of really great models, and the military is one of them. I think this is a very pro-military movie in many ways. It's saying, Here are people who are capable of subordinating their financial needs and their physical needs to an extraordinary regiment, mental and physical regiment, in the cause of service. The question of the movie is, "To what extent is that person capable of abiding by precepts which he's teaching other students, which he's explained to others?"

Do actors like Val Kilmer respect your dialogue and not try to change it? Yeah, they don't do that to me because of several reasons. One is the dialogue is good; the other reason is the actor is good.

Have you ever deviated from your own script?
I haven't deviated from it. I've certainly changed it.

In what circumstances?
Well, if something's not working, a lot of the times you say, "Well, let's try something else." I mean, I've always got a typewriter in the trailer. Say, "You know, that scene isn't working right. Give me a moment, I'll write a new scene."

The trick is to take a story that might be complex and make it simple enough that people will want to catch up with it rather than stopping them and explaining to them why they should be interested because then they might understand, but they won't care.

You get inspired too. Oftentimes, you just get inspired. Stuff's happening on the set. You say, "Oh my God, let's do some more of that," or, "Now I understand what happens in scene 47. One of my favorite moments was doing *State and Main* with Alec Baldwin and Julia Stiles. They're both drunk out of their minds, and he crashes the car. The car is upside down; they're both drunk, and he crawls out of the car and looks around. He says, "Well, that happened." It was like an inspiration at four o'clock in the morning. He said something else, and I said, "Well, wait a second, say this." I was looking at what was happening on the set and said, "Wouldn't that be funnier?"

Has an actor ever invented a brilliant line that you took credit for? No, I would never take credit for something somebody else said.

But in a play, you wouldn't change what's written. Well, of course, when it's written. I mean, I just opened a play in San Francisco on Saturday, and I'm changing the play up until opening night, and that's the first production. I'll probably change some things as I work on the manuscript before it gets published. At a certain point you've got to stop.

What have been the greatest frustrations of letting other people direct your scripts? Well, the greatest frustrations have been having the scripts directed other than the ways in which I thought they would have gone. But when I did a script for someone else to direct, I got paid for it. I mean, that's one of the things you get paid for.

Kristen Bell and Val Kilmer

Something as well regarded as *Glengarry Glen Ross* — what would you have changed? Oh, nothing. I wouldn't have changed anything. I love that one.

When do you make yourself stop writing? I'm pretty good. At a certain point you want to do something else. Past a certain point, you say it could be perhaps a little bit better with a lot more time, but I try to get it as perfect as I can given the fallibility of the fact I'm not going to live forever.

How do you approach something that's your own as opposed to a for hire project? I don't think I approach them any differently. I put my name on it. That's the best I know at this time.

Do you see a career plan? I don't know. I just make them up as I go along. Whatever anybody says, you're always making it up as you go along. It's like when you have babies; nobody gives you a how to book; nobody gives you a manual. It's like any of the important things in life. Whether it's your career, whether it's marriage, whether it's child rearing, you're making it up as you go along. And you try to have certain precepts, and sometimes they even change.

Has directing become as natural as writing? Well, I enjoy it. There are certain things I can do naturally, but the people a lot of us admire — I'm sure a lot of athletes that people admire — they're working on their weaknesses all the time. That's what I'm doing at least some of the time. So do you enjoy doing the thing that goes easy? Yeah, sure. But there's also great enjoyment in doing the thing that comes with difficulty.

Directing is more of a challenge? Well, certain aspects of the writing are easy. I write dialogue fairly easily. Plot is a big pain in the ass. I work very, very hard on that, but I enjoy working on it because it has great rewards. And I love directing.

When you sit with your plot, do you start with character, theme or story elements? I think when you're working on the plot, you're talking about what does the character want? All the plot is is the structure of the main character towards the achievement of one goal. **- FT**

Over the next six months, we are proud to feature excerpts from Hollywood producer Mark Bennett's manuscript "The Big Show."

The BIG SHOW

"...*Johnny Came Lately* and Mark came after that."
- Fred de Cordova

There is no such thing as an independent producer. Co-dependent I believe is accurate.

Nevertheless, I have found it practical to view running any company let alone one in Television, the same as running a greenhouse. One has to maximize their efficiency so that there are plants growing in every square inch of growing space. And if you want to bring something to market next Mother's Day, you'd better seed last week.

