

Ep #74: Think Like A Screenwriter

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On this episode, we're talking all about how to think like a screenwriter. Screenwriters' brains-they're amazing and they're super awesome. So, listen in.

0:13

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.

0:26

Hi, Scott. Hi, Desiree. How are you? Good. Good. Hello to the listeners.

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Hello to listeners, and how are you?

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No, I've done this already. Kind of be like you're okay. And to the viewers and the listeners out there, this is the Script Reader Pro podcast. I'm your host, Desiree. I'm going to do it the proper way today.

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Nice. And who am I, host?

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This is Scott. He's a screen reader. I'm a

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screen reader

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with Scripterra.

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I'm a screen reader. Yeah, I'm one of the team here at Script Reader Pro. That's a tongue twister piece. You know what? I was mentor. I was on with a mentor last night, and he's he's from China, lives in China. And I was asking him how to pronounce certain characters' names in the script, and I learned something. He said that in Chinese, everything is very, it has a rhythm to it. So when you say someone's name, it's beep by beep by beep. So this character's name was Xinjiao, so it wasn't just Xinyao, it's Xin Yao. So you have to like you said Xiao at the beginning. I don't know. I I'm not great at pronouncing anything yet, but it was like you know one character was Murong and Zhen Wan. So so

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syllable, yeah.

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And and he said that's what Chinese is is a lot of it. There's just a very staccato where you know a lot of like like English or Russian and stuff. It's just right. You just go go go go go go. So that's the big difference.

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Interesting.

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Yeah. Serious. Thought I'd share that. I meant that yesterday.

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Thank you to Scott's mentor.

1:54

Yeah,

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mentee.

1:56

Mentee.

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Thank you to Scott's mentee. If it's a it's a if it's a male, is it different than a mentee? Because mentee, you think

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is it a mantet, like dude and dudette?

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I don't know. Is it? I don't know. Who knows? Who knows? Hey, Scott.

2:09

Yes, that's right. How

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are you doing today? I'm

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doing good. Yeah,

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haven't shaved.

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That's okay. I shaved yesterday. Roughing it today.

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He's roughing it, people.

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Too busy to shave. But I'm not too busy for you guys.

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Doesn't that so? What

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are we talking about today, Desiree? Does it warm their hearts? I hope it warms your hearts. What are we talking about today?

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Today we are talking about how amazing it is to think like a screenwriter. Yes,

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it's a big.

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My favorite thing. I love, guys. I can barely tolerate him as it is now. I have to learn about what it's like to think like him.

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Wow! Barely tolerate me as I am.

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I'm so excited,

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man! I'm such a lucky man.

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For

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those of you who've never watched this before, this is also my wife. So when she says those derogatory, horrible crazy.

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Derogatory. Oh, what did you call it?

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Derogatory.

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And then

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horrible.

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Yeah.

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Criticisms.

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Oh,

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about me. It's okay because I'm her husband, so she's allowed.

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I am allowed, and you should tolerate it too.

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I do. But a

3:16

boom.

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Yes. So today we're talking about how to think like a screenwriter. But before we get into that, what do we usually start with?

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We start with besides

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you criticizing and making fun of me,

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talking about how we went to the lake yesterday. Such a beautiful day yesterday here. Sat by the water. Such a lovely day. Came home, unpacked our stuff, And realized

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what

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that Scott spilt juice.

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Scott

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all over.

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I don't know if you if you guys don't know about this. Desiree has a converse obsession. Converse obsession, not addiction obsession.

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No,

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she has like 87 or 90 pairs of condyle,

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and it's and she doesn't

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have many white pairs, and she was wearing a white pair yesterday.

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It was cream, actually, cream

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white, and I pulled them out, and one was just normal, but the other one was kind of it was wet, and it was like pink and purple because I guess some juice had laid by it or spilt on it. So I spent three hours last night trying to scrub these stains out of these shoes.

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So he scrubbed the stains so well that he

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slept on the couch.

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No, you didn't. Can he scrub the stains so well that the one shoe looks white now?

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Yeah, the one that was dyed looks like white, brand new, but the other one's a little off-white now. So I got to figure out how to take the color right out of the canvas. Love you. Anyways, we normally start not with the trials and tribulations of what it's like to be married to me, but about something we watch. So you went to a movie with your friends. Which one did you?

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I did, and I see here. This is now two weeks in a row spot that. We are doing what I've seen and not what you've seen. Need to get up on the ties.

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Okay, next episode.

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Call yourself a screenwriter and you don't watch movies.

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I do, but you went to a movie and you said it was really good. So I thought you'd like to share that.

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I went to Toy Story Five with my little nine-year-old friend, and I guess it would be her four-year-old mom. Yeah, am I allowed to say that? It was so good. It was really, really good. I I don't know if I I've seen Toy Story One. Don't know if I've seen.

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So you saw two and three. I don't think you saw. Did

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I? I don't even remember two and

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three was to do with the big purple stuffed bear. He was like the bad guy.

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It obviously is not that memorable because I don't really remember it. But this one was amazing. It was so good. That's good. Entertaining. I always love when they have kids movies and then they put a little bit of adult humor in there.

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Yeah, it's always good.

