

Ep #51: Tips for a Killer Pilot (Part 1 of 2)

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In this episode, we have the first of a two part series all about tips for a killer pilot.

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Yes, TV is the golden era once again. So listen in.

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This is the Script Reader Pro podcast, hands on advice, insider hacks and deeper discussions for the screenwriters who are serious about breaking into the industry.

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Hey everybody, this is Desiree as usual. I am your host, and this is the Script Reader Pro podcast. And this is Scott with me, and

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I am her husband as usual, and and one of the team here, Script Reader Pro as usual. Why are you laughing already? I don't know. I just thought that was silly. How you said as usual, like it's ever

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been different. Well, it has never been different. Hey, Scott, yes, thanks for joining me.

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Yeah, you're welcome. Podcast, Yeah, you're welcome if you're first, first time listener, if you're joining us, sorry about that. Just be prepared for for some education. Gonna try and drop some knowledge on you, hopefully in ways.

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I thought you're gonna say, drop some F bombs. No

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no knowledge. The hope is that maybe it makes more sense to you than something you've heard in a different way before. So that's what we're about. And Desiree is just going to sit and make fun of me and complain about how I think of things and how my mind works and how you look. Oh, thank you, honey. See, she's so sweet to me wearing a house coat. Well, don't tell them that

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they need to know. Why do they need to know? Well, if we ever go back to doing Instagram or Facebook Live or something, yes,

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we'll have then. Did you know that our podcast is gonna start becoming a video too? We're gonna do video and audio.

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This is scary for you. For me, you're in a house coach.

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Well, I wouldn't if we were on an actual video. Come on now.

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Anyways. Scott, yes, the way we always start the podcast is we talk about what we've watched lately. And don't ask me,

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Do you remember what you I know you remember this one because it's a pretty catchy title. It was actually really, really good. Yeah, we went to the theater. Go to the theater for movies. We went to the theater and watched the movie called the housemaid. And, yeah, it was adapted. It was a book first, yep, big time novel. Who is the author?

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Frida something

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Desiree is gonna look that up while I talk. Scott comes very, very you don't even read the notes before we start. So don't even go there, because your notes are really free to make something.

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Frida McFadden, McFadden, Faden, fat and fat and fading Yes.

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So I really enjoyed it. I thought it was really well done. It reminded me. It reminded me of Gone Girl. It had that same type of narrative where they show you kind of the first half of the story from one point of view, and then it shifts to kind of like, show the other point of view of what's really going on, which was really cool. I'm not going to spoil anything, but I guess even the people who've read the book, when they finish the movie, they're just they're just sitting there, you know, applauding for it because they nailed it, which you don't see very often anymore. When books turn into movies, normally what we see is books turning into limited series now, right? Like Harlan Coben books, for example, right? It just gives the narrative a lot more time to develop. And I think that's cool, you know? It just allows you more time to get into the characters over 446, episodes, that kind of thing. But yeah, the house maiden turned from book into a movie. Yeah, it was, it was cool. It was funny. It had some funny moments. It was intense. There was some great thrills, some twists and turns.

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Yeah, and I it was very unexpected, and I really enjoyed it to the point that I typically don't like to read, and I thought I should really read this woman's books.

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Oh, is there more than one house made book, or just the author has a lot of books, yeah? Oh yeah. The way they because the way it ended, it makes you think, Oh, this is just the start of this story, right? So I didn't know if there was more books. I'm, you know, but that's good, yeah. And you're a bigger beer, big time reader. So the fact that you're gonna, gosh, big time reader that I have, did you read that Christmas book that I got you at the end of November. Yet, how many pages in

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Are you? Let's talk more about chapters. How many chapters you in? I think I want chapter five.

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Okay, is there six chapters? Can

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you imagine if a book only had six chapters?

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It would be like there are some books that don't have a lot of chapters.

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I'm gonna like finish this chapter before

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I go to 89 pages later.

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Yeah, no, I don't know if I'm gonna get to it. No, I don't this year,

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yeah, cuz, as we're recording, this Christmas is over.

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So sad about that. So sad. Anyways,

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yes, so what we're talking about today. Talked a little bit about TV just a minute ago. Um, but even if you're gonna write a limited series, you know, if you're, if you're penning something to be a limited series or to be a full series, what we're gonna talk about today is yes. Tips for a killer

pilot. Yeah, that's a good voice. That was creepy. Was it because I did the word killer doesn't mean that this is about people who are writing pilots that just are about killing. Oh, it's the other use of killer. Like, awesome, like, amazing.

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It reminds me my voice. Reminds me of what are you buying?

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Yeah, that old video game we played back in that in the 90s, maybe I don't even remember, played in the 90s, a long time ago. What was it? No, wouldn't the 90s, they didn't meet you till 98 so in the aughts, then

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Anyways, moving right along, we're talking about tips for a killer

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pilot, yeah. So we're just part one. We're doing this in two parts, just because there's a lot to talk about, we're gonna be going over eight different kind of, like, styles of pilot and, you know, or styles of television shows and just kind of, you know, give some ideas and angles to think about when you're putting that pilot together. So we're gonna go over the first four today, and then the next four will be in the next episode. So make sure you you check that out. All right, so basically, we're going to be breaking down the kind of the core craft mechanics of what makes pilots compelling on the page, right? Because it's always important to remember. You got to put someone who's reading this in that space of what it would be like for an audience and how they're going to feel by the end of it, and whether they want to hit that next button, right? Because, I mean, 90% of television shows now people watch either streaming or even recorded, right? Not a lot of people have time anymore to sit down and watch television when, when a show is actually scheduled, right? I don't even remember the last time I did that.