So, one does a delicate dance between television's two very distinctive industries: The Development Business and The Production Business. Sometimes you hope the twain meet. It is possible to make a modest living and stay in Development and that may have been helpful in bridging some gaps but with Fred, obviously, he increased the odds as an insurance policy of sorts so that we could make occasional appearances (and profits) in the Production Business.

Frequently, I would express to Fred that it was one thing to know you're lucky in retrospect and quite another to know it as it is happening. He in turn, in his typical self-deprecating way would say that *he* was the lucky one.
Also unusual (or maybe not so unusual) was the fact that Fred was quick to note that at least internally in this industry the focus would be on me. He said, "When you're in the cat-bird seat, the downs far outweigh the ups. So what time would you like me to show up tomorrow morning, Boss?"

Truth really is stranger than fiction. Then again it is always good to hire people who can do your job far better than you...

I felt so fortunate. My infant company growing into adolescence.
While we "planted seeds," I had a flashback.

I watched my parents start with nothing more than a card table, a phone, my mother ran the printing press (she still winces at the memory of ink under her nails), and my father did the sales calls.

They broke even in a year and the company is still going strong.
Dad would say, "Running a company means you're the one who opens the door, cleans the toilets, recognizes that sometimes meeting payroll is a victory unto itself, always pay your self last and finally, if you want a company to run well...hire women."

I am glad there is a thing called osmosis.

My Dad's example, combined with my observations of the well-oiled machine called Carson Productions, helped to expand Nightingale.
(When I asked Johnny Carson how many people worked on the Tonight Show staff, I seem to recall his answer, "'Bout half.")

So, with a shift in thinking, Fred and I began looking outside the walls of NBC (still giving them first choice of course) paying closer attention to the sensibilities and personalities of the other networks and by so doing, expand Nightingale Productions' contact pool.

"...They may look like an idiot, sound like an idiot, everyone says he's an idiot, but they may still have a good idea. Good ideas are everything."
- Fred de Cordova

Good ideas can change cultures.
I believe in what I call the Producer's Cosmos. That is that ten producers can come up with pretty much the same idea around the same time and the person with the most energy wins.

I also believe that every producer has a total bomb of a show that will never get on the air that they are just itching to do.

Then there's the third belief in which, due to the odds that are against you, the experience (almost) outweighs the result because every producer should love the process.

Then once in a great while, when the planets are in the right place and it is somewhere around 72.4 degrees with a light breeze, the Producer gods kiss you on the cheek and present you with something fully realized, utterly simple, original yet familiar, an idea that travels well, has broad appeal, and gets the heart pumping by the most jaded of Network Executives who has heard the best and the worst ten times over.

Lightning struck and I pitched Fred de Cordova.

He saw what I saw.

It was magic.

"It is the most original idea I've seen cross my desk in many, many years," Fred declares.

"Let's take this all over town," says Youth.

"No, we need an organizational okay. We need funding for a ninety day period to corral celebrities and to see if we're really onto something."

(Oh that's right, Fred always says that any good Producer does not put dollar one of his own money into any project.)

"That makes sense," I say.

"We'll take it around when we're sure," Fred continues, "It is my belief that three months is a realistic timeframe at which time we can determine whether or not to commit and/or exploit this elsewhere."

Fred lights a cigarette.

He continues, "We'll set this up as a Special, which could lead to a weekly show. Weekly makes it sound to easy."
NBC thinks it is too much like a previous special.

Fred, always quick on the uptake, "It is 180 degrees the opposite, and this is why."

NBC on a second thought adds, it is too "PBS."

I mention to Fred, "We need to take this outside."

Fred grabbed the phone and called Garth Ancier, then President of the newly established WB Network.

This would be the first time Fred and I pitched outside the confines of NBC and I couldn't be more nervous.

Then it had occurred to me, when was the last time Fred pitched outside NBC and who was he with? Jack Benny? George Burns?

At the time, this thought did not help my already existing nerves.

I remember I thought, "Is this leap-out-of-the-comfort zone, my fault?"

Then, "This man next to me is sure going out on a limb."

(I'll never know the half of it.)
Funny thing is that later that day I had an opportunity to be of service for the Talent at an APLA benefit concert. Elton John, Joni Mitchell, Nona Hendryx, George Michael, Clint Black, of course Little Richard; a real high-end concert that Bernie Taupin put together. Normally this would be exciting. Frankly, it paled in comparison to the (likely) twenty minute, ten o'clock pitch meeting I was to participate, and lead.