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It's always needed. I think when you do, yeah,

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it has to hit. It's designed to hit all four quadrants, right? All audiences. Yeah, the quadrants, the the young children, the older children, the parents, and the grandparents, right? Every there should be something in there for everyone to enjoy. Well, it was

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very, it was very good. Plus, the popcorn was amazing. As always, that always adds

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good. So, Desert gives Toy Story five, thumbs up.

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Nope, five thumbs up.

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Five, nice Toy Story five, five thumbs up. I don't. I don't have. But where's our Shola?

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No. Bring your thumb over. Have a thumb. Hold on. This guy. No. Look, AT has a really nice thumb.

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Look. Ready? Look, look. See, there's a thumb.

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Five thumbs.

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This is my Dracula. Um, Gary Oldman Dracula. Fun for Papa Dela. Exactly. Sarah Desiree, talk.

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Hi, I'm Dracula. I sound so scary.

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Anyways, we're talking

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about thinking like a screenwriter, which I'm so excited about. As you guys could tell, with how we started.

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Yes, yeah, I'm sure you can tell. So not

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the notes off of my notes. I

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can't. I know, but I don't want to look at this way as I read my notes because then that's rude.

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Just keeping your quadrants.

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Keeping in your quadrants. Okay. So yeah, I think a lot of screenwriters don't quite understand that the best education you can have as a screenwriter is to study screenplays. Right. The first thing you should do if you want to be a screenwriter is not just watch movies or watch TV, but read pilots, read screenplays, but not just read them. Read them like a detective would. That's kind of a smart way to look at it. I think when you go in, you're not just you're not just watching movies passively. As a screenwriter, I know it's it's frustrating sometimes to watch a movie with me because you can tell that I'm like analyzing everything. I'm like, oh, I love how they did that. Oh, that's got to be a setup. It's going to be a strong payoff there somewhere. I don't say it out loud, but you know, sometimes I do. And then you're like, can you just stop?

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Sometimes you're like, oh, that's going to be the bad guy.

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Yeah, but I keep I keep to myself now though because I don't I don't want to ruin it for you. But as a screenwriter, you you just should be like watch it the first. I always say watch the first time just for enjoying it. But then if you did enjoy it, go back in and watch it again. Same thing with screenplays. You should read a screenplay. You should study a screenplay. You should watch the movie or TV show, and then repeat. And don't just do it once. You should read a script 456, times and just really break it down. That is your textbook essentially.

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Break it down how.

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So what? That's what we're going to go through. We're going to talk about all these things that you should be looking for and how you be that detective as you read. I'll be that detective. Examples. Yeah, put your detective hat on. This is a fedora. Detectives used to wear fedoras all the time, so I thought it's fitting that I would actually wear a fedora today.

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You wear a fedora every day, but the fact that this actually does look like a detective fedora with the material-it's

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like leather. It's like faux leather, but it's got that crunchiness to it. Crunchy, yeah, crunchy, crunchy. All right,

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whatever you say. Yeah.

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Okay, so that's what we're going to learn today.

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Yeah. So, so one of the so one of the big things you want to ask is: is what is the filmmaker trying to get? Filmmaker,

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you're talking about the screenwriter, Dani.

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No, when you're when you're watching the movie, right? Because it's read the screenplay, start the screenplay, watch the movie, right? So you're trying to watch when you watch that movie, you're trying to understand how that filmmaker, what they did, what they wanted you to notice in the way that they took the script and brought it to life.

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Okay, so we're not talking about the words on the page. We're because that would be the writer. We're talking about more of the producer.

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Ah, well, kind of. You're saying I

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want to clarify. Yeah, filmmaker.

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Filmmaker is the is like the director. So

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that's what I'm wondering.

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Sorry, the director. Yeah. So, how the director's vision moved from the script to the screen, because that's what's great about reading a script kind of ahead of time. If there's a good movie coming out, I'll sometimes download the script and read the first like 80% of it, right? And I don't want to ruin the ending, but I want to kind of then see how it came to life on the screen, how that because a lot of times the vision just doesn't. Match the script, but a great script, the vision matches because the director sees exactly what that writer needs to see. All right. See, because

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for me, just as a side note, yep. When I think of a screenwriter, I sometimes consider a screenwriter to be a filmmaker.

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They are for sure.

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So that's why I'm making sure that the listeners. I appreciate that.

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Yeah, I appreciate that. Yeah, and I mean, if this is why screenwriters just need to have more credit than they get. It used to be that that was the place we went to the bathroom during watching the Oscars when the screenwriter awards came. I know because no one cares, and and you say to someone, "Hey, name a screenwriter, and I guarantee 95% of people will just name a director,

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or

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like a writer director, like oh Christopher Nolan, because he writes and directs all the stuff, or whatever. You can't. Not many people can just who aren't into screenwriting. Not many people can name. Can you name a screenwriter?

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Scott Perry Shank.

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Can you name a screenwriter other than your husband, right? And she does a screenwriting podcast and is married to me. I

11:08

don't.

11:08

That's what I'm saying. Is most people don't, and a lot of people just think the director writes or the actors write.

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I'm thinking of the ones who are the directors became writers, writers became directors. Yep,

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I know. So that's the thing. Is a lot of people. So yeah, I consider a screenwriter filmmaker because the script is designed to be filmed. Well, the script

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wouldn't be there without the without the person doing nothing. Yeah,

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no movie without the script. So, so everything starts with the script. Okay, so that's

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one thing.