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I don't even remember either. Yeah, so thing is, so it's so easy and at your fingertips all the time, just to hit record, record series and then forget about it. Yep, exactly. Remember the TV guides, where you'd have to flip through the guide every week. Oh gosh, paper one, I know you'd have to buy them, I think, didn't you with the paper? With the newspaper? Yeah, way back in the day, yeah, in the black and white. And then you would keep it so you knew it was coming on.

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Yep, crazy, but yeah. So, so that's what you want to keep in mind, is that especially the ending of your pilot, right when you get to the end of the pilot, it has to end in a way that the audience is like, Okay, I have to hit that next button. I don't want to watch my other 17 shows that I have in my queue. I need to hit the next one. And that's what, that's what people are looking to feel, right when they sit down and they get to the end. So it's all about, you know, character authority, right? Making us pay attention to them, the emotional stakes of the story. How they not just the emotional stakes of the characters, but of the audience, right? Are you getting the audience

emotionally engaged in the story? Is that voice coming through, which is probably the most important aspect of trying to put a spec pilot out to people, and then the narrative control, right? That feeling of confidence that this writer is, yeah, knows

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what they're doing too, really, is what it comes down to. And, and we've talked about a lot of those things in previous episodes as well,

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yeah, but I mean, I noticed over our last, because we're over 50 episodes now, and we've talked about how old you are. You're supposed to tell people that you know, the we talk about features a lot on this podcast. We talk about both television and pilots and such as well. But I want to focus, you know, especially going forward, because TV is becoming so strong and movie theaters are kind of disappearing, and, you know, like the focus is on the smaller screens in your house now. So, so that's why I thought we would dig into this more well,

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and we haven't talked too much about character authority and narrative control, yeah, having control over right? Yeah, exactly.

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And that's, I mean, someone asked me once, well, what do you as a reader? What do you really look for? What makes you really pay attention and feel like I'm going to keep going, I'm going to keep going. And to me, it was like, well, the control that the writer has over the narrative, and whether or not it makes me confident, if the if the narrative doesn't feel like it is specifically going somewhere and it's just meandering and, oh, this scene. What was the point of this scene? Why these characters just sitting around talking, you just lose confidence that the writer is going to pull it off by the end and attention, yeah. And if that happens, if a reader move, you know, loses confidence in the control of that of that writer, they're probably just going to stop reading, right, just like you would hit the back button on your TV or, like, oh, okay, I don't want to watch this anymore. So that's the biggest thing for me, so that that's kind of the, you know, and then the voice and, you know, just everything characters and whether or not they, you know, they're in control of the story as well. So, so those are the things we're going to discuss.

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Yeah, you guys, I am so excited about this episode, I cannot wait. Well, you should, because you mainly watch TV. I know, right? All my TV consists of.

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Of like, reality, reality? No, no, you watch a lot of you watch a lot of reality shows when you're like, Oh, I just don't want to think today. You have a lot of series that you binge, too. I binge real, like actual shows.

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I binged beyond what is it be yesterday that I win? Below deck, below deck. I watched nine episodes yesterday. I kind of watched them. I don't know if any listeners do that too. When you're trying to get your mind off of things, yeah, when you just don't want to think about stuff and you want to zone out and not have to think too much about the story, then reality is sometimes so entertaining.

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It is, yeah, because it's just like, oh, I guess my life isn't as bad as I thought, watching these other people.

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So, okay, hey, you have your the first thing that you're talking about is the unlikable protagonist who still sells,

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yeah, and, and, it used to always be that the protagonist in any, any movie or especially television show, someone that like you, well, not even like but someone who's like, a bull, right? That you're like, okay, yeah, this is a good guy. This is a good girl. They're gonna be the ones who are gonna take us through this, and life is great. And I remember the first time we watched a television show where we were like, wait a minute, this is a bad guy. Do you remember what it was, Dexter? Because Dexter is the protagonist of that show, but he kills people, right? And it's like he kills people he considers bad, right? Who, like the system, didn't catch, and so he's gonna go and catch them and kill them to whatever feed his addiction to killing. But he was an anti hero. He wasn't someone you should be rooting for because he's killing people all the time, but because he was killing bad people. It made a difference.

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It was okay, right? Really? I mean, should it really make a difference?

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No, but you're seeing that a lot more these days, right? A lot of show like, look at something like Yellowstone, for example, you brought Yellowstone a lot. I don't think I've ever brought Yellowstone up. You have Okay, Yellowstone, though, go ahead. Yeah. So Kevin Costner is the lead of that television show, right? And hey, but he's just not a good guy, like he's just his whole organization there. He's greedy, and you know, he doesn't want to share his land with anyone. And you know he's, he'll kill people if he needs to. And sounds a little bit like you Scott kind of Yeah, but yeah, so he's not, he's just not a good guy. But he's like, the guy you're supposed to be rooting for, supposed to be rooting for this family, but when you actually step back and look at all of the stuff they do, they're just corporate, greedy people. And there's some good people in the family, but overall they're just bad people. And so he's that's hugely successful, you know, looking at shows like succession, I remember I was pitching something to someone once, and they read the pilot, and they're like, I don't know. I just don't, I don't want to watch a show about people doing bad things, like bad people getting ahead from doing bad things. That's life, no.