My face was flushed the moment I got up that morning and one would think I had lockjaw due to my clenched teeth.

I agonized, "I am two steps away from an anxiety attack because of a pitch meeting?"

My resolve: Excellent. *This is good.*

Fred was not much on waxing nostalgic. For him it was about today and how is that going to affect tomorrow. But at that moment, as we drove onto the WB Network lot and passed the guard, Fred reminisced, "The first time I was on this lot, it was as a dialogue director in 1942 for the motion picture *Mildred Pierce*. Joan Crawford won the Oscar that year."

(This is the one time when you wish you had a longer drive.)

The meeting came and went. Garth was gracious.
On our way back to the car, the first words uttered were from Fred when he whispered, "Now tell me, how do you think the meeting went?"

I told him my thoughts and he replied, "Yes. I would agree with that."

That was the first time I felt like a partner, but I could never really say that. Ever.

to be continued next month...

continued from page 11

anything in an animated movie. You can do an animated movie about baseball, and it doesn't have to be about one certain thing.

What are the advantages of animation in storytelling?

WF: Different artists find mediums that simply are their strengths. And the thing that I always go back to is that in 1937 you could have made *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* in live action. They're all human characters. You could get four actors and seven little people to play those parts. In fact, there had been a silent movie Walt Disney had seen as a kid, a live action silent movie he'd seen as a kid that inspired him to make that. And yet the artists at that point who were really flowering into their own — Walt Disney and his team were masters of animation and caricature. They created a vision of the movie that live action could not simulate because they were masters of animation. I think Sylvain Chomet did that with *Triplets of Belleville*. They're human beings in the movie, but it's a caricatured world, and it's a very personal world. It's the mastery of the artist. Some movies have that mastery of CG art.

JS: Going back to anime, I'm a big fan of martial arts movies and samurai movies. I've seen Akira Kurosawa's samurai movies and they're great. On the other hand, there's an animated TV series that's about a samurai, and that's so unlike that stuff because the things that characters can do in animation — you can't film that. You can't even come close with live action CG combinations.

How do you divide your tasks?

JS: We kind of tag team everything pretty much. We both write. We both do a lot of story pitches. We both do a lot of dialogue. We both look at animation. Will being the more experienced animator, I did a lot of watching early on to see how he would work with the animators.

WF: John's terrific with directing animators. I've done a lot of character animation, but it really comes down to the ideas. We had a fantastic team of animators who were all brilliant in every case and a great story crew too. But the thing is — and again it's one of the great things about working in a team as two guys — we had the strength of presenting a united front. I can't think of anything important we were ever at odds about. There might be a detail thing that we would say, "Let's try it one way and see if it works. If it doesn't we'll try the other way. Really, it's very tough to create these marriages, and if they don't get created right, they can not work. At some studios, they actually use two and three and four directors as a way of dividing up all the different departments. I've tried to work in that situation too, and it's a nightmare because no one ever gets to feel like they own anything. You might focus on this part of a movie or a story or something, but then somebody else is committed to something else, and it sometimes gets very fragmented. It's not a good way to work.

Was that on *El Dorado*?

WF: Yeah, by design and not by the design of the other directors. Both are terrific guys. But it was really kind of a divide and conquer sort of situation over there.

Is there room for video sequels or a TV series?

WF: I think we're going to hear some pitches on that next month. Usually, they like to see how successful the film is tracking. The sequels thing has got kind of a knock on it right now. A sequel can be a boon to something, or it can be — I think *Toy Story 2* is the best sequel I've ever seen on a movie because you actually came back to a world and added to it. A lot of sequels come back, and I don't know how many times they can come back to Austin Powers.

But that's theatrical. We're talking video.

JS: It's strange because they're done on a much tighter budget on a much tighter schedule with much more limited resources than we have. So they don't get the chance to workshop the story the way we do. They don't get the chance to redo. Once an animated scene is done, it's done, and it's in. So they mainly do them to kind of keep the franchise alive, keep these characters alive.

WF: *Lion King 1* is a really good example of getting the clue around here that you can't just keep coming back and hitting the reset button and just telling the same story again with the same character, a lighter version of the same story or the son of the character. *Lion King 1* found a very funny way of fleshing out the sequel without really being a sequel, and hopefully they can do that with *Home on the Range*. We have ideas of our own. **- FT**

Fred Topel is an experienced entertainment correspondent with a degree in Cinema and Photography from Ithaca College. He currently writes and has written for online news outlets and magazines such as Herald Tribune Online, Daily Radar, eUniverse, Cinefantastique and The Hollywood Reporter since graduating in May 1999.

