

# Ep #61: The Worst Screenwriting Advice

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On this episode, we're talking about the worst screenwriting advice.

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Yes, there's good stuff out there, but there's some bad stuff. 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, and this is the Script Reader Pro podcast, I'm your host.

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Hi. Host, I am the screenwriting talker guy. Oh, I don't even know what my title is. What is your title? Expert, I don't like to say expert, teacher. Teacher, sure. I'm the teacher. I remember we were, what

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was the word the teacher? We had another word.

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I don't remember. I don't remember either jerk. I'm the jerk who sits here and annoys you with screenwriting advice, as you roll your eyes at me and think I could be mod podging right now. I could be Hey, Hey, Scott. What are we talking about today?

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The worst screenwriting advice, yes, which is anything Scott gives you?

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Whoa, okay, that's positive. Thanks, honey. That's positive.

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When I used to work at a telecommunications company, remember the lady beside me that I told you about? Yeah, she'd always answer the call. She'd always say her initials. And she instead of saying AJ, AJP, she'd say Apple, jam, pear, uh huh. And then that's positive.

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That's positive. She said that to everything, that's positive because you were so negative, I'm not negative. You may have been in the past.

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Are you negative? You had a positive streak there for a little bit a streak. It was short lived. It was short lived. But being negative is more exciting.

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Yeah, sometimes it feels better to commiserate in misery than just put on happy smile all the time.

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There should be a song about commiserate, commit. What did you say? Yeah, I know I was thinking that one already commiserating. Commiserate. What a weird word.

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Commiserate. Every word in English is so weird, if you

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look at it too long, but commiserate, commiserate. Hey, Scott, what have we seen lately? That's what we always start

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this with, yeah, we saw a movie or show called handsome devil. Do you remember it? I do not come on now. Are you serious? It was a documentary, or the documentary? Yeah, yeah. About Wade. Steven Wilson, right? Wade Wilson, same name as David. I can't

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believe that you actually put this documentary

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down well, because it was so interesting, and the reason it was so interesting is because they couldn't understand why. And I'm not categorizing women. Okay, that's not what this is about. But this guy was a handsome guy. He kind of had some charisma. He wore really nice suits to court to court, but he just brutally murdered a couple of women in incredibly horrific and brutal ways, yeah, and he was, and he confessed it all many times, and so he's in court now saying he's not guilty. And this guy had no but this guy had so many women, yeah, in love with him, obsessed with him, wanting to marry him, sending him money in jail, all these things to an incredibly, like, a horrifying degree of people who and I was just like, the psychology of it all. I was like, okay, but they know, they know he murdered these women. Like, why would you want?

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Why would you tell you? Oh, it's just that bad boy scenario. I was gonna tell you. It's women are attracted to bad boys

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but, but bad boys who drive over a random woman 87 times till she's dead. You're ruining though, it's fact public record. It's not a movie that you need an ending for. But it's just like, these are like things that are out there. I don't I just, I kept, I'm just like, I don't understand. And it's so incredibly interesting. So just it was interesting for that alone, yeah, to watch how much effect looks have on somebody, because he was a good looking guy. He was cool

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until he wrecked his face, yes, and then

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he put tattoos, skulls and smiles on his face. But, you know, he was that handsome guy with a good smile and dimples, and he was tall, and like so women were attracted to that, and he was a bit of a bad boy, but once they learned the truth and the witnesses came up and said exactly what he did. And they played his confessions. You could just see, especially this one woman who was there all the time, who was like, his girlfriend, right? His online girlfriend. You could just watch each each day, each confession, her face, she just sinking more. Yeah, she sank more and, and then she finally saw it for what it was, and she admitted, I, yeah, I was attracted to him because of this and that. But here's the thing, it's insane. How people are. People are insane.

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The crazy thing, though, is that he wasn't like that growing up. He was a nice kid,

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yeah, and they so what happened? Oh, he said that. He just, it was drugs, right? I know that he was, like, a good guy, sort of, no. He was like, really? Good, but, yeah, and, but they said when he hit puberty, something changed, and that broke. He got broke. He was adopted, and, well, it's because his parents then told him he was adopted. So that was, like, an identity crisis.

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You mean, he didn't know that. He told him that he

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was adopted when he hit puberty. And that's the mixture of it all really messed him up, I guess. But like, there's a difference between being messed up and just like, then he's like, when I'm on drugs, I just want to kill, kill, kill,

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so maybe don't do drugs. Yeah.

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Anyways, something really it was really compelling. It was a really compelling

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that is why I love those shows.

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You love more and more mature. It's just like, it's just interesting to see how, how bad humanity can become.

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And the thing is, is, like, Great talking about writing, you can get great, like, information and great tools and characteristics just by watching some of these. Yeah. And you might think to yourself, the character that you're writing, no, that can't they can't be that bad, till you watch, like a documentary, and then you're like, shoot, there are real people that are that bad in this world. Yeah. I was

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talking to James, one of my mentorship clients, just yesterday, and he said, Yeah, you know what's interesting? It was listening to your podcast, and it was the one where you and rife were talking about 90 day fiance and all these reality shows. And so I went and watched a bunch of them. He did, yeah, and he's like, You are so right? The characters in these shows, I could never make up, and it just gave me so many ideas on what to do.

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Use these reality,

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yeah, this handsome devil show alone, there's probably, like, a dozen different personalities that would make amazing characters because they're so messed up. Yeah, so messed up.