And then I said, Well, what about succession like that? So it's about the corporate world and this family and who's going to take over the business, and they're just all awful people.

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Okay, it sounds a little bit like, what's that one with the brothers and the crazy mom?

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Oh, yeah, Animal Kingdom. Animal Kingdom. Same thing. Those are bad. Those are all really bad people. You do because the characters are so interesting and they're depth and they're damaged, right? And that's the thing, is, good, good, good, quote, unquote, good characters. They're not as interesting because they don't have trauma and damage and addictions and all these things, right?

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Let's be real though, like we're all damaged, right? So it's like, you, I think there's a lot of relating to that total relatability, even if you're not a killer, and you don't kill people. I mean, the damaged part as to why you do the things you do is why you continue watching a lot of the time.

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Yeah, it is. It's just, it's more interesting, right? And so animal, so those, yeah, so I said succession is an example. And they're like, she can't compare anything to succession. It's a one off thing. I'm like, Hmm, it's like, wildly successful, and people are getting all these awards, and it's all everyone was talking about a couple years ago. And then you're not supposed to compare, like, Hey, this is the same audience that watched. Like, I didn't get it right, but that. But then over the last couple years, just more and more shows are coming out that are like that, right? You've got the boys, and the boys is fun because it's about humans who realize that superheroes are actually bad, and so then they start to try and catch superheroes, but the butcher, the guy in charge, he's not a good, clean person. He's messy, he's broken, he's dirty, he's he's, he's just a bad guy, right? But he's fighting against something more evil, and so he becomes the guy you root for. You know, same thing in the shield. It's all about corruption, and you watch it, because you're like, how far will these guys go? You know, they're the law. They're stopping bad people, but they're so incredibly corrupt. So we're seeing more and more of that.

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So the pace, same with. Um, that show too, with the

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motorcycle guys, yes, Sons of Anarchy, right? They're a biker club. They're doing bad things, but eternal Kingdom, Sons of Anarchy, those are all good ones. So 10 years ago, in 1015, years ago, we didn't really see any that. So, so the the key, if you're going to write that kind of show is to think about. It's not much about likability. It's watchability, right? How are you like? I remember watching the first episode of animal the kingdom, and I watched it, and I was like, Oh my gosh, I have to get desert to watch this. I didn't think you'd like it, but I'm like, it's so good, just a pilot. I

was like, Oh my gosh. Like, everything in there's amazing. And then we watch it. You're like, okay, next episode, right?

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Yeah, you know why I liked it, Charlie, that was Sons of Anarchy.

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Honey. Animal Kingdom is Darren Jay. And you know why I liked it? You like Pope. I like Poppy.

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Poppy. I go for the

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bad guys, the bad boys, yeah, but no, it's, it's all about watchability, right? Doesn't matter how crazy these people are, if it's compelling, that's, that's what people are looking for, right? Now, like, Oh, this is such a nice place. So you want to keep that in mind. You then want to create that authority, right? Meaning that just this world is real. These things are really happening. These people are doing things that they just believe are right, right, that you're not just being over the top. It's competent writing. You're moving the story forward. You're creating characters that do stand out, even though we're shocked, but when someone shocks us, we just want to see more, right? And so it's creating something that's fascinating, right? Animal Kingdom, for example, if anyone hasn't watched animal kingdom, go and watch it. Unbelievable. Ellen Burstyn, is this? Her name's Smurf. She's this mother, worst mother you've ever seen. But you just want to see. What is she gonna say or do next, right? I know it's fascinating, even a fascinating world is about these family they're thieves, and they're, you know, they're just, they work for their mom, these sons, and it's just like, holy, this world is crazy, so, but it's so fascinating. You're just like, I want to dig deeper. I want to know more. So that's, that's what you want to keep, keep in mind, and then trusting the writer over whether or not we approve of the character. That's what a reader is looking for, that idea of that authority. Do I trust the reader to make this world or sorry? Do I trust the writer to make this story believable and to keep it in that realm of believability, even if it's over the top, and we're like, I can't believe this could happen. Those are just stop those movies, though, you know this, no, but I'm saying, like, animal kingdom, you're like, No, there's no way. There's this family of these things, and they're paying it all. Yeah, I know, but that's what I'm saying, is some of the things they do, you're just like, like, all these heists that they're doing. But that was my favorite part of the show. Was, okay, how are they gonna pull off this heist?

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It was like, watching a really cool adventure, like, crime movie every single week, right? Exactly. It was like, yeah, the same twists and turns, kind of like with House made, right? I felt like Animal Kingdom was kind of on the same level with the twists and turns, and you're just like, what?

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Yeah, it was like a little mini movie every week, yeah, yeah. It's fascinating. So that's, that's, that's, those are the things to keep in mind with that option of writing a pilot with an unlikable protagonist.