Dig Deeper

by David Landau

Photos courtesy of Columbia Pictures © 2002

I have often been perplexed when a producer or another writer reads something I wrote and then gives the following comment, "Dig deeper." I suspect all writers get this feedback. My first inclination is to think to myself, "What? You want me to dig the hole I'm in deeper?" Is there some book that only producers read that tells them when to say "dig deeper" instead of giving specific comments?

When I first saw *Adaptation* by Charlie Kaufman, I laughed and was moved by it. This isn't really a comedy. It's a tragedy. Writers block, loss of self worth, and self-destruction are all themes at work within the two hour story. On the surface the story is about a screenwriter attempting to adapt a non-linear book into a movie. But Kaufman dug deeper. He wrote about adaptation — changing to survive. That's what self-doubting screenwriter Charlie (the character in the film not the author) fails to do, while his brother Donald actually does. As Donald realizes success, Charlie falls deeper into despair. Ironically, and a true statement on Hollywood, it is Charlie who lives.

Virtually everything in Kaufman's screenplay runs counter to the agreed upon collective instruction on how to write for the screen. The screenplay is imbedded with voice-over, not just of Charlie but of the female main character Orlean as well. It features flashbacks within flashbacks. It doesn't even seem to know exactly who its protagonist is: Charlie or Orlean. While these might all be severe comments given to Kaufman by a producer or reader, one thing he made sure they can't say is "dig deeper". And that is why *Adaptation* works perfectly just the way it is.

Kaufman found a universal feeling that connects all human beings: the feeling of despair. His two writer main characters both share this, while seeing all around them others who seem not to share their plight. Despair is a lonely business. Kaufman seems to be saying that despair is a downward spiral that ends with horrible consequences for us and those around us. That's deep.

But the screenplay is full of humor and irony. Despair is so heavy that if Kaufman left out his wit and his social commentary, we would all be killing ourselves half way through the feature — or at least walking out. A good story has a balance between the tragic and the comic. They are two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately many writers seem to forget that. The despair in Kaufman's writing is particularly strong because it is off-set by the humor countered to oppose it. It is the juxtaposition of the humor with the sad circumstances that makes this story so poignant. Kaufman isn't the first to do this. Certainly Charlie Chaplin was adapt at this art as witnessed in his film *City Lights* and Larry Gilbert did it in *MASH*.

When we writers are told to dig deeper, we aren't being asked to fill in more of the background of our characters, or add more obstacles for our protagonist to overcome. We are being told to do what Kaufman did, find that universal, all connecting "something" that we have successfully hinted at but not quite grasped a hold of within our writing. This is our theme. It is what our story is "really" about. It's there, somewhere, and the person who told us to "dig deeper" saw a glimpse of it, otherwise they wouldn't have bothered to comment at all. They would have just concentrated on the standard screenwriting workshop commentary — the stuff Kaufman defiantly makes fun of and refuses to bow to. **- DL**

David Landau is a published, award winning playwright whose work has been produced nationwide. He has written industrial videos and penned numerous screenplays - a few having been optioned, a few finalists in competitions. He teaches screenwriting and electronic filmmaking at Fairleigh Dickenson University and is a member of the Dramatists Guild, Mystery Writers of America and IATSE Local 52.

Script Notes

News and information concerning screenwriters and their craft

WGAw President Holland Resigns, Replaced by Petrie, Jr.

Writers Guild of America, west president Charles Holland, the first African-American to head a Hollywood union, resigned his position in March after serving only two months. Daniel Petrie, Jr. has been elevated from the vice-presidency to the top spot. Holland had replaced Victoria Riskin who resigned after claims of ineligibility were raised last year. Some Guild members had called into question the truthfulness of certain comments made by Holland about his past and his record.

Holland's weakness could have reportedly undermined the Guild's bargaining strength when negotiations with the studios begin later this spring over DVD residuals. The industry trades are already buzzing about the possibility of a Writers Guild strike this summer.

"As committed as I am to fulfilling my responsibilities and to standing up for myself, the guild is more important than one man," Holland said in a press statement. "On the eve of negotiations, I have no choice but to remove myself and clear the air for the only issue that matters —the best possible deal for the benefit of the most possible writers."