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We're not saying either. You have to write something that no, the same premise, notice the same, similar

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character traits, and it shows such that, because, I mean, one of the biggest facts in the case is that his father turned him in. His biological father turned him in because he called his dad, and he's like, I just did these awful things. I killed these people. And he's like, You got to turn so he called the cops, told him where the cops, told the cops where he was, and he got arrested, and then he went to court, and he like, so he basically just, like, turned against his son. But he's like, I can't, yeah, I love my son, but I can't let a monster be out there. Like, I can't, I know word, and that is amazing. It was just like, what? And that character alone, like, the integrity of that guy, and the sacrifice, like, but those are things I don't really see in movies. They just don't go deep enough for TV shows. Just don't take the time. It's just, and it's real, real, yeah,

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the interesting thing is that the sign everyone was like, Oh, he's so good looking. Blah, blah, blah, blah. Same thing goes for his dad. His dad looked like a biker guy, right? He it, we're talking about looks like a tough, tough guy. Tattoos everywhere. Softest guy, so soft, so sensitive, so Right? And so it's like, you can't judge people. Can't you

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say it's a perfect example of what looks do to people, the value that people place on what someone

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looks like. Yes, then that's what I'm saying with this dad guy, nicest guy. Yeah, he like, would call and turn his own son in. Yeah, because, because of his

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integrity, don't anyone else get hurt. It's crazy. Anyways, I would recommend it. It's crazy. It's crazy story. Any documentaries

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are good. I've kind of like become, I mean, you've seen my list. I have like, a picture of, like, I don't know, 12 ones that are on the top, whatever. Keep checking them off. Because, guys, I don't know if you know this, but I don't remember the names of things very well when it comes to movies and shows. So Scott, for years, has been saying, just take a picture of what you're watching. Just take a picture what I started taking pictures forever.

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Took, like, three years, because, like, every day, oh, I started watching the show yesterday. I can't remember what is called. It's about this and this. And it drives me crazy. What channel, what streaming service was it on? I don't remember which one it's on. And, yeah, this

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is what I don't understand, that why the streaming services have not just made one streamlined service where you can utilize each of them, like books. I'm gonna pull Netflix off and you do search, and then searches

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one streaming service doesn't want another streaming service to have customers. I do. It'd be great if they were all in one, right? Yeah. Man, yeah. So anyways, watch it if you if you like that kind of stuff isn't if you

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do and if you don't, just take work, even if you don't want to take that advice and watch something. You can also listen to us talking about the worst advice.

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Yes, just listen right now. We're talking about the worst advice for screenwriters that I see out there, not, not that the the person giving the advice maybe as bad or ill intentioned, but some of the things that come across in a way that isn't necessarily relevant or helpful for new screenwriters or

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helpful or helpful. What about you're going to sell the first screenplay you write for \$2 billion I don't think

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anyone gives that advice. Well, I hope not. No, no, you should quit your job or of things, you

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should quit your 100 grand job and just do writing full time. You'll make a ton of money.

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Yeah, not gonna happen. Oh, yeah, not not instantly.

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Anyway, is that poor advice? You'd say advice, yeah, but

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we're just gonna go through them. So how about you read the piece of advice, and then I can talk about it and you can share as well. First one, Desiree, first one is

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write what you know,

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yeah, that, I mean, that's good advice. Right, right? What if you

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know, what if all that you know is boring,

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yeah, then it's gonna be what if

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all you know is his like, what if all you know is you went and you liked history in high school, yeah, yeah, and you focus on that, all you're gonna write is boring stuff about history, yeah,

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like, it's misunderstood. Because, right? You know, people think you can only write about your own life, right? Instead of, instead of writing about like emotions or themes you understand,

right? Write what you know doesn't mean, like specifics. Oh, you you know how whatever clean energy works. So write a movie about clean energy. No, write a movie about sadness, about depression, about trauma, about darkness, about hope, about family, like themes you know, right? But also, instead of write what you know, I always say, know what you write, know what you're writing about. Perfect example, Jurassic Park. Did the writer of Jurassic Park know dinosaurs? Did the writer of Jurassic Park run a theme park of dinosaurs and my dad know what they were gonna know he, because it's fiction, right?

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I know Scott. Can you imagine, maybe he did

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know the dinosaur, Scott, maybe. But long time that character did not do endless or that writer did not do endless research, like Michael, right? And David kept roll the screenplay, but he had to know everything about genetics and DNA and Dani, so all that, right? And and then add the story to it. So you have to know what you write. And I've given this example before. I know how many scripts I read with like FBI agents or police officers. And they just talk like movie, movie detectives and movie FBI agents. Call up an FBI agent, call up a cop, please.

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Scott, you can't call up. Can you call up an FBI agent? Definitely. They people love to talk about what they do. I know they do.

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Yeah, you can call the FBI. You can call people. Hey, I'm a screen reader. I'm looking for some research. I'm doing, I'm writing a movie about this, and I just want to make sure I'm doing things right. Do you have anyone that can talk that would be interesting talk to me about about FBI procedure? In this

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case, the thing is, FBI, to me, is so like hard to reach.

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Have you ever tried to reach the FBI?

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I have many times I've called to report you. Oh, nice to the FBI and the CIA. Nice and the

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I'm on watch lists for everything Googled in my life, watch

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or whatever. Yeah, SWAT teams, yeah. And you know, yes.

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But know what you're talking about. Make it effective, right? Don't write a hospital drama without learning about hospital.

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Yeah. So if you're, if you're, if someone's saying, write what you know.

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But like, okay, so people and people like, make assumptions that way you live your life using a wheelchair. Yeah? So you should really just write a story. That's what

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I'm saying, right? That's not really fair to say to someone, write what you know, because it's like a lot of people are in their own field, right? They're in one lane. This is what I know. I mean, right?