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That's yes.

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But for me, I mean, I don't read a whole bunch. Like I don't read a lot of books even. But when I do read, I want to know what's really important is for me personally to be emotionally invested.

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Yes, that's a. I think Carl Iglesias said it. He's a write. He's he wrote screenwriting books.

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He wrote screenwriting books. He

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said, I think it was him. Said never underestimate the power of the emotional connection with the audience.

12:04

Deep spot. It's

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but it's true, and I and I always remember it because if you don't like, I was I was talking about this last night with my mentorship character. I'm like people

12:11

character,

12:12

my mentor, my men, my mentee, my mentorship.

12:16

He's a character.

12:17

He's not a character. He's a real person, but

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thinks he's, you know, like thinks he's a real person

12:23

in sport. In a lot of sports movies, for example, right? Like, say it's a football movie. There's always going to be football game stuff. There's going to be a big match. It's going to be leading to the end where oh, this team is going to play in the big final game, and will they win or not? We've seen that so many times. We know the football game's coming. We know it's some guy's going to not get a pass, or the quarterback will be sacked, or whatever it'll be. Audiences don't care about that as much. If there isn't a character to emotionally care about and lock into, then it doesn't matter, right? Friday Night Lights movie, for example. I I remember it's about football, but there's a scene in that movie where the one football player is having a hard game or whatever, a hard practice, and his dad comes down from the stands and was played by Tim McGraw. Never forget, because I was like, I don't like Tim McGraw now. And he berated his son in front of everyone, talked him down, was kind of physical with him, and I felt so bad for that kid. It's like he's just trying to play. Like there's so much pressure on him. That had to be emotionally invested, and I was like, I want them to win just for him.

13:24

Yeah, and people get emotionally invested for different reasons. Sometimes they're emotionally invested because, oh wow, and sometimes they're emotionally invested because they felt or gone through the similar thing in their past. Yeah, and so that's what you want to remember when you're writing is to do something that's going to be real. Like, how is your audience going to relate? So, how do you get them done? What do you have to do to make sure that your reader feels that emotion?

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Yeah, there's. I mean, there's a lot of different ways to kind of go through it. One of the things that's really important is the is the is the pacing of the story. Okay, so as you're reading that script and you're studying it and you're going through it, trying to identify how they pace the emotion in the story, right? It can't always be like heavy emotion, heavy drama, crying. Oh, I feel this. Next scene heavier. Next scene heavy again. You have to go heavy, and then you have to go light, and then you have to go joy, and then you have to go sad, and you have to mix it up and create that movement, that flow, which creates a great pace. Because if if everything is just so, even like so like cheesy love all the time, it gets boring, right? You want to have different moments, different emotion sets, different you know breathers. You want to give, you want to throw a laugh in here if the emotion is high, just like in life, if if you're in a room and there's a heavy conversation and everyone's kind of like, you know, Desiree will just crack a joke and everyone laughs and it's like, okay, now we can breathe and now we can continue on.

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I can read rooms really well.

14:52

You can,

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and I think that's as a writer, you have to be able to read what your reader or your. Viewer is going to need. Yes, if it's heavy, you know you don't want to keep heaviness for too long because then it's like people are going to be like, okay, wow, I feel like I'm just being run over by a dump truck.

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Yeah, yeah, exactly. No one wants to be run over by a dump truck.

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It would really hurt.

15:17

It would suck.

15:17

I feel like it would be painful.

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It would, but another great-I mean, there's there's a few different ways to to kind of you know make sure that you don't lose that big idea of emotionally connecting with the audience. That's what you're

15:29

saying. Yeah.

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So pacing, building tension, right? You the more tension you can build by we did an episode a little while back called the art of the blank space, right? You build tension by leaving certain things out to have an audience kind of leaning in further and further. Like, okay, I want to know what what's happened. I want to know. Oh my gosh, like her heart's broken. Does he know? Is he going to find out? Like, oh my gosh, she's cheating on her. How is she going to? What's going to happen to her? Oh my gosh! And oh, she's right there, and they're behind the door. Like building that tension, right? That gets us emotionally, just like in a horror movie. People don't think fear is an emotion. I do because it. I mean, fear is a reaction. Fear is a feeling. But holy crap,

16:05

controls your life.

16:06

Fear controls my life. Like every like last night, I'm in my I'm in the room with my wife and getting her blanket however she wants it, and all of a sudden the the TV was on pause behind us, and

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TV went on, and then the TV on

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paused itself, and it was just like, but I jumped because I didn't know what was going to happen. So, but it's an it's for me. It's an emotion. Like I'm afraid, right? That's that to me is to me is an emotion. Maybe it's not technically an emotion, but you know, you want you want to build the tension, right? Build the tension along with those emotional highs and lows. Your characters, if you give them a goal that we can identify with, we then care about it, right? We want if we care about the character, we want we're investing. We want to see the reach that goal.

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We want them to do well.