Writers Guild Award Winners

The 56th Annual Writers Guild Awards for outstanding achievement in writing for the screen, television, and radio were held on February 21, 2004. Sofia Coppola won the Original Screenplay honors for *Lost in Translation.* Adapted Screenplay was awarded to Robert Pulcini & Shari Springer Berman for *American Splendor*, based on the comic book series by Harvey Pekar.

In the television categories, Matt Selman won the Animation award for his work on *The Simpsons*. Larry Gelbart took Original Long Form prize for the HBO telepic, *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*. Anne Meredith scored Adapted Long Form for *Out of the Ashes*, based on the book *I Was A Doctor in Auschwitz* by Dr. Gisella Perl. Evan Katz won Episodic Drama for *24*, and Bob Daily won Episodic Comedy for *Frasier*.

"King"'s Ransom at the Oscars

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King swept the 76th Academy Awards, winning every category it was nominated in including Best Picture, Best Director, and Adapted Screenplay. The latter award was given to director Peter Jackson and co-screenwriters Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens for their adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's beloved fantasy novel. Sofia Coppola took home Original Screenplay honors for *Lost in Translation*.

Carole Eastman, Screenwriter of '"Five Easy Pieces," Dead at 69

Carole Eastman, who co-wrote the 1970 film *Five Easy Pieces* and wrote several other screenplays, died Feb. 13 after a long illness. She was 69.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Eastman died at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. The cause was not released. She was a resident of West Hollywood.

She and director Bob Rafelson were nominated for an Academy Award for writing *Five Easy Pieces*, considered to be Jack Nicholson first major role.

Eastman wrote five other movies that were produced, including the 1967 western *The Shooting*, which featured Will Hutchins and Nicholson; 1975's *The Fortune*, starring Nicholson and Warren Beatty; and her final film, *Man Trouble*, a 1992 romantic comedy. **- JV**

James Vejvoda wrote "Primeval: Devolution and the Horror Film" that appeared in the September 2003 issue. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California's Filmic Writing Program, where he received both the prestigious Jack Nicholson Award for Excellence in Screenwriting and the Abraham Polonsky Award. He has won The Writers Network Fiction and Screenplay Contest and was a quarter-finalist in the Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting. He can be reached at jamvej@msn.com.

continued from page 26

of them I still like for the beauty of the shots, but I don't think they moved anyone emotionally.

As I get older I think my armor is tougher, both literally and figuratively. I could use a little botox! Just kidding. I worked hard on *The Watershed*, and I feel very proud of it. Yes, improvements could be made, but sometimes you just have to abandon the project and move on, not to mention that I don't have any money left. But generally I can stand behind this film and know I put my best out there. When that person in my screenwriting class made that comment, I treated it as a complement. Sam Shepard can write, for God's sake. Anyway, I sometimes have to remind myself that it's really a waste of time to be insecure. We only get a limited time, and for me the time seems shorter and shorter. I can't believe I'm in the middle of my life already! AAAAAH! Remember when we were 20 and we thought getting old would take forever? If I don't stand up for my work, I can't expect others to do it, which isn't to say I don't have my moments when I want to cry and feel completely sorry for myself. It was not easy to stay at the Closing Night Party at Slamdance after I won nothing. And it wasn't easy when I returned home to three different festival rejections waiting in my mailbox — all festivals I was kind of hoping for, even one who said they loved the movie but ended up not finding a spot for it. I was also PMSing, so I was a mess after all of that. After a few days I said, "Fuck it. I want to get the film out there, and if I have to do it myself, then I'll do it."

In the promo poster for *The Watershed*, you've included the quote, "In order to survive...you kind of have to kid yourself. Otherwise you'd never get through it." Whose quote is that, and why did you choose to display it so prominently? And was that quote made during the years shown in *The Watershed*, or was the quote made now, looking back?

The quote is by my sister Lizzie, and she did say it in her interview, and it is in the film. She's talking about how she didn't want to truly face the dire situation we were in without food and parents because, if you really faced it, then you had to face the fact that the situation was out of control and maybe you wouldn't survive it. I love the quote because it works on many levels, most importantly regarding memory. Everyone remembers this event in our lives in different ways, and I believe we do that so that we can live with it. Maybe it's not exactly accurate, but how do we know that unless someone was videotaping the actual events? But it's accurate in each person's mind. My father remembers or doesn't remember how things were because that's how he can live with himself and have a life that makes him content in some way. My siblings can laugh about some of the most horrendous events that occurred in their childhood because they probably didn't see it as horrendous when it happened. If they did, they may not have survived. How many times do we return from a party or a job interview or something that requires you to be "on," and we either hate ourselves because we think we behaved horribly and probably weren't so bad, or we see it as an event that wasn't so bad. We say to ourselves, "I did okay," or "I wasn't that drunk at the party." And then we can go on with our lives. Isn't this always the case with politicians? Anyway, I think the quote speaks to everyone on different levels. And if we're honest with ourselves we admit that we manufacture memory, change it, embellish it, etc., and we even do it for the present. It's how we survive living life.