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What you know, if you're an expert in it, then, then that should be part of your story. But why I say write what you're interested in. Write what interests you, right? So then take that advice. Is only right when you know. Again, it makes sense that that so that's, that's the one piece.

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Yeah, all right, next, follow save the cat exactly, and save the cat as a book.

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Yes, save the cat as a book. And kind of like a formula on how to break down movie structure.

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Why is save the cat such a big thing?

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It was a book that came out that made movie structure easy to understand for everybody. Right? Here are the 12 things that happen in every single movie, and this is about where they happen. But it's like, it's like, your inciting incident must happen on page 12. Your midpoint must be at page 55 you must do all these things. And so you see a lot of screenplays that a lot of people force their story into the structure, and that this ends up being like a cookie cut screenplay. You can see, oh, sorry, a copy, a cookie cutter screenplay, where it's just like, let's just fit all these things into here and make it, you know, but that can't, it can't be that there has to be an organic aspect to it. It has to just flow out from the characters. And so a lot of times, yeah, use it, right? I've talked to writers where they're like, Okay, I wrote my movie, and then, oh, but I read save the cat. And so I went back in and I just, I tried to make sure I plugged everything into the Save the cat way of doing it. And it's like, well, why? Why a story? And, yeah, save the cat. Great. I use, I mean, it opened up a lot of ideas in my head. I use pieces of it when I'm structuring a story. But it's more. It's about more. It's a nuances. It's the finesse of everything. It's the

character driving things. And, yeah, structure is there to be your friend and to help you, but don't feel you have to be boxed into any specific like page count type of breakdown. So follow it right? Treat the beat sheet like a formula, but not strictly right. Still, it has to be told. It has to be a story told in a way that makes sense. That could be that song. What?

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Treat the beat sheet. Treat treat the beat sheet. Are you a rapper? No, I feel like could be wrapped. Don't you think it has a nice beat to it?

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Yeah? Treat the beat sheet. Yeah. Treat the beat sheet.

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No, no. Okay. Next one is you? Script must be exactly 110 pages.

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Yeah, page count is a variable that exists in the screenplay alone. That screenplay, when you write it, that story needs a certain amount of pages to be told, and sometimes it's 90, sometimes it's 110 sometimes 130 try to fit it within the page. You know what that story needs. But also, just know your genre expectation. I was gonna say the genre. Well, how long

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should it? 90 pages for a romance, right? Roughly, pretty

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much every screenplay. Now, 90, around 100 pages is all you need for a script, usually, right? There are ways to to cut your script down, but, yeah, like horror, the horror genre, 90-95, pages. Comedy, 90 to 100 drama, 110 100 220, sci fi, 110 100 does the stories that need more time? You know, epic adventure, swords and sandals, type of story that's going to be longer. So just know your expectations. Look at all of the scripts and stuff that are in that genre. Don't write a 300 page script and say, Oh, well, they did it in Oppenheimer, so I can do it. No. Know your story, know how long, know the beginning, know the end, get there in the appropriate amount of time. Okay, makes sense.

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Dialog is the most important part. We've talked about that in the last podcast

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we did, yeah, a lot of our character introductions, most of the ones we pointed out had no dialog. So and dialog is the most fun part, right? Dialog is not the most important part. Dialog is the most fun part for writers to write, usually, right? But film is primarily visually storytelling. Great. Scripts rely heavily on the action and the behavior of the characters. I always say you should be able to remove all dialog from your screenplay, read it, have someone read it, and still know exactly what's going on. It's that example, if you watch something, you tell someone about

it, you don't talk about the dialog. You talk about what happens. Like dialog is important, definitely, but it's not the most important, right? The story, the character, the pacing, the movement, the structure, the plot, all of that, right? Everything is, is probably as important, right? So, yeah, that's, that's a myth. I think people, they just fall in love with their dialog too much. They'll have a seven page scene of characters talking for no reason about nothing but nothing going on. And it's hard to see, hard to see how that could Yeah, right?

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Yeah, that makes sense. This is a good one. Wait until your script is perfect before sharing it. Well, your script is really, can you really say a script is ever going to be perfect?

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No, not perfect. As strong as you can make it for what you're trying for it to become kind of thing, right? But, yeah, so many writers are afraid to share their stuff, or they'll wait until they've done all the drafts and now they think it's ready. Film and television. It's a collaborative medium. That's what people always forget about. Why? Why sit and write in your bubble? Sometimes, like, as writers, sometimes we can't see what's going on in our own stories, because we know everything that's happening. We know we know exactly what we've written, so we don't see the holes. Sometimes, right? We don't see the problem. So always, like, I'm not saying, Oh, you're fresh first draft. Give it to a whole bunch of people and send it and send it. You know, there's a difference between waiting until your script is perfect before trying to sell it and put it to the market as indifference to sharing it, right? You always want to get eyes on your work. You always want to get feedback. You need to know how people are reacting. You need to know if anyone is saying this is the problem, or I didn't get this, or there's a big hole here, or this doesn't make sense, this dialog doesn't feel real, like you can't see those things yourself a lot of the time.

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No, but especially you're new. If you wait and you keep rewriting and rewriting, you could have a hole in that script that then turns into a major plot, you know, above the script, then wait until you think it's perfect, Senegal, and then someone's like, oh, that whole plot doesn't work.