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Yeah, you get excited. You you invest in it, right? And so that also emotionally invests you. And so you want to look for that when you're in a script. Every time I read a script, at the end of a scene, I said I say to myself, okay, what did anything in this scene emotionally get me? Was there anything that pulled me in? Did I learn something new about a character that made me feel something? It's all about feeling. I say it all the time. Anyone, yes, saying that while I'm talking. Everyone, no matter who you are as a writer,

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can make us see what you need us to see with your words, but not every writer can make us feel what you need us to feel. And cut. That's good. That's good. Thank you. But yeah, you

know, yeah, you have to make us feel something. So I, so that's what you want to be doing. You know what else is good,

17:39

which we have in this episode a lot, you guys.

17:41

What's that? What is that? Shut

17:43

up!

17:44

What? I

17:44

hate when you wear that hat.

17:46

Conflict.

17:46

I hate

17:47

it. Conflict off

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of your head.

17:50

Conflict is. Why

17:50

do you just scratch your nose like that? I hate

17:53

it. I know. I'm sorry.

17:55

Stop banging the table.

17:56

Stop nagging me

17:57

every time you do this.

17:58

Yeah. Do you like when I talk with my hands? Do you have a problem when I talk with my hands? The problem with all of you. See that? Are you guys emotionally investing? Are you feeling for drama? You know what it

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is. I I freaking love drama. I live for drama. Not

18:14

in your own life though.

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No. Are

18:15

you like watching drama when there's

18:17

someone like out in the world? Not just shows, but in the world, I'm like, oh, I gotta go check what's going on over here. And Scott's like, you don't need to know everybody's business. I'm like, no, I do.

18:27

Yes, you do. Yeah, but because

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you know why? It's interesting.

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Yeah, and then so so that so the conflict, the drama again that gets you emotionally invested. You you want you you're like, oh man, I'm so angry at that person right now, or oh, I just want to punch that person in the face for her, right? That so so that's what you're looking for, and and that's what audiences react to, and you don't even notice you're doing it when you're watching something. You're watching a TV show or a movie. You you get into it, you're not, and you start crying. You're not thinking, oh, that made me so sad. I'm crying now. You just cry, right? You just feel things. But when you're studying a script, you want to see how is it done in a great way, right? And because that's what you want to be learning. So many people, so many writers. I ask, how many screenplays have you read or do you read? And they're like, oh, I don't know, like one once in a while, or a friend of mine. I'm like, why? Like why are you not reading, you know, The Dark Knight, the brilliant screenplay, and learning how did he do all that? What what did you

write on the page that made that scene work that way? How did how was that there for the actors to capture? So those are the things that you want to be looking at when you're studying. You put your detective hat on, and you read a scene, and then you break it down and you look. You do those things. So what we're going to do is I'm going to go through some exercises that you can do and some of the types of questions you can ask yourself as you're going through the script, and you're trying to put it all together. Make sense?

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Yes. Now remember, though, when we are doing an exercise like this, you want to make sure you don't bend your wrist, because if you bend your wrist,

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yes,

19:57

actually this hurts a lot here.

19:59

Yeah. Only a probably a carpal tunnel.

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Don't talk to me, carpal tunnel, Mister Wright. You're like you're like

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when you're exercising like this, you don't want to bend your wrist as a wrist is bent. It hurts. Oh,

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I wonder how many writers out there do have carpal tunnel. Probably probably a lot. Okay, so we're doing exercises, not like not like this. Yes,

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no. This is these are things that you can do to train your creative brain, right?

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Is this something that you can put in the show notes for the views and listeners? Yes,

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I'll have all this in the show notes. You should have already clicked on it and seen that. But but these are exercises that I've done over time.

20:36

Down there, I like in the

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click click yeah.

20:38

I like in the click

20:39

right there.

20:40

I like click on show

20:41

notes, or maybe there show notes. Click there, click there for the show notes. Maybe the show notes are up here. Maybe they're up there. I'm not sure.

20:49

Hi, Scott. Hi, kiss me. Look at I'm double jointed.

20:54

I'm not. Your fingers are creeping me out.

20:56

Kiss me.

20:58

So these are these are ways to to train your creative brain. Okay,

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so first one you have it says observation drill. Let's see how many spelling mistakes he has today. None.

21:08

Observation drill. Spend five minutes in a coffee shop and write down the following. Oh my goodness, I would love this activity.

21:17

I do this. That's why I love writing in coffee shop.

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Call it an activity instead of a sure. These are

21:21

activities. Sure,

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because exercise to me feels like hard work. It's work,

21:24

yeah. I hate

21:25

exercise.

21:25

All right, what was the word you said?

21:27

Activities.

21:27

This is an activity. Writers like activities. We're like children. We're like big out of children.

21:32

Okay, boys and girls.

21:33

So when you're in the and that's why I love writing in coffee shops. A lot of times I don't get a lot of writing done because I'm just observing people. But look, sorry, I did something weird with my mouth there.

21:44

No, but you know what? Too, you got very loud and excited, and I was like, "Hey, calm down. Just

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like doing this, I like watching. We like people watching.

21:51

No, I know, but just this whole thing is just

21:54

yeah. I get excited about these things. Okay, so when you're in the coffee shop, pick five people that you see over however long you're there, or in a couple minutes, get five people.

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I will help you with this because I like to hear myself talking.

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You should be talking. So take five unique people, and what is the things that you want to note

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in real life?

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No, these things that are listed here. What are these things that you want to

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note? Know too.

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We add to them. Feel free.