If you were me, interviewing you, what question would you ask?

I'm kind of stumped. How weird is that? It's funny because what just popped into my head was that I always seem to ask people how old they are. I guess I'm a little insecure regarding age because it seems there are so many young, baby filmmakers out there who get all kinds of recognition, and here I am at 42 feeling like my pace is snail-like. Not very interesting, that question, I suppose.

I would probably ask a lot of questions about the family. What are your relationships with everyone now? Who do you talk to the most? What do they think of the film? Did you ever wonder if you'd made a mistake to do this? Will you do another film about them at some later date? Is there another event in your life that you'd want to share? Now I guess I have to answer them.

My relationships with my family are basically pretty good. I'm closest with my sisters, and I probably talk to some of them at least once or twice a week. I am close with one brother, but the other one lives in Florida, and we hardly talk at all. When we do it's not uncomfortable but we lead very different lives, and therefore, there's very little to talk about. Also, he's had a troubled life and isn't great about taking responsibility, so I have a hard time being around someone like that. The funny thing about families, or at least ours and I suspect others, is that we talk about each other with each other. When someone is bugged by someone or needs to figure out how to deal with another, we talk to each other, sometimes really getting into a bitch session. The other great thing about families is that, although you can be furious with someone, you do end up forgiving them at some point. Sometimes it takes a long time, but with us we make up fairly quickly. I think we all hate confrontation and want to resolve things. Not that we're great at it, but the awkwardness of being mad at each other is just too uncomfortable.

The overall response to the film has been positive. The siblings are excited and one sister says she feels empowered because of the film. They like to talk about it, and they feel proud they came through it fairly intact. They also feel like I do in that our story is not necessarily unique and sharing it with others opens us up to other people's stories and hopefully people can learn from it. My Aunt Florence feels better about the film since she and I have talked. She understands that it's my story and my siblings' story. She has a hard time seeing my mother in such a vulnerable state and wishes people could see other sides of her — her accomplishments, her humor, etc. But then she is my mother's sister, and I'm her kid — very different relationships. My Uncle John feels the same way as my Aunt Florence but is proud of me and has come to terms with it. I have not talked to my Uncle Mike yet, but I've heard that he doesn't like the way my mother is portrayed. Again, he's not exactly happy with his own life, so my guess is that he's unhappy with a lot of things. My Uncle Fran, Florence's husband, loves the movie, and my cousins do too.

I never really thought I was making a big mistake by making this film. At one point when I showed my mother the 20-minute-long trailer, I knew she was having a very difficult time watching it, and I felt badly for her. I didn't want to hurt her at all. She was a very emotionally fragile woman. We ended up having a long lunch afterward, and she told me the worst part was watching my father because it brought up all the insecurities she felt back then and she became afraid again. Fortunately, she was still supportive of the film, and I didn't feel like I had to stop. I was also worried about my father. Many people don't understand why I would even care what he thinks, but that goes back to still loving a person despite the pain he causes you. I didn't want this film to be about how fucked up my parents were and how angry I am. I was over that when I began the film, and I wanted this to be a story about survival and forgiveness, about how you can maintain a family after such trauma. But I had no idea if my father would understand that, and honestly, he still may not, but at least I know now that he has seen it and he hasn't closed down all communication.

Well, Mary, what you've done has been very inspiring to me. Seems like, with *The Watershed*, you may have some momentum going. So then, what project or projects are in the works for you and MA+PA Films?

I hope the momentum from *The Watershed* will help me to continue working on documentaries and other film projects. I don't expect any great distribution deal at all. I'd just like to have my work and my name out there so when I apply for all those grants that I didn't get for this film I might get them for my next. **- CG**

For more information about this film you can reach the Filmmaker/Screenwriter Mary Trunk at www.thewatershed-project.com.

Craig Griffin is a freelance writer and blues bard extraordinaire. He can be reached at www.craiggriffin.com.