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Yeah, this makes no sense. I

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and then you're like, oh, gosh,

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your bad thing after that doesn't make any sense, right? Then you're back at ground one, right? So it's, it's, and that's the thing too, is try to, try to share your stuff with people that you know are creative as well, that can, like, give you new ideas, right? So I was go to my wife for stuff, because she's just highly

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your wife is so smart, awesome.

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She's highly creative, right? Desiree always comes up with interesting ideas. If, I mean, if you could, when Desiree has a dream, people don't want anyone in this world gets they don't want to hear it into her dream details. It's insane, but she just, I always share with highly with people I know that are going to be like, Okay, let's brainstorm this back. Let's bat this back and forth. Let's come up with some ideas. This didn't work. What else could you do? Right? So, yeah, don't wait until you think it's perfect. Get it done, do a couple drafts, and then get people's eyes on it before you start trying to sell it. You need that feedback. Ideas aren't just yours alone. You got to share them. People give you things back.

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It's great. Okay, next one is your first draft. Should already be great.

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Yeah, I fell into that trap a long

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time, really. So who says that?

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I think that's the idea. Is sometimes writers think, Oh, my. Writers themselves think that, yeah, yeah, your first draft, you don't need to read. Draft and redraft. That's bad advice, right? Your first draft is your first draft, and not the final draft, right? If it's the first time you put it down, you need to find a way to make it as strong as possible. So you there's, they're supposed to be rough. Like, don't try and don't try and make it perfect, essentially, right? Like, don't, like, sometimes where I'd be like, Oh, I can't just leave that scene as it is. I have to finish it before I can move on. Or, oh, you know, that's not perfect. I have to perfect formatting. And then I knew a writer once, he would do his first draft, and then he would pay a service to proofread it and make it perfect before he would send it to anyone to read. I'm like, why are you wasting them? Like, I don't like, if I'm reading someone's draft, even if they think it's a final draft, am I? I don't care. Like, I don't care about, oh, they spelled this word wrong. Or this is like, That's not important right now. It's important at the very, very, very, very, very end, guess what?

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What? That's what I would be like, I know you would and I would be, if I was a writer, I would be the the person who could not leave one scene until it was perfect. That's just what I way my brain works, is you finish that one thing before you move to the next Yeah, and people write like that.

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I'm very linear. I cannot write a scene way down a script until I've gotten to that scene. I can't do a lot of writers write in chunks. I cannot do that. I have to start from the beginning and go. But I if I get to I get to the end of the scene like I'm not happy with it, but I'm gonna keep moving on, right? But I used to be that way. I used to think my first draft was perfect, and then I was like, as I learned, as I grew, I was like, No, it's, it doesn't it's just the first step. Like, there's plenty of time, there's plenty of work to do. So, yeah, it doesn't have to be perfect. Rewriting is where writing really happens. Like, seriously, that's why I say writing is rewriting. The first draft is just your base, right? The real work, the real magic, the talent comes out in taking what's there and making it stronger.

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Yeah, here's this one. You need a completely original idea.

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Yeah, no, you don't. I mean, originality is important. What do you mean about that, though? Okay, so look about that podcast we had with Aaron Faulconer, right? Her movie maintenance required. It was essentially inspired by, kind of, like a retake on You've got mail. Yeah, that was based on the same price, like based on something else, but it was original in all the

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Yes, I get what you're saying. That's what I mean.

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So, you know, people are always asking for something original, but originality these days is seeing seen as less and less attractive in the industry, right? People don't want to take risks on things. People want to just kind of like, let's do something people are familiar with. So it doesn't have to be completely original. If you love a movie and you can think of a new take on it, write the new take on it, right? If you're like, Oh, I love Dani Brasco, for example, right? I love this idea of, you know, an undercover cop infiltrating the mob, and, you know, the characters getting really close. Okay, so how can I do that with all women? Make it then that's completely different, right? It's not a complete original idea, because it's been done, but you're doing it this way, or I'm going to set it in the future, or I'm going to do a sci fi take on this, or I'm going to not, not going to put it in the like the mafia side of things, I'm going to put it in, I don't know, the drug running field, or I'm going to put it in politics or whatever, right? So it's using the things that you love and that you're inspired by, and then just doing it in a new way, right? That's a lot of times what you always hear that, oh, it's Die Hard on a bus. It's Die Hard on a boat. You know,

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those kind of a new, I think, a new way, but also you could so many scripts could be so different. If you went and you did it from the side of a different lens or a different point of view. Yep, you know, like you see Die Hard, for example. I don't even know the story. You see it from wearing character, flip it on its head, and you see it from a different character. We'll do it could be a whole new script.

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Yeah, like, Die Hard. Do you know what I mean? Yeah, it's about him going in. You've got to see his wife, and his wife works in this building, and it gets taken over by terrorists. And he said, cop has to go in and save everyone because his wife's in there. So what if you wrote that type of story from the wife's perspective. That's what I'm saying. Protagonist, brand new movie.