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Okay, what do you mean, though, by over approving the character, you say trusting the writer,

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yeah, meaning like, well, this is a bad character. I don't approve of what they're doing, but okay, I think the writer is gonna take me somewhere

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really cool. So trusting the writer more than how you approve of what the actions of the character, yeah, are doing exactly

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Dexter's killing people. I don't really think it's good to kill people no matter what they're doing, but watch, because I want to see how what's with the plastic and what's with this, and that was he doing, what's this code he's talking about, right? Like that initial pilot, you're just like, Okay, I've never seen anything like this,

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yeah, oh, yeah. That's where he put all the slides, right? Yeah. He had

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his slides up there. Yeah? So that those are things to keep in mind. So, so that's the unlikable protagonist. Second one we're going to talk about Desiree. What's it going to

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be talking about? We are talking about, you are talking about, I am observing invisible stakes. And then emotional, emotional stakes, yeah, over emotional stakes, over plot stakes,

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yes, you can see how desert never reads these words before we go, no,

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because there should be a comma here, comma and it should say, my writing season over plot stakes, because you don't, because it just says all it says Here, you guys, for those listeners, emotional over plot stakes, yeah,

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because my brain put that and thought that makes sense, that does not make sense. So it says invisible stakes, colon, emotional over plot stakes, there's no comment. Do you see how I

paused? Like there should be a comment in my brain? There was, there was not so invisible stakes. So this is the kind of show that's a bit harder to sell.

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We're not talking about. Wishing that you had a big T bone steak, and then it's invisible on your plate, and you're pretending it's there.

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No, it's the other kinds of stakes. What is at stake in this story? Talked about stakes a lot we have, yeah, but invisible stakes. So, like I said, these are the stories that are harder to sell because the concept isn't necessarily, like, flashy, right? Like you look at something like animal kingdom, or even Dexter, right? That's a flashy concept that's easy to get across to people. Something like Mad Men. Oh, this is a story about a bunch of men in in the whatever, 50s, when advertising was huge. Okay? Something like this is us, okay, this is a family of three children who cry a lot and go through things with their parents cry a lot, right in treatment little it still have a great show all about the characters, but not flashy. It's a it's a story about a bunch of psychologists. I thought that you were psychiatrists. I thought you were talking about writing, because in a treatment I thought the story. So I don't know what that one is? Oh, you know what I'm I wrote the wrong one. I'm thinking of the wrong one. I meant shrinking.

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Yes, I'm like in treatment, what is in treatment? I can't I

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don't know. I It's the same kind of thing, but, but, yeah, so shrinking, right? It's just a bunch of about a bunch of psychiatrists who are all dealing with their own issues.

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Did you Did anybody notice that Scott was giving me a hard time yet he forgot a comma above after the word emotional and wrote the wrong name

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of the Listen, I have a lot in my brain that's trying to get out all at once when I throw this together. So, so it's not called in treatment. It's called shrinking, right? And so they're all great shows, and all huge shows, right? Huge. They're everywhere. But they were not about a lot, right? But it, when you watch them, and you go through them, it's all about the emotional stakes. Yes, every single

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character, and it's, it's the life of following in the life of every single one, yeah, kind of like a soap opera, but, like, elevated,

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yeah, but exactly, it's basically, it is. It's an elevated soap opera. But the key is, even though they're all very different genres, those three, right? Like *madman's* more about that, you know, it's like, it's like, we're getting a look behind the curtain of what this thing would have looked like. This is us. Is just, you know, very, very emotional drama and then shrinking. It's fun, it's entertaining, it's over the top. But all of them make you, make you emotional, make you feel stuff, make you cry, right? And so the things to keep in mind if you're going to write that, because you can't really sell it much on the concept, it's all going to be about, no, like you get them to read the script and the script makes them feel the stakes of the characters. That's the most important thing, right? So you want to make sure that there's internal, internal urgency in what these characters are all going through without a big spectacle happening, right?

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Life, that's life. You go through your own stuff. And a lot of times you don't say, I'm feeling depressed today, like I want to eat a bunch of chocolate, yeah? And more of an internal struggle, right?

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It is, yeah. And I mean, looking at shrinking, for example, in that opening episode, they set up that, okay, there's these psychologists or psychiatrists, and they're all working together, but this the main guy, Jason Siegel's character, ness, his wife died, and he hasn't been able to get over it, and, and he yet he's going to work, and having all these girls come over, yeah, and, and he's and he's got a daughter, and he's disconnected, and he's falling apart. And so you understand the urgency of his emotional state, but also of his daughter, of his neighbor, of his friends, of his co workers. You feel the emotional urgency that they're all like this guy's got to get it together or it's going to go really, really, really bad, right? And so it's not the concept, it's not the plot, it's just the urgency of those emotions, those internal stakes of those characters, right? You want to focus on the emotional consequences as the tension. Because everything you read needs to be building in tension. It needs to be moving forward, having us lean into what's going on, have us feel more and more so you want to write it in a way that those consequences not just infect the characters, but they emotionally affect us, like you said *Desiree* earlier. It's the relatability, you know, that show everyone's lost someone, right? Might not have been a spouse, might have been someone else, or whatever, but everyone understands loss and how that spiral can take you down. So it's relatable, right? Yeah. So it's all about keying in on how that character is dealing with things, what he's really trying to mask, how he's trying to, you know, not deal with it. Why? You know, it sets all of those things up. And it's like, not even an hour long show. It just does so much so well. And now, you know, you looking at those examples of what we call quiet pilots, right? Pilots, where they don't those explosions going on. Quiet pilots, well, I don't know. It's just that's what you came up with. No, I just that's what I've heard other people say, and I'm just like, that resonated well with me. It's quiet. It's not about the big concept, right? But they still sell. They're still hot, because when people are reading a spec, they want to feel that the audience is going to feel this. Because a movie is different. You got a one time shot, okay? Whether you felt something or not, you still experienced it. Television, they have to come back to that next episode. You have to emotionally invest those audience members in the lives of those characters. So you're doing it quietly, because it doesn't have that big, flashy concept, but

you need to do it in a way that it reads hot, right, that it just pulls us in. And it's the only way that's going to happen is using the emotions of the characters to build that tension. Do you

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think it's the emotional aspect of things that make any pilot great in general, or do you think there's something that is more important than that?