SCRIPT-TO-SCREEN

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Charlie Kaufman has been hailed by many, myself included, as an original and gifted screenwriter, not a common thing in Hollywood. His screenplays have received recognition as stunningly original and cerebrally challenging creations. His stories deal with perceptions of reality. His characters are fresh, strange, provocative and extremely organic. There's no doubt that Kaufman is one of the more original writers working today in the "Industry." He's one of the best. But I can't help but wonder if maybe we're so hungry for anything original that we cut Kaufman a lot more slack than we would other screenwriters? As absurd a thought as it might be, I think the argument does hold water.

His movies are usually hailed by critics, and yet audiences have stayed home time and again. Now this may say more about audiences today than it does about Charlie Kaufman the screenwriter. When I first read Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich* I had about the same response as most of my serious screenwriting friends — "Wow, this is beyond description." It was one of the more fresh and inventive-screenplays I had read at the time.

Lately, some critics are becoming less enamored with Kaufman's stories. Leah Rozen of *People* described *Adaptation* as being "almost too clever for its own good." Stephanie Zacharek of *Salon.com* calls out Kaufman, saying his script was "cowardly." I've heard screenplays described as many things, but that's a first. On the positive side, Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* went so far as to declare that "screenwriting this smart, inventive, passionate and rip-roaringly funny is a rare species."

Kaufman's latest film is the *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Some time ago I read his May 20, 2002, third draft of the script. I was really turned off by it when I reviewed it online (screenwritersutopia.com). I sat down and re-read it for this piece and came away with some of the same feelings, but some other things were brought to the surface that I did not consider last time.

I still don't think it's a brilliant script or a particularly original one as some will once again say about Kaufman's writing. It's a science fiction story in a sense, but the interesting thing about it is its insistence on not being a sci-fi movie. It deals with technology that does not yet exist — the ability to erase someone's brain of memories of someone or something they no longer wish to keep. The irony is that these moments, those bad experiences in our lives, are what shape us as people.

The main characters are Joel and Clementine (I really do love Kaufman's choice for characters' names). "Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling … you were gone and lost forever …" Never mind. But that's the point, "never mind." It's already known that the origin of this story was this really cool idea about a guy who gets a card in the mail one day that tells him he's been permanently erased from his girlfriend's mind. This conceptual approach to his story is nothing new. *Being John Malkovich* was all concept, but with it he was creative enough and fortunate enough to occupy the story with some bizarrely interesting characters (a Kaufman trademark). But here he's not as fortunate. I found Joel and Clementine to be too familiar and remind me too much of what Kaufman has already done. Joel is a mere copy of what we've seen in *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*. The strange and the bizarre are not enough to carry a character arc.

Clementine is an alcoholic and a bimbo, and Joel is a self-absorbed loser who gets nervous around women. There are some laughs, some moments, and a few interesting details, but for the most part, this off-center, offbeat and quirky story might not be enough for today's audience. There's something missing here. I can hear my screenwriting friends now as I write this. They'll think I've lost my mind.

There are two things about this script that I think will translate well onto film. One) The love story between Clemetine and Joel is an interesting creation. There are some sweet and touching scenes in this story. But I kept asking myself, "Is this just a clever idea for a story and nothing more?" What's interesting is that the story centers around one particular holiday, "Valentine's Day," and I'm wondering why the film wasn't released around that time? Two) *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a social commentary. There's a statement being made here by Kaufman. We're a society that would much rather "erase" the bad things from our lives instead of dealing with them because it's easier. I think it's a sad social truism that Kaufman keenly picks up on.

When Joel discovers his beloved Clementine has lost her mind, he decides he'll show her, so he has the same procedure done to him. When I first read the script, I failed to appreciate Kaufman's work here, but stepping back and looking at this narrative device, I think it works and once again it's pure Kaufman. The man lives inside our heads. Or maybe Kaufman lives too much inside his own head. Perhaps he needs to break free of this in order to move on as a screenwriter.

As his memories are being stripped from his mind, Joel has second thoughts, but he's unable to communicate outside of his mind because of the sedative they gave him before the procedure. Desperate to hold onto the memories he realizes he cherishes, Joel takes the remains and hides them within other parts of his memory, hoping to hold on to them.

But love does conquer all. Though Joel and Clementine had their minds erased of their relationship, maybe they were soul mates, and maybe, just maybe, they'll find each other again.