22:17

Okay, first one you have. These are all going to be boring compared to my things, just so you all know, their habits.

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Yeah. So, what habits do you notice they do? Does someone pick their nose? Does someone pick their eye booger out and eat it? Does someone scratch their? Does someone turn to the counter and scratch their bum, thinking no one can see because their bum's facing the counter? Do they? Do they yawn and stick their finger in their ear?

22:42

Right. I mean, they could.

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Yeah. Just check out their habits, and not that everyone's going to be interesting, but you can use them to help put characters together. Right.

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My next one is my favorite thing.

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Yes.

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Their clothes.

22:52

Yes. Because

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I always, I'm like, and I'm not saying like by any means, you don't have to spend a lot of money on clothes. Nope. This shirt was 399.

23:02

Thrift store

23:04

purchase. No. Um. I just like to see how people pair things together. Yep. And and then I'm like, why are they wearing plaid red and black pajama pants mixed with a turquoise sweater and green sheets.

23:23

Yeah, I

23:25

know on here it says no judging, just observing. I'm sorry, you guys. If you're wearing that, I am gonna judge you.

23:31

Yes, but in a writer's brain, this is what this is the different thing here. It's not just checking out their clothing; it's trying to figure out the story behind the clothing. I know that.

23:39

So what that tells me is that person is either in a rush and they need their coffee fix, so they gotta go, or they just don't care. Yep, maybe they maybe their one of their friends just passed away and they are in a slump, and that's how they carry around the world, and they have a deeper story. That's you know,

24:03

or maybe they're an 18-year-old child of a screenwriter and his wife, and they decide everywhere in public they're going to go, they're just going to wear their pajama pants.

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And maybe that same person-no

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reason-they just want to wear pajama pants, and you say why, and they say because I'm wearing them,

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and maybe that same person has pajama pants on with the pockets hanging out.

24:27

Doesn't even take the need to tuck the pocket in. But wait, the pajama pants have a huge rip down the side of the leg, about five inches.

24:38

Yes, and if I saw that person in public and their crease on their bum is like way off, two

24:43

inches off, way off of

24:45

the side. I wouldn't say anything, but you would go up to them and say, "Hey, just want to let you know, your bum crease is not balanced.

24:51

I I want to put someone, and maybe this same person looks like they haven't brushed their hair in a really long time.

24:59

Oh. Okay, no judging, just observing. We might

25:04

know this person very well.

25:05

The other thing you can think of is what does that? What does that person do for a living? So

25:09

you can tell a lot by

25:10

yeah,

25:11

but not just a living. You can tell a lot about how someone needs to portray themselves by how they're dressed.

25:18

Oh yeah,

25:19

right. Yeah,

25:20

for sure. Like some people, just yeah, like a lot of people put a lot of importance on what how people see them. You know, like it depends on how your race. If if you've grown up to think that you have to look a certain way, so people

25:32

you can't leave a house without

25:33

yeah

25:34

this this this. If

25:34

you haven't been taught that, you're just gonna maybe you don't care, maybe you don't care about clothing, maybe you do, right? More

25:40

people care about clothing. You could get arrested if you don't care.

25:43

Like today, Desiree said, "Oh, what are you wearing today? I said, "Well, I'm wearing my my black hoodie because I can't, you know, I can't wear this hat with the shirt I have on. And she would like, "Well, I would hope not. Do you want to see my shirt? I don't want to see my shirt.

25:56

Show it. Show it. I'm showing my shirt. Take it off. Take it off. He's got to make sure he doesn't.

26:02

Ready?

26:02

Can you see? What does it say? It

26:05

says, "My favorite Disney villain is my wife.

26:13

True story.

26:14

I think that's.

26:16

But yes, clothing, clothing could definitely make a character. Craig Mazin on the Script Notes podcast. He had a whole episode on wardrobe and how wardrobe and hair-it's important because that can can define a character. So, so that's one of the thing. That's one of the exercises. Sorry, that's one of the activities. Yeah, the next

26:31

activity is the what if chain. Like, what if your phone rang and it was yourself calling you from tomorrow.

26:42

See, that's the thing. Okay, this is why I say this is an important activity because the way I start any query letter, so I still write query letters when I want to get in touch with certain person. That that can sometimes be the best way to start. Hey, Bill, what if you got a phone call from yourself from and from tomorrow, whatever, right? But whatever it is, that can help you understand if there's a cool concept there or not, right? So, but don't just stop there at what if, right? What if you got that phone call and it was yourself calling, and then and

27:13

then and then you were like, okay, you're not going to believe what happened to me, Scott. I just called myself from tomorrow. Do you believe me?

27:23

No. What do you mean you called you? She got a phone call, and it was you from tomorrow.

27:26

Yeah, it was the craziest thing ever. All right. Like, do you believe that? No. It was those five.

27:32

I can't believe things that aren't real.

27:34

That's me,

27:35

right? So that's one of the questions. What else? What

27:38

please you?

27:38

What? What else?

27:39

What if Tomorrow, it says, "What if tomorrow you was lying?

27:44

Tomorrow you, not you now, but the tomorrow you,

27:47

comma,

27:48

comma. What if tomorrow you was lying? Right. What if they were lying? What if it was a lie? What if what if tomorrow

27:56

you you're gonna die at the end of the day?