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Yeah, I don't think it's not always emotion that gets you most right. I'm saying you personally. I would say, I would say, what we said earlier about the previous type of pilot is fascination. That's what it is. I think so like, for example, like I talked about with Animal Kingdom, I was just at the end of the show. I wasn't, like, emotionally feeling anything. I was just like, This is so crazy. Like, this is fascinating. Stop, yes, yeah, so and, you know, a lot of that, a lot of that happens. I remember when we watched Shrinking, or we were just the first episode, or even, what was the other one trying? Right? About the couple who were trying to have kids and adopted that first episode, we were just emotionally hooked at these people. Yeah, it was emotional. But yeah, it wasn't fascinating for me. It's motion every single time pretty well. I think it has to cause. I mean, excitement is an emotion, yeah, it has to

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cause me to feel something, to feel, Oh, for sure, for sure. Yeah. And that's so that's for me, what it is, hands down, yeah.

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And everyone's going to be different, right? Yeah, every reader is going to be different. Not every reader is going to feel the same way about something. So, all right, so yeah, just pressure doesn't need explosions. What do you mean? Like, like, the, like, a pressure cooker, like, in that, in that story, right? The pressure that the characters are all under, it doesn't have to always be explosions and big things and bank heists and stuff, right? It has to have emotional consequences. And that's what that kind of quieter, you know, less plot driven pilot must have kind of like a simmer and not a boil, yeah, like you're feeling like that person is, like, simmering, not boiling, yeah? But they're, but they're, they're moving towards that boiling point. Yeah, right. So, yeah. So that's that 1/3.

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One is the, let's see if you, if you mess this one up, the anti concept pilot, voice driven shows

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there's nothing wrong with what I wrote there. Anti concept. So it's, you're selling the tone instead of the premise. So it's kind of like that quiet you know that that not you know that more emotional, driven type of show, right? But it's all about making sure that the tone of the show is what sells it, right? You look at something like anti concept, though, yeah. So it's not as much about a concept, but it's not that highly emotional drama, right? It's more about the tone of the show. You know how dark things are or how you know how funny things are, if it's a comedy,

right? It's all about the tone. It's not much of a concept. It's, oh, here's, here's, you know, six friends living across the hall from each other in New York City, okay, well, the tone of that show is silliness, comedy, relationships, all that kind of stuff, right?

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So to me, tone and voice, we've talked about that too, where they can kind of be interchanged a little bit, can't they? I don't

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know about interchange, right, but, but I mean, if you're, if you're writing something that's spooky, for example, right? The tone is you have to do things on the page, play with the words, play with the descriptions. Those kind of

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things, their voices, the playing with the description and stuff and how they put it across on the page.

28:34

No, that's more about tone, right? You want to make someone feel the hair in the back of their neck stand up by the way you describe things. The voice is more about how you pull people in, the way you use your words, the way you have characters come to life. You know, those kind of things, right? What you're trying to say, but this, you know, that kind of, the anti concept, this, these are the shows that kind of scare people, right? They scare development people because they're not really about something you can sell to an audience, right? A couple examples. Remember this show girls that you loved when it came out with Adam driver, he was the boyfriend of the girl. You're like, I love this guy. I love this Adam Driver guy. You don't remember it at all? No, okay. Do you know who Adam Driver is? Yes. And you remember the TV show he was in and he was this girl's boyfriend. No, okay. Welcome to my life.

29:26

Everybody, whatever. Welcome to my life. Scott. What did you do 50 minutes ago? I don't know exactly, Scott, where

29:32

your case of girls wasn't really about anything. It was just about about life, about girls and meeting boys, and how you figure it out. I don't remember. Do you remember fleabag? Yes, I remember fleabag. What's it about that woman who's like, wasn't she a stand up comedian? The TV show came from her, one woman?

29:52

Yeah, one play. I don't but I kind of vaguely remember.