There are two quotes I want to pull from the script that I think really help us to understand where Kaufman is coming from, at least from my point of view. It's early on in the script and early in Joel and Clementine's relationship. She's talking non-stop and drinking, and Joel can barely get a word in. And just when you think the conversation really isn't going anywhere, it jumps out at you:

CLEMENTINE
…Y'know, you think something and then it happens or you think a word and then someone says it? Y'know?

continues on right hand side of page 34

EDITORIAL

I got the chance to listen to Roy Disney last year at the Telluride Film Festival, where he spoke about the Walt Disney company, animation and his uncle, Walt Disney. Roy Disney was instrumental in rebuilding the company's film and animation departments in the 1960s and again in the late 1980s.

In a letter Roy Disney wrote to Disney employees in December of 2003, he outlines a sad fate for Disney's animation:

> Sadly, times have changed. Michael Eisner has lost sight of the vision upon which this Company was founded. The focus has shifted to the chase for the quick buck instead of a dedication to new and high quality ideas, the development of enduring value. This has led to division within the Disney workforce, a revolving door of managers and the exodus of too many of its most creative and inspired employees.

Roy Disney has been vocal about Michael Eisner's decision to close the Florida Feature Animation department. Decisions such as this are what Roy Disney claims have contributed to Disney's animation woes. Disney's Florida unit was responsible for some of the studio's best efforts in recent years: *Mulan* and *Lilo & Stitch*, with its Elvis-imitating space alien. But for the most part, Disney's animation output has been poor. In fairness I should mention that, during this time and for many years leading up to it, Roy Disney served as the Chairman of Walt Disney Feature Animation. We know he screened films, and wasn't he supposed to be overseeing the creative development and management of the animation department? Clearly, there was a lot going on below the surface that we just don't know about yet.

But whatever the reason for Disney's decline, it has indeed been a decline. *Treasure Planet*, released in November 2002, cost $140 million and only took in $17 million in its opening weekend as it went on to lose over a hundred million dollars. *Piglet's Big Movie*, released in March 2003, reportedly lost $13 million, and recently, *Brother Bear*, released October of 2003, lost $30 million. Who is to blame? There probably are more people to point fingers at than there are fingers, so we won't even bother. Pixar recently ended its relationship with The Walt Disney Company.

In this issue we feature an interview with the writers of *Home on the Range*, Disney's last 2D animation feature. I was in agreement with those who said the loss of 2D is a bad thing. But does it reduce the creativity on the part of writers of animation when 3D computer animation takes over? I find that hard to believe. The writing behind *Shrek* and *Finding Nemo* was fantastic. The problem is in the concepts and execution of those animation features that failed.

As we know it's a trendy business, when *Lion King* made $300 million, everyone wanted to be the next to make a 2D animated movie. Now with *Finding Nemo*, everyone is ready to stick a fork in 2D and hail 3D. There's no easy answers.

The creative pool at Disney might be drying up as some say. But let's hope that *Home on the Range* is a hit and that the creative juices are still flowing at Disney Animation.

- Chris

continued from page 33

JOEL
Yeah, I don't know. It's hard to know.

CLEMENTINE
Exactly. Exactly! That's exactly my feeling about it. It's hard to know. Like, okay, but how many times do I think something, and it doesn't happen? That's what you're saying, right? You forget about those times. Right?

JOEL
Yeah, I guess. The human mind creates order where there is none.

And finally towards the end, when Joel is having his procedure done by Doctor Mierzwiak and his assistant, Mary, with whom Mierzwiak has an affair. As they work, they have some interesting conversations, and just when you're ready to fall asleep, Mary quotes Alexander Pope:

MARY
The quote goes "How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot! The world forgetting, by the world forgot: Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind! Each prayer accepted, and each with resign'd."

The structure of the screenplay is all Kaufman. The first act jumps around, and then when it settles and Joel begins his procedure, the craftsmanship of the screenplay is impressive, another Kaufman trademark. His sense of timing and balance has always been incredible. It's an overlooked talent that many screenwriters, even professionals, struggle with. Getting in and out of scenes, building, setting up, paying off — all the aspects of the scene-to-scene construction of a screenplay — just pull out any one of Kaufman's scripts and you have a fine example of how to do it.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind has an interesting narrative structure that, if it remains as written, really suggests the circular nature of memory and time. (You'll have to see the movie to understand this.) It's some deep stuff, which is what he does with his writing. Kaufman takes explorations into the human psyche and mind. **-CW**