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That's what I'm saying. Look at it from somebody else's exam, someone else's Perfect, perfect, perfect piece of you have a whole new idea that's maybe not original,

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yep, and you'll hear that sometimes I get they got told a story before, but this writer was trying to figure out the story, and he always was doing it from this character's perspective. But he kept getting kind of poked by this other character, this little girl, until he finally, and he could never make it work. And then he finally thought, wait a minute, this is actually her story. She's my main character, and it became something big. So sometimes, yeah, try, if you're stuck, even you can't, try to figure some out. How can I make this idea work? Try and do it from a different perspective. Great. He just said that pearl of wisdom,

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guys, I should seriously do this for a living. Should really not do it. Okay next. Next one is you must live in Hollywood

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to succeed. Yeah. I mean, you used to have to be there before technology, internet and all that kind of stuff, right? Like when I was coming up, I had to go down. There. I couldn't live in my own little town and think I could get anywhere because there was internet. Wasn't really even a thing, or it just started. And, you know, it's it now. I mean, the world's so much smaller now, right? And I know a lot of writers who are successful and live nowhere near Hollywood, and they're making deals and they're getting jobs, and obviously they go when they have to go, right, if I have to go down, and, you know, oh, we're gonna do a water bottle tour, and off we go. And, you know, got to meet these people, meet these people, and, you know, producers are putting this together. And you go, you just go. So you have to be able to have that kind of thing where it's like, okay, if I'm called to go, I'll go, right. So yeah, but I mean, a lot of writers, I know, hardly anyone, I mean, people are moving out of Hollywood now, right? Like they're moving other places, because Hollywood isn't the only place that makes movies anymore, even everywhere in America, they're all over the place. So, yeah? So no, you don't have to be there, but if you are wanting to get into television, you have to be where they shoot the television show, because there's writers rooms, or even if you're freelancing. We learned that

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there, right? We talked to

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Brandon Violette, yeah, yeah. Violette, yeah, Brandon Violette on our previous podcast. Yeah, so television is much different, right? You have to be physically able

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to be in the room. Yeah, exactly. That makes sense. Yeah. This is the other one here. Voice means being weird or edgy, yeah. Who says that? What? What do you mean? Well, a lot

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of people think that, right? Well, your voice has to be different. Oh, so they immediately think, Quentin Tarantino, oh, that's a perfect example of a voice no one's ever heard before.

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Ask me if I like those movies. No, you don't. I don't because they're weird and edgy. You don't like weird edgy stuff,

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you know, but, but it's and we did a whole episode on voice so, you know, search through that. You can go do that. Listen to that. We explain that well. But a right? You know, writer's voice is really about perspective, right? Their perspective on life, the tone that they put out, and kind of their worldview, right? I look at certain things in a completely different way than anyone else.

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Everybody does exactly all their

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life experiences change things. And as a writer like I'll read writers sometimes they're just like, holy crap. Like this person was born to write the way they use the words, the way they the theme they're exploring their their view on how people are like, that's what comes out as voice, right?

27:07

I will speak on that, yes, because you can go and grow up exactly the same in your household. You go through the same experiences, have the same parents, see the same things, hear the same things, and then, as people, as adults, you can turn out to be completely two different people. Yeah, exactly. I personally know

27:33

siblings, right? You are nothing like your sibling. I am nothing like my siblings. Most siblings aren't. The siblings that are exactly the same, or sometimes just in movies and TV, right? Sometimes they are. But even if get along and they're like, oh, this family, everyone gets along, every single one of those characters is different.

27:51

They see something different. They take something different from every single look at the murderers.

27:55

Most murderers have family members and those siblings didn't become murderers, right? Like, that's the thing is, even though we grew up in the same household, same family, income, all that kind of stuff, you shape into someone different, and that's your voice. That's just the same thing as a writer, exactly your experience makes you who you are, and that should be on the page that you don't try to be like

28:16

everybody else. The way that you the way that you write something is going to be completely different, from my perspective, the way that I would write it exactly.

28:25

And I mean even myself, like I learned my voice over time, and I've always been interested in thrillers. Those are my favorite, favorite kinds of movies, or thrillers of any sort. And as I was, you know, people, a lot of times, people ask me, Oh, you're so funny, or, you know, like you see, you know, you talk about how you're romantic. You love rom coms, things, why don't you write those things? Those things? I write horror, I write thriller, I write darker stuff. Why? Because I have a fascination with it. I've been afraid of my dark. I've been afraid of the dark my whole life, and I've been trying to understand why, and so exploring those kind of ideas, what is in the shadow, what is unseen? How does that make me feel? That helped kind of that defined my voice, and so I write those things because my voice works well for those on the pages, right? So even though I'm interested in other kinds of movies, and I have lots of ideas for the kind of genres, and I've been hired to write in many different genres, my passion when I sit down to write something for myself, that's the lens it comes through, right? But it's based on my trauma, my experiences, what I've gone through in life, what I've seen, the struggles, all those kind of things. Every one of you listening has something unique and different about that that should fuel your voice. So hope that makes sense. Good point.

29:35

Scott, thank you. You should teach that

29:37

a pearl of wisdom. You always

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have, I would never say pearl of wisdom,

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but you always came up with this term

29:42

pearl of wisdom. I don't know you'll look it up later. I'm sure we'll look it up. All right? The next one is structure. Rules can't be broken. Yeah, not true.

29:51

Structure is there at the base, first act, second act, third act, right, beginning, middle, end. There's plenty of variations. You. Is what works for you. You can go against it. You can go against the norm. If it works right. You just have to make sure it's clear, it's understandable and it makes sense for the movie story you are writing. But don't just break it to break it to be different if it if you break it and make it work, no one's even going to say a thing. So that's yeah,

30:21

pearl of wisdom,

30:23

yeah, so we looked it up, yeah, of

30:24

course, originates from the long held ancient association of pearls with knowledge, purity and Rarity across various cultures, particularly in China and Greece, interesting. It defines, it signifies valuable, hard won insights, reflecting how pearls develop slowly after over years with an oyster, yeah.

30:48

So they started as a great sand, and over time they turned into a pearl. So it represents hard work, deep

30:55

you get wiser as you keep working on your craft, just like an oyster and a pearl. There you go.