29:55

It was an amazing show. She a stalker. No, she was just twice. She was trying to find a relationship member, and she would always like, Look at the camera and stuff like that all the time. And it was just the writing was amazing, but the there wasn't much of a concept is about a woman floundering through life, right? And so there wasn't really something to sell there parenthood. It's just, should I know parent is amazing, but it was just a show about a family, right? These aren't. These aren't. This is what we called anti con, or what I refer to as anti concept shows, right? The Count, there really isn't a concept. It's just a scenario, right? It's a it's a setting, it's about one person. So those shows like they scare development people, but what? What sells those shows and fleabag is a perfect example, because Phoebe Waller bridge is amazing, and it was her voice alone that sold that right? Yes, it came from a stage play. But that stage play, everything she said did went through. It was that unique voice no one's heard. That's what sells those pilots. So if you are going to write a pilot that doesn't really have much of a concept, that is the hardest one to write, because you have to absolutely kill it on every single page with every single choice,

31:07

everything, yeah, everything so

31:11

well, you know, the perhaps the premise is thin, that voice must carry the entire thing. And that's where that's where writers get careers. That's where someone reads your script. And these ones aren't necessarily ones that would sell, but as I mean, a lot of writers don't seem to know this, but especially new writing. You know, obviously working writers do, but newer writers just think that you can just sell that all these TV series that are made are just sold. People buy them from writers and then make the show. It's not how it goes. Not all flowers and sunshine. Well, usually there are hardly any spec TV scripts that just come out of nowhere, right? Your spec script that you're writing 99% of the time is a sample to get you a job. It's like your it's like your actor's headshot, right? They're reading your script and thinking resume, pretty much, yeah, your script is around. It's basically, yeah, it's but you're applying for a job, the work you can do, yeah, and they're looking for 100% above everything else voice, right? And so writing a pilot like that, and just even like thinking this is, this is the best sample I can create, right? That's not necessarily, maybe it's not a show that someone will make because it's just hard to market, but they'll read it and go, Holy crap. We need to hire this writer to go in the room of this show. We need to hire this writer to, you know, be the next, you know, Vince Gilligan, right? We need to hire this we need to know this person. That's what you're looking for in that kind of series and that or that kind of pilot. And everyone should have one, because it should be the perfect example of holy this. I've never read a voice like this, and that happens very rarely. So if you're going to be doing that, and you don't have a plot, you don't have a flashy gimmick, sorry, you don't have it's not plot driven. You don't have a fancy gimmick. It's just, here's a setting in scenario, and people, it has to be something we've never read before, right? Never read before. So that's a hard one to do, but that's the one that will kind of usually get you working.

33:03

So makes sense? Fourth one, yep, the pilot that lies to you, yeah,

33:08

on purpose, yeah. So it, like, sets up a certain situation, but something happens at the end of it that you're like, Okay, wait a minute. This is not what I thought it was gonna be. Perfect example for that is lost, right? Lost plane crash, Island people, what's going on? Okay, so this is about survival. It's a survival story. But then at the end, all of the trees in the entire island start shaking and moving, and we stopped watching. We didn't watch the very last season because of that, because we were so engaged. Do you remember this? We were so engaged and so enthralled with the whole thing, them making building houses and all this, and the others in the hatch and all that kind of stuff, cool stuff. Then it got to be like, sci fi all of a sudden. And we were like, Whoa. It started, I mean, it started to push further into the Sci Fi angles more and more and more right over the top. And then they went home, and then they're like, they're like, oh, okay, so now we're wet. It just Yeah, it's like, it just fell flat. And for me at the end, and I was like, it became less about the characters and more, like, I got a little bit lost, yeah, and you don't like that stuff, so you're like, I don't believe this anymore. But by the end of that pilot, and they admitted, like, JJ, Abrams admitted that they had no idea what, where that where it was going, or what happened next after that first episode, they had no clue. They just wanted to see if people liked it, and they're like, Okay, now we got to figure it out. But by the end of that pilot, it's not a survival story, yeah? Well, that's just where it went. But it, it started as a survival plane crash story, and then by the end of it, you're like, Okay, wait a minute. No, this is sci fi, or, you know, a mythological story or something, right? So it tricks you, right? Same thing shameless. And this is more and more as it went on, but, like, you were addicted to shameless. But it started out this as, like, an outrageous comedy, right? It was like, dark, and this guy was a drunk, and he would say the ridiculous things. And it was like, Okay, this is just designed to be, like shocking comedy. But the more it went on, no, I didn't

34:59

find it funny. But he was funny. Yeah, he was funny in how he delivered, right? So it was dark, but it was comical, right? But I feel like if it was any other actor, it wouldn't have been pulled off the same

35:09

and yes, and you would never have expected William H Macy to be that character, to play that role. That's why it worked. I think because you're like, What? No, but he was so down that rabbit hole, right? But it turned into basically a commentary on poverty and and trauma and family trauma and what addiction does. And it just became, it started out as that silly comedy because of because of who he was and things he was saying and doing, but it was just masking the idea of, okay, no, this is actually about trauma and a broken family, and how hard that goes, right? So, so if you're, if you're going to be writing something like that, you want to have that, that strategic misdirection, right, where it's purposeful, you know where you're going, you're leading the audience down. You're throwing little, little hints, little tips of the hat, and then, bam, you're like, Okay, wait a minute, kind of like Breaking Bad, almost, right? Like it's about this teacher, and he has cancer, and, okay, what's going on? And suddenly he's cooking meth in a trailer in the middle of the desert. It's like, what? Right? So you're it's not bait and switch, right? It's not