27:58

Yeah, and they said that because they knew you needed to do something to get make actually what was coming right.

28:02

Okay, the next one. What if answering changes the future?

28:07

If it was me, the future would be gone because I don't answer the phone when people call me.

28:11

You don't. You don't even answer when I call you.

28:13

I know. I don't like answering the phone. I know. So what if right? So then there's that. So it's just on and on and on. Within minutes, you've got the seed of of a TV show or a movie, right? So it's a what if, but don't just say a what if. Just keep going, because that's and that's the rule of a dozen. I talk about is think of a dozen different additional what ifs. What if this, and what if that, and what if this, and what if that, because you might have a cool idea at first, but it might be number seven that you hit, and you're like, holy crap, I can't believe I thought of that.

28:40

We haven't heard this a dozen times before.

28:43

See.

28:43

Okay. Next one. Character notebook. It says, create one new character every day, not just a name. Oh, you want to give them something so you can like create them, create them.

28:56

Yeah. A character notebook meaning buy a notebook specifically for characters, whether it's in your phone on piece paper, I'm a big fan of pen to paper.

29:04

He loves when his ink is like doing funky things, and then he shakes his ink.

29:10

We talked about ink before on this podcast. We're not talking about it yet.

29:12

Yeah, it was on the white carpet almost the other day with your red.

29:15

Hey,

29:16

your red

29:16

who stained their Converse shoe with not pen ink.

29:19

Not me. Anyways,

29:22

anyways, have a character notebook and every day write about a new character, someone you've seen, someone you thought about, someone you interacted with.

29:29

Yeah, and then you have not just the name though. It says give them a secret.

29:33

Yeah,

29:34

give them a fear.

29:35

Yes,

29:36

contradiction. Yeah, one strange habit. Yep, something they desperately want. You know what I was thinking when you said a contradiction. I just listened to a betrayal episode, betrayal podcast. Yep, and it was of a woman who was married to a pastor, and pastor always not doing good things. Oh, that's a contradiction. It

30:02

is. Oh, totally is

30:03

because you see the pastors being, you know.

30:05

Yeah, yeah, and and that's the thing. Don't don't feel feel you don't feel you can't dirty up your characters either, right? Even if it's your main character, if you know there's a contradiction about them, really strange habit they have, something they desperately want, something they're afraid of, you start to they start to become a real person. So do that in your notebook. You don't have to. If one inspires you and you write 25 pages about them, who cares? Go ahead. You don't have to. You could just write a paragraph, right? Those characters one day in one might fit in a story you're doing. Doesn't mean that you're writing that character because you you're absolutely going to use them. It's about training your creative brain. How do you invest

30:36

training your creative brain and making your juices flow?

30:40

Yes, get those creative juices flowing. And what do you do with your craft?

30:43

You hone it.

30:44

She hates that word.

30:46

Okay, next thing, guys, you no longer have to do activities. Now we're playing games.

30:51

No, these are actual activities. It's games. It's games, exercises, and activities. Okay,

30:58

it almost sounds like you know in Dirty Dancing today at the blah blah blah. We're gonna have gangs, activities, and and exercise exercises.

31:09

Yes, like we're at summer camp.

31:10

We need to participate.

31:11

Screenwriter. Oh, I'd love to write a. I'd love to run a screenwriter summer camp. Holy would that be the best summer ever? Okay, idea generation game. Pick three words. Okay, three random words. I have a few centered, but that

31:27

just stressed me out. Okay,

31:28

I I wrote three here, but I want you to just think of three random words. Random words.

31:33

Idea generation game. It's called. Yeah. So everybody wants.

31:35

Yep. This is the game. Idea generation game. Three random words. Yes.

31:39

Toadstool.

31:40

Toadstool. Okay, next.

31:44

Paper cup.

31:45

Paper cup. That's two words.

31:47

Paper cup. Just say cup.

31:50

Okay. Toad stool, cup, and

31:54

mice.

31:55

Mice. Toadstool, cup, and mice. Okay. Now force yourself to connect them into a story. Doesn't have to be a long story. We we did that last episode, right? I know

32:06

that I suck about this.

32:07

Okay, so you've got a toadstool, you've got a cup, and you've got a mouse. What

32:10

is a toadstool?

32:11

It's like a giant mushroom. I think where toads sit.

32:15

I was thinking of it being a toad. I don't

32:16

think it's like you make a toad. You make a stool for a toad, like a like a bar stool, can you imagine? So, a frog's

32:24

hands are like this, and he can't. A

32:26

frog

32:27

can't drink because his hands are with

32:29

a frog and a grasshopper and

32:31

has a toadstool.

32:32

Just wait. This is my story.

32:34

Oh,

32:34

a frog.

32:35

Listen, just wait. I have to. I have to pay attention. A

32:37

frog, and a grasshopper, and a maggot all going to a bar. The toad sees the stool and he says, "That's mine. You know why? Toad stool. And then suddenly the grasshopper rolls his eyes and hops out of the bar. The maggot barfs on the floor and starts licking it up. And as the toad pops over and sits on his stool. He looks down and screams and faints because right at the base of his stool is what

33:05

a cup. No vomit.

33:07

What was the first word? The last word.

33:09

Stool. The

33:10

last word.

33:12

Mice.