31:00

Make pearls. People make pearls. Maybe the oyster. No, be the pearl. I'm gonna get that shirt.

31:06

Be the oyster. No. Why get it for Jonna,

31:11

all right, some what is the next one? Desiree, sorry, I didn't see you were taking a sip of your drink there. What's the next one?

31:22

The next one, for those that are still listening to us, is more dialog makes the script better.

31:31

Yeah, that's a bad piece of advice. I mean, it can be right, if the dialog is great. You look at some of the great screenplays where it's a lot of talking, like Aaron Sorkin, his drafts usually like 160 pages, because it's a lot of dialog, and that just doesn't take as long to shoot. So it fits. But you know, more dialog will normally not make the script any better, right? Usually less dialog. There's so much power in the unspoken, much more than in spoken words, true story, especially in a visual medium like this, right stage play, different stage play. You just it's there's nothing much to see. So you need dialog. A movie, a TV show, something that is moving. It requires visual storytelling. So more dialog. If you're stuck and you're like, I can't figure out something on my character's talk, no dialog has to remove, has to either move the story forward or reveal interesting character detail done in a way that is entertaining and engaging and sounds real. It's a hard thing to do, but writing more of it doesn't isn't going to automatically just make

32:35

your script, no. And the thing is, too if you're writing just to have, if you're writing something just to share pieces of information with us, you have to ask yourself too, can that be shown or do I have to write that instead? Like, do I have to write it in dialog format? Yeah, because a lot of the time you can show things without saying a single thing. And I talked about this the other day with the show that I was watching about the guy who had his license change his name on his license, and there was nothing spoken. It wasn't like, oh yeah, here's my license. Thank you for that. Here's my money for purchasing the change of license. It was simply him opening his mail and seeing that his name is different, and then bringing out his old one and tossing his old one, replacing out the new, simple way to show it without dialog.

33:23

Yeah, very simple, yeah, especially like when someone's doing something secretive, right? Like a perfect example for someone who's, you know, who wants to kind of understand, how does that look as well on the page, if you have a character in an argument, and then the character is like, Ah, I am so exasperated by all this. Okay. Why do they have to say it? Though? How? Yeah, but like you said, can you show it instead so that character, the other person says something to them, and the idea is they are just absolutely exasperated by this conversation. What can they do? Roll your eyes. Roll your eyes. Walk away, walk away. Grab throw something. Grab something and throw it at them, punch the wall, scream or just like, or just sigh and drop to the bed and just like, rub their hands. Like there's ways to show something, especially if it's a character talking about how they feel, that's always a trap, right? People don't talk about they feel, and if they do, they don't do it just by saying, Look, this is how I feel.

34:29

I find too when I'm watching something, because I'm very emotional. If I see if I see emotion, I'm more likely to feel emotion. Yep. Then if I hear someone saying I'm sad,

34:41

yeah, or I am so scared right now. Okay, show me you're scared. Show show us. If said, how do we know they're scared? Plus, they wouldn't even say, I'm so scared right now out loud, right?

And that's a lot of the things we see in scripts, is that characters talk to themselves and they talk to themselves so the audience understands what's going on with them and in their story. Hey, guess what? It's gone Yes,

35:00

in all of the documentaries, if you're in one of those rooms and they're questioning you, and you happen to be alone and you're speaking to yourself, you're usually guilty, usually Yeah, so don't make a habit of it. Nobody talks to themselves like that. Our daughter does. There are exceptions to the rule to

35:23

themselves all the time, yeah? But it's true though. Like, yeah, in life we talk, we talk to ourselves like, we'll talk out loud, like, you know, you go and you order something at a drive through, and the person gets it wrong, just like

35:36

in traffic, driving in traffic, traffic, yeah? But you

35:38

don't or like, oh, you know, I'm such an idiot. You might say that, right? Such an idiot. But you're not going to say, oh, you know, I really just wish that one time in my life I could get this right, and when I go in that house, when I open that door, I'm going to find exactly what I've been searching for. Yes, so let's go like people don't do that. You. So having a character talk more, talk about them, talk out loud about themselves. It just doesn't. It just isn't effective. So, so yeah, that's, that's not the great, great piece of advice.

36:05

Another one here. Your price, your protagonist must be likable.

36:09

Yeah, no, no, they must not. There are people who are dislikable. There are people who are morally corrupt people, and they are the lead of a story. What you must do the better piece of advice is make that person who is unlikable, even purposely unlikable, like make them able, at least make them charismatic. You look at Jack Nicholson's character in as good as it gets, he is just an awful human being, but He's entertaining, he's funny, he's clever, he's he says things you're like, Okay, I guess that makes sense, right? And, yeah, he's not a likable guy, but you start to root for him. You're like, Oh, come on, man, all these good people around you, there's got to be goodness there. You need to see who you really are. And then he does over the coastal store, but it doesn't really change much, but he starts to see himself or what he is. So it doesn't have to be likable, but it has to be engaging, intriguing. Why is this person like this? Yeah? So, yeah, that's a bad piece of advice. Not every protagonist has to be the perfect, shiny, likable he

37:02

shiny, likable hero. Okay, here's another piece of bad advice. Your concept must be totally unique. Goes along with the other that we were talking about, right?