like, Oh, I'm gonna pull a wool over your eyes and then do this thing that makes no sense. You are specifically misdirecting us for a reason. So that's something to keep in mind. When you're doing that, you're also hiding the true show. You're you're making it compelling and fascinating, like lost for example, who are all these people? These ones are the ones who lived. How do they all fit together? What's going on? Right? You're paying attention to the characters, the situation, and then, oh, wait a minute, this goes much deeper than we think. So it's, it's, you have to really be good at layering things, right? It's all about you. Probably in this type of show, you're adding probably three times the amount of setups as you would in any other pilot, because you're trying to make us pay attention to the characters, what they're dealing with the world, and then, oh, wait a minute. Okay, that makes sense, because they show me this and this and this and this. I didn't really realize that's where it was going, but here we go, right? And so it's if you don't do it that way, you're you're gonna lose the trust of the reader. When, when, when there's like, when something comes out of nowhere. As a reader, you're just like, come on. Like, seriously. Like, that's way too far of a reach. It makes no sense. There's no way that's just right. So you have to make it believable. So when it happens, we're like, No way, right? That kind of reaction. So yeah. So these ones are difficult, and especially when you're trying to because a pilot like I said, a lot of it is a sample, but when you're writing something that's, you know, marketable and commercial, you want to make sure that that when a reader is going through it, it checks off that big box more than anything else. Of longevity, right? This has somewhere it can go. Holy crap, that twist. Now I got to see where this goes. This is different than I thought. It's turning into something wild. I need to know why, right? It's that longevity piece so that that's what you want to kind of, you know, keep aware, keep in mind, right? Misdirection works, but only when emotional, the emotional contract that you make with the audience, right, stays intact. Right? You're not just pushing them away from it because you're like, Okay, well, they told me it was a comedy, but now it's about murder, you know, like that kind of thing. You don't want to be too shocking in it. So that's what you want to keep in mind on that one.

38:11

Yeah. And so just to recap with everybody, because there are quite a few things we talked about, the unlikable protagonist and how that sells? Yes, the invisible stakes and having emotion over plot stakes, the anti concept plot, where it's more voice driven, yep, and then you talked about the pilot that lies to you, yeah.

38:37

So those are just four examples of some of the some of the types of pilots that that work. So overall, the kind of formula would be, would be authority, right? That you're you feel like, okay, we're confident this writer knows what they're doing, plus your voice, okay. This writer is completely different, plus the emotional control, okay, this writer is making me feel stuff, and I feel like it's actually going somewhere that I need to pay attention to. All of those together, authority plus voice plus emotional control equals a pilot that will lock someone in and want to see what happens next.

39:13

I do not want to do math. I don't either, but you have addition and an equal I know. So that's the formula,

39:25

that's the formula. That's the only formula you will ever see me write, I hate math. You suck at math. I am horrible at math. Okay, well,

39:31

that was good. So that's all about PILOTs. So that was all a lot of information. So while

39:37

you guys all process that, take a listen about one of our other services here at Script Reader Pro,

39:43

feel like you've taken your script as far as you can on your own. We know how frustrating it can be sometimes to get the great ideas that are in your head properly on the page, but imagine having a professional screenwriter jump in and rewrite it for you to. Create a market ready script. Send us your script for a rewrite proposal, and the pro of your choice will write up a page or so of notes on exactly how they'd approach a rewrite. Head on over to www.scriptreaderpro.com/rewrite and use the code rewrite 15 during checkout for the rewrite proposal to get 15% off,

40:26

and we are back. Thank you for listening to this podcast. We have come to a part of our episode where we have questions and answers. But first I want to mention, if you have any questions, you can submit your questions to Hello@scriptreaderpro.com We'd love to hear from you guys. And we do have four questions that have come in from different listeners. First question Scott is from Doris from Helsinki, ooh, Helsinki. Where's Helsinki? I've never met anyone from Helsinki before. He's Europe. All right. Doris says, How can writers tell early if their premise has a ceiling?

41:07

Yeah, I saw this question. I thought this good question for the TV episode, because that's a lot of the time when you're when you come up with an idea and you think, okay, is this better as a, as a as a feature script, or is it better as a television is that what she's asking? I think so, because does that's the big difference, right? A movie has a ceiling. It's a beginning, middle and end. There's a specific close to that story, for a reason. Whereas a television show has to have no ceiling, like, Can this go on forever? Can it create longevity? Can it keep going, right? So how do you how can you tell if your premise has a ceiling, it's that idea of, can this go longer? Is there more to tell here? Are there more stories? Or is it because a lot of times we'll see a movie and then it'll turn into a TV series, right? Animal Kingdom was a movie and then it became a TV series because they're like, there's so much we can unpack

41:52

here, right? It's the opposite. Is the same too, for What's that movie that I like, the one from the British one

42:03

that I Oh, Downton Abbey.

42:04

Downton Abbey was the show first, then into the movie,

42:09

because they had a bit more to tell, but not full season's worth, right? Yeah. So, yeah. So that's, I think that's how, how you

42:15

figure that out. Question two, it's something that readers notice immediately, but almost never mentioned in notes. And this is from Chad, from white horse, the White House, white horse, Yukon.

42:26

Yukon. For me, something I noticed, I guess it's like, what we talked about earlier actually, is confidence, like authority, right? You never talk about that. I don't think I talk about that. Oh, you had such authority. And I really felt confident. You don't say that, but you're just like, I am glued to like, you don't even notice. You're glued to the page. You don't even notice the page you're on. All of a sudden, it's over, and you're like, oh my gosh, right, you'll, you'll say that. Oh, you hooked me, but you won't talk about how I felt there was authority in this. I felt confident that you were taking me here. So I think that's one of the things, the other you know, everything else you kind of talk about, right? If there's mistakes, if there's formatting issues, if the characters are are not exciting enough, you're going to talk about all that. But I think it's an unspoken thing that you're just like, holy crap.