33:13

There was a mouse, and that as the mouse watched the toad fall off and faint, he picked up his little cup of beer and drank it and burped.

33:21

That is hilarious story.

33:23

Yeah, so it was a story. It's not anything good. Story. I'm not a storyteller.

33:28

Obviously, you're not a storyteller. So

33:30

how are you doing then? Because you know what

33:32

random story. Random stupid story. But it's an example of of it's again. It's just about training your brain. Yes. It's about here. Just take three random words and and just go with it. There's this guy online. He's a rapper, and he just goes up to people and like, give me a really just a random complicated word, and I'll put it in a wrap. And people come up with the strangest words, and then he just takes it and starts going and puts it in his wraps. It's the same kind of thing. It's just a matter of training your brain to be fast, to be creative, to think outside the box. So, next activity.

34:04

I didn't like that story

34:05

because it had a mouse in

34:07

it. I know. Okay, next activity, boys and girls, is called increase the stakes, and we're not talking about ribeye.

34:17

No,

34:18

we are talking about stakes.

34:21

What is that stake?

34:21

S T A T T T K. So yes,

34:26

exercise. The activity here is to take something boring, right?

34:29

You

34:30

like me. So I'm just sitting here at a table and I'm writing in my book, which everyone just thinks is absolutely boring. But then add to it. Take that boring situation, right? Don't don't make a crazy situation off the start. Just here's a person waiting for a bus, right? Then add a bunch of things. What are the what are kind of some of the things that you can add if someone's standing there waiting for a bus, looking around?

34:50

Well, if I were to look at this page, but I'm not really looking at this page. Yes,

34:53

be creative,

34:54

and I'm just thinking outside the box.

34:56

Think on the fly.

34:57

What if they were being followed?

35:00

That's cool. What else? It's okay. The camera's on me right now, Desiree. No one can see you reading the paper. So, Desiree, what else?

35:08

The what if Scott? What if?

35:10

Yeah.

35:11

They only had two buckaronis left.

35:14

Okay. How much? That makes me wonder how much the bus. Are they going to be able to get on the bus if they only got two bucks? Okay. Random. That okay. I don't

35:20

know

35:21

why else.

35:21

When they went into their pocket to get their \$2, they had left.

35:24

Yeah,

35:25

they had a gun.

35:27

Okay, cool. That's different.

35:29

The gun was in the same pocket as the chain as the gills.

35:32

Okay,

35:33

and you're not going to believe where they're going.

35:37

Where they going on

35:37

this bus? Where the bus comes? Where's

35:39

the bus?

35:40

They're actually meeting someone. It's hard for me to say

35:46

what

35:46

who betrayed them.

35:47

Ooh, see that's interesting, and those aren't like to go together.

35:51

Well, they could though. They could just wait because we have a gun in the pocket, and then we're going to meet someone.

35:55

That's true, and then yeah. So then suddenly the scene this it it can become compelling, right? Yeah, that was the end. I know that wasn't another part of it. That was my note. I just didn't put it outside of the bullet.

36:05

Suddenly, this scene, same scene, becomes compelling.

36:08

Right. So it's those little things, right? You have person at a bus stop, boring. You have a person at a bus stop, shifty-eyed, looking around, making sure no one's looking at them. They reach into their pocket for their bus money, and the gun falls out. They reach down, pick it up just as the bus pulls up. Bus pulls up, it opens. They get come on. They look at their phone. Yeah, I I don't really want to see you right now. And but then they sit down and they put in their whatever. Yeah, okay, but I'm on my way anyway. And whatever. What's like? Who are they going? Where are they going? They have a gun. What's happening? Right. So you just add

36:38

person that was following exactly.

36:39

And yeah, who's following them? So a lot of interesting things. Maybe it's the

36:42

person who betrayed them, and they're actually going to know.

36:45

Yeah, they know. That could be. That

36:49

was like that movie we watched with the husband and wife both trying to kill each other.

36:54

That was actually really. It was really weird. Uh huh. But it was really good. So, anyways. Okay. So

37:01

next we have

37:02

last activity

37:02

originality exercise forward slash activity forward slash

37:08

game

37:08

game. Ask yourself what's the obvious version and deliberately reject it. Yeah. So obviously.

37:18

Yeah. So here we go. I'm going to give you the example. You're going to tell me what could be different. So instead of the idea that says a a detective investigates a murder, well that's pretty boring, right? That's pretty obvious. A detective obviously investigates a murder. What's something different? What's a different way to approach that idea?

37:36

Well, if I was looking at the page again, I might say something like a forensic accountant investigates a murder, following through tax

37:46

records. Right, which then equals the movie The Accountant, which was amazing. So it's and and then to add to that, but the account, yes, go

37:54

ahead.

37:55

Add to that the accountant is autistic, so you just and and then he works for some secret company. It just becomes. It becomes more and more and more wild instead of just a story about investigating murder. Right.

38:07

Thoughts. What if a child is a suspect in their parents' murder?

38:16

Okay, that's a basic, obvious, right? Like so, pretty pretty basic, right? Parents are dead, kids. But what? What would the? What would the? That's the obvious version you reject. What's the crazy, unexpected version? Does right?