37:11

Yeah, yeah, it's, it's like, it's the original idea. And you see this in Hollywood all the time, like the story of Pocahontas, for example, right? So they find this tribe, the male warrior, soldier goes in, falls in love with the daughter of whoever, and realizes that what they're trying to do to take over these people is wrong, and he needs to save them, right? The Last Samurai with Tom Cruise, that's exactly the same story. Dances with Wolves. Little different. There isn't a romance angle. Well, there kind of is, but it's about a soldier going in, seeing what these Native American people are like, and realizing they're not what they're painted to be. Avatar is essentially Pocahontas in space, right? It's what it is. The big, strong military they go in, send a guy in, he falls for the girl, realizes I want to be with these people instead, I'm going to fight against you. It's, it's, it's not necessarily a unique idea, but it's the execution that's always what it is you need to execute what you're doing in a way that feels original. So yeah, that's bad piece of advice, right? That's a story, and it's, it's based on another thing you've seen or something you love. You just you can make it unique, even if it hasn't been told. What about like the Lion King. Lion King is essentially Hamlet, right? Like it's Shakespeare, it's the Father Son, relationship of the father dies. And who am I powerful? And can I be this person and this, all those kind of a lot of stories are just based on something else, right? My nephew,

38:35

side note, our nephew, the other day, sent me a Instagram thing about the Lion King when he's going, oh, right, yeah. Do you know what that is? What it's spoken in the Zimbabwe language? Do you know

38:52

what it says? No, I saw someone like translated wherever once, but something

38:57

I can't remember exactly, but because, I mean, it's so such a complex. You know, meaning to it. It means, are you ready? You guys, yeah, this is a lion.

39:10

That's it. Oh, wow, that part, yeah,

39:16

this is a lion. It's something I mean, correct me if I'm wrong to listeners, but if I am, but

39:24

that's what interesting piece of tidbit

39:27

trivia. Very interesting. I thought

39:29

I love movie trivia. Okay, next

39:31

one here is, agents will find you if your script is good enough.

39:35

Oh my gosh. This is the, I mean, okay, if you are a writer who is just waiting for someone to discover you it is never going to happen. The writers that get careers, the writers that get noticed, the writers that people read and love and want to represent, those writers fought for it. Those writers were proactive. Those writers were pitch. And networking and building relationships and doing everything possible to get their script on every possible desk out there, these people will not find you. A lot of writers think I'll just win a contest, and everyone will come to me. Even if you win a contest, people aren't search you out. I mean, a big one will you'll be set up meetings, but like you have to be, you have to show these people who are not going to get paid a single penny until they sell something for you. You have to show them that you are worth the investment, that you are a go getter, that you are proactive, and you are intense and confident, and you are going to chase this, and you're going to not let them down. You're going to make them proud. Blah blah, blah, blah, blah, they will not find you. People always like, that's such a strange thing. And vice these people in Hollywood always say this, right? If there is a great screenplay that falls out of a plane and lands somewhere in Los Angeles, if it's a great screenplay, someone will find it. I don't get that, because the only, the only way someone reads something is if they're sent something to read.

41:04

Plus Scott, those pages would be pretty dirty. They

41:06

would be dirty. Yeah, when I get the concept right, a great screen plan undeniable,

41:11

it'll be, we'll find a home. Yeah, it will find but, you know, send it to people. There has to be something. It's like thinking you're

41:16

gonna find the love of your life if you never go on a date, if you never interact with people, if you sit in your basement and blame your life and your loneliness on men or women who want nothing to do with you. What about this one?

41:28

It's like winning the lottery but not buying a lottery ticket. Exactly, how are you gonna win the lottery if you don't invest money and buy a

41:36

lottery ticket? Yeah, exactly like I'm gonna be successful screening around and I'm gonna sell script for \$4 million like all these people did. Okay, how you gonna do that? I'm just gonna sit and wait. They're gonna find my scripts on my computer one day. No, that's bad advice. Don't listen to that. Doesn't matter. Last one. Need to find them. Last one.

41:54

Scott is formatting. Doesn't matter if the story is good.

42:00

Yeah, it doesn't. It's an interesting one, because it doesn't and doesn't right. The trap here is new readers in the industry, all these readers in the industry, they even like. If you send for AI or something, your format's all over the place, the AI will tell you the format is wrong. And the problem is, if the formatting is so wrong, right? Like you've written in Word, for example, with your own macros, and nothing is right? It immediately removes any confidence you know what you're

42:28

doing. So they're not going to turn to page two, right?

42:31

So it saying it doesn't matter? Yeah, it does matter, right? Format. It doesn't matter how good the story is. If it's not written like the industry people expect it to be they're not going to take it seriously. It could be some grade four student who just, you know, like as a reader, you lose confidence if it's not in proper format, play with the format. Like I said, bare bones. It must have proper basic format margins. It's an expectation. So all you're doing you may if you have the greatest story in the world that is going to change lives. Amazing. Learn screenplay format to do so, buy or download some program that does everything exactly how it's supposed to be. It's simple, yeah, I'll never understand, especially these days, why someone sends in a script and it is not written in format like, Why? Why waste your time and money? It's not hard. Read a screenplay. You can see the format. Get programmed, do it. So, yeah, bad, bad advice.

43:28

Hey, that was a lot of negative bad advice.

43:31

Well, I mean, not necessarily all of it was. I mean, some have different bits of view. Is good, a lot of the problems, a lot of writers say to me, like, I'll give them advice, and they'll say, Oh, but I this person, this person, one time on Reddit, told me that I should do it this way. I'm like, well, who's that person? Are they in the business? Have they been like, do they work with people? Go and find trust their advice. But don't tell me that. What I just shared with you, that I've learned from actual people in the industry and working with people is because some random amateur nobody on the internet told you that this is how you should do it. Right? Don't buy into

the advice of people who aren't doing it. It's like if you had colon cancer, for example, and your friend said, who isn't a doctor? Said, no, no, you don't need to deal with that. No.