43:08

Wow. Interesting that you bring up the word confidence. I did read this article. I can't believe I read this article. Okay, it happens to be about writing.

43:20

Oh, why would you read an article about writing?

43:22

Exactly what's wrong with me this guy, Duchenne, I don't know who he is. Okay? He says, you know your writer, if you're scared of writing, yeah, and have imposter syndrome, then it says, I feel like that's part of the game. It turns out, most writers do feel that sense of not feeling counted, and it's something we have to get over. Confidence is important, and you shouldn't let

imposter syndrome hold you back to the point that you never share your writing or call yourself a writer. We have to find a balance

43:59

that's great, that's so true, and I always say that like because there's a big difference between comp, between being confident as a writer and cocky.

44:06

Okay, funny, but the fear means you care about the work and want it to be good. It keeps you accountable and growing. You want to improve and strengthen your writing. Overconfidence can lead to cockiness, and sometimes you can get away with that, but most people will find it insufferable. We're we're of the opinion that your work should

44:29

speak for itself. I was just gonna say that. I'm like, don't tell people how awesome you are, show them Yeah, that's right, and that's what it is, yeah. And it's not how awesome you are, it's how awesome your writing is, right? But that's all people always like, people ask me that a lot actually, like, how are you? Because I think I'm an amazing writer. I don't think anyone can do what I specifically do. I know AI can't do what I do. I know other writers can't do things in the same way as me. I'm not saying I'm better. I'm a better writer than everyone else. No, because everybody is you're you, and I think there's writers who are her. You know, like, just miles above me in right? But I'm confident that the stories that I'm trying to tell, I can tell in a way that that work and that that can can excite people and all that kind of stuff, and I don't nail it every time out of the park, I'll give you a script. Sometime you'll be like, Honey, this isn't very good, right? Like, and it keeps you grounded, right? But, yeah, if you there's a balance, yeah, be caught, but you but every like, I can't tell how many times does this? Sit down and I stare at my screen and I think, why that? What the hell am I even doing? Why am I what am I doing? I've been wasting my entire life. You're and if you don't have those days, it's a problem, right?

45:38

It's just interesting that your answer to this question is, confidence, right?

45:43

Yep, confident that that would be the entire answer, yeah. Oh, and I did, that's what I said.

45:47

Yes. Confidence, what's something readers notice immediately? Confidence, yeah.

45:51

First Page. Mike gate, I'm in this writer knows what they're doing.

45:54

Okay, question three from Bill from Westchester, you have to say it that way, Westchester, no, honey, you have to say it was chest.

46:05

No, you're thinking of Worcestershire. Worcester. Where's West that's worked. This is Westchester, not Worcester.

46:12

I know that. Where is that? Where is Westchester? Is it in New York? I don't know. To me, it sounds like a UK word.

46:20

No, I think it's, I think it's Westchester. Is New York. Well, if it's from West Chester, New York, okay?

46:26

If it's New York, if it's UK, how do you say it

46:29

Westchester, or Westchester or Westchester? There's lots of different ways.

46:40

Anyway, I wanted to hear the accent. Okay, Bill. Bill asks, Is originality overrated in pilots?

46:47

No, no, no. The only way someone will even pay attention to pilot is if the writing is original and the concept has to be original to everything it has. Original is everything and everything. Yeah, exactly. Not features, though, because they just want to do remakes and sequels. They don't want to take risk the television holy. It's about taking risks. Okay?

47:04

Question four, Jennifer from Maine, I'm not gonna even ask you about an accent for that. Okay, when should a writer stop taking notes and protect the draft?

47:15

When no one has notes? I think no one has notes. That makes sense. The thing is, is people, I think, will always have, there'll always be a note, but it's like, do you always have to take what the notes address? Yeah, don't be that writer who just does everything. Someone says, Follow your gut and your heart still, yeah, and can. And it comes down to consistency, right? Always have, like, a few people, few people reading, and look for what they are all saying that that coincide with others, right? That's what you look for. But you got to get to that point where, if you do not, you get more notes, and there's like, one or two little things that, if you change, won't affect anything. Then I'd say, no, no more is needed. Because even if someone buys a script and tells you this is the most amazing thing I've ever read in my life, they will then hand you seven pages of notes of things to change, right? It's never gonna be perfect, but you know, if it gets to that point where you're like, Yeah, everyone who reads it is pretty much impressed by it,

then I think you're done. Okay, awesome. Speaking of done, we're done today. We're done. We're done. Hey, Scott, yes, for those listeners out there, yes. If you loved this podcast, please subscribe to us. Or even if you just liked it, please subscribe to us also. Please give us four stars, gold stars. Desiree likes gold. I love share it with your friends. If you if you learned something, if you're like, hey, I really liked how that that made a lot more sense to me. I haven't heard it that way before. And you learn something, then pass it

48:31

on to other writers, you know. And also, if you could please email us any questions that you have or ideas for any anything that you want us to go

48:39

over, whatever you want. Desire to talk about, send in an email and say, Hey, Dez, talk about this.

48:43

This won't be fascinating enough, but you could email still and say hi at [Hello@scriptreaderpro.com](mailto>Hello@scriptreaderpro.com)

48:50

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