44:16

Why don't you just have five bananas in a day and you'll get the cancer to go away, you'd listen to that

44:23

person you think, or should you listen to the person who was at school for 27 years and has operated on 1000 people like right? It's the same thing, people in the business who've done this, who are working like myself. I mean, I'm not Craig Mazin or John August. I don't pretend to be, but I'm a journeyman screenwriter. I've been through all the different scenarios, and I talk to people all the time and ask questions and stay up to date and so trust the people who who are successful in what they're doing. That's the way to go. So yeah, and that's it. So if you want to digest that for a minute, just take a quick pause here with us, and we'll tell you about. Of our services,

45:02

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](http://www.scriptreaderpro.com/rewrite) and use the code rewrite 15 during checkout for the rewrite proposal to get 15% off.

45:45

Okay, we are going to talk about the questions that have been submitted, submitted by listeners. Yeah, where

45:50

these questions come from? Des How did they get to us?

45:53

You can email us at [hello@scriptreaderpro.com](mailto:hello@scriptreaderpro.com) first question comes from Michiel in San Antonio, Michiel. And Michiel says, How do you know if a story idea is actually strong enough to be a movie? Yeah, I think, I

46:08

think we've had this similar type of question before. I remember, or maybe I just talked to people about it. But the way, you know, is, if you tell someone your idea and it makes them say, oh, my gosh, oh, that's a good idea, right? So yeah, and it doesn't have to, you know, just you want to share, you want to talk to people, because you might think it's the greatest idea, and then no one else gets it, or no one else thinks it would. So it's about asking, what is the movie story in

this what is the movie story in this idea? A lot of people will, like a lot of new writers, they've written a book, right? And so now they're going to adapt their book into a movie, and it won't work, because a book story is so much different. Movie stories need specific things in them, specific ways of unfolding the story, all that kind of thing. So So thinking of it that way, what's the movie story? What makes this important? Why is this the most important snapshot of this person's life? That kind of thing? Just ask the questions and don't just go through it blindly. Gotcha. Okay.

47:04

Next question, what makes a great inciting incident? And this comes from Jennifer, from Vancouver, Canada. So what makes a great inciting incident?

47:14

It's shocking. What is an inciting incident? So the inciting incident in any story is the moment something happens that changes everything. For a kid, the trajectory changes the direction of their life, changes their view on something. You find out, and if any kids are listening, who are under 12, don't let them listen. But if you your whole existence is on Santa and Santa Claus and who Santa Claus is, and you want to be Santa Claus one day and you find out Santa isn't real. That's your inciting incident in your in that story. You know what I mean? Like something that changes things I was wondering with that. Yeah, your parent died, or character loses their job, or character finds their spouse cheating, like something that changes the trajectory of where they believe their life is going,

48:01

Yeah, trajectory, that's trajectory,

48:03

trajectory, and something exciting and surprising, something that's never been done in that way, all those things Gotcha.

48:10

Next question comes from Bri in South Korea. Bri says, I wish that I could speak Korean, because that I could ask I'm not good. What makes a character arc satisfying?

48:24

Hmm, what do you think when you watch a movie and

48:27

you get to the end, why like to see that they've grown?

48:29

That's, that's pretty big. Yeah, that's pretty much the basic thing is that it's, that's what makes it satisfying. They've grown. I think they've that they've overcome what's holding them back. That's, for me, the biggest thing, understanding as an audience member, that person's flaw, and

then watching them go through a story with that flaw that's holding them back. And then they something happens there. They realize that the only reason they're not successful is because of that flaw. So then they realize I need to put death to that. I need to move on. Now, this is who I am, only because I gave that up. So that's, I think, to me, that's satisfying, is seeing that in any script I read which would also be considered growth, yeah, growth. That's me, growth. That's the core growth change. Characters don't necessarily have to completely change, but they have to change something. Yeah.

49:13

They have to view watching or writing. Yeah. Like, yeah. Okay. Last question that we have, which is from Stephanie in Phoenix. Stephanie asks, When do you know a note is actually good advice? Like, notes

49:27

that you get? Yes, like, screenplay can be sent off for notes. Yeah, that is good advice. That's tough, because

49:33

some, you know,

49:34

sometimes it's good advice, sometimes it's not. I think it's like what Aaron Falconer said in our previous podcast, is, when you get notes from someone, you need to think everything that they say that is an issue or whatever that that person is right, the suggestions that they make, the advice they give on how to fix them may not necessarily, don't view those as the best way to do it, think of it, try and feel what works for you, but, but that's how you know what's good is if you just. You want, you can, you can see that it makes you think, right for me, when I get a note on something and I think, oh my gosh, that's, that's great advice. It's usually when it points out something I didn't see or I didn't understand, someone would view it that way. You're too close to it. Yeah, something that makes you step back, that's perfect. Yeah, you're too close to it. So a note that makes you step back and realize, oh gosh, yeah, you know what? I can see that that would make it stronger. That's a good piece of advice, if it's advice that just makes you say, oh, you should do it this way instead, and it won't make it better. It'll just make it a bit different. That's not good advice, right? Something that makes you think, I can see how this makes this group better. An aha moment, yeah, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, that is the end of the podcast. That is it? Well, that is it? Well, that was fun. I like that. I like talking about advice, and you like talking. I just like talking. I do.

50:49

Scott, yes, please. Let's tell the listeners about what we like for stars.

50:55

Desiree likes five gold stars, if you enjoyed yourself, if you chuckled a little bit. We're entertained. If you feel like you actually learned something that you can put forward in your

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