38:28

What if a child, that same child, realizes that his imaginary friend has actually killed his parents and is now framing him for

38:40

murder? I think I think I'm gonna write that movie because that sounds like an amazing movie. Like when I put those words in, I'm like, okay, that's awesome. Yeah. So instead of just a kid being, you know, that's that's kind of crazy on its own, right? No, it was parents are murdered. I know, but my

38:56

imaginary friend,

38:57

right? Right. Who's

38:57

gonna believe that the parents are dead? Right. They're not going to be like, oh yeah, he's known Jeff for 20 years. So then it's

39:04

is there an imaginary friend? Is there not? Is the kid schizophrenic? Is he not? Is the kid just a brutal, awful human being who decided to kill my parents and then just pretends that that imaginary friend did it? There's an amazing movie called Primal Fear, and it was Edward Norton's first kind of movie, and he was starring. Richard Gere and Edward Norton was like accused of these murders, and it's that same kind of idea. Like it's so good. Like watch it. I'm going to spoil it. So if you don't want to know, don't. But

39:31

plug your ear. At the

39:31

end of the movie, like the whole time he's he's playing a schizophrenic. He's switching his personalities in the interrogation room, and he's so believable. And they they believe him and they let him out and as soon as he's out he smiles to himself because he was faking the entire time. Yeah, really. He's just a brutal murder. Yeah. So now you can keep watching. You can unmute. Um. But it's it's that kind of thing. So the story can just go anywhere, right? And so don't write it. I'm gonna write that movie. That's mine. All right. So you you just want to change the perspective. Right, changing that perspective transforms something familiar, right? Like, oh, here's a detective in a murder. Let's give it something different, and it makes it unique and different. So that's the so you can do that kind of exercise with every single movie that you know. Think of a movie you know, and then think, okay, there's the idea. How can I make that idea different? Not that oh, copy movies and just play with them, but just to get your brain again, these are all ways to to get your creative brain brain to get your creative brain working to think more like a screenwriter. Be a detective, you know. As you study other screenplays, use those to help you start to think. Oh, I see that needs a setup. I got to make sure I'm putting a setup in a scene that gets you thinking like a screenwriter. Okay, so soak that in. Let that kind of marinate. We will be back in a moment to answer some

40:47

questions. Hang tight.

40:52

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41:35

Welcome back. So at this part of the podcast,

41:38

yes,

41:40

we have had previous questions submitted to us.

41:43

How? How did we get questions? I want

41:45

to let you know that if you want to have questions put on the show, you can email us at hello@scriptreaderpro.com, and we will definitely we'd love to hear from you. We'd actually really like to hear from you with other ideas that you want for a podcast, questions you have, comments.

42:04

Yeah, this actual episode came to me because someone asked me, "How do I start to to I can't remember whose question was how do I start to see stories in a in a way like I'm building a movie? Someone who just wanted to try getting into screenwriting, and I'm like, "How do you do that? How do if you don't if you're not natural like that? How do you come up with that kind of thing? So we love those

42:22

ideas. So yeah, so

42:23

that inspired this. So if that if you if you learned something on this, then yeah, feel free to send in other thoughts.

42:28

Okay, so this first question comes from Hannah from Carmel.

42:32

Ooh, Carmel by the Sea, you think? Love that place. Love it. Oh, so good.

42:36

What's the biggest mistake new writers make when introducing their main character.

42:41

Oh man, what's the biggest mistake? What do you think?

42:44

They focus too much on how they look.

42:49

Sometimes, if that's all they focus on, yes.

42:53

But yeah.

42:54

But on the other side of it, some writers explain way more than they need to, or they they the biggest mistake that writers do is they give us a whole bunch of information that an audience can't see, right? You have to remember that this is a screenplay. The only thing on the page that should be there is what you can shoot and show the audience, right? There's nothing wrong with having a little color and having a little commentary in it, but you wouldn't say Desiree 39 enters the room. She is vibrant and she laughs at her own jokes and she does never roll her eyes at people. But she also doesn't have a filter. Okay, it's a perfect explanation. But you wouldn't say that. You can't say that as you introduce someone in a script because

43:39

you can't see them.

43:40

You would show them doing it. You would say, "This is Desiree. She walks into a room, and then you have wheels into a room. Didn't say it was you specifically, but she goes into this room. And if you want us to know that she has no filter, you have her have no filter, right? If you if you want us to know that she's funny, have her be funny. You can't tell us that. It's like same thing. I the one of the things I hate most in the script is when a character says something and it says Bill laughs uncontrollably, and I'm like, that wasn't even funny. So now you're telling me that was supposed to be so funny, and now I find it even less effective.

44:15

I think it's because you live with me.

44:18

True, but if it's going to be like, just let if it's going to be funny. Let the audience let

44:21

me decide if it's funny or not.

44:22

Well, just make sure it's funny

44:23

because try to joke on

44:24

100 people and see if they laugh.

44:25

Right, and when I go to movies, you'll know if it's funny because I will laugh.

44:32

She very she's so funny because she very laughs. Even like stand up comedy, right? The the only time I've seen you lose your mind laughing so hard,

44:40

Dane Cook

44:41

was Dean Cook. Yep. Do you remember the joke he told? That was the funniest we've ever had. He was talking about a guy. He like some guy. He's like the guy. This guy was just a mess. Like he looked like he ate cigarettes, and we laughed so hard because we can see what he meant. Like you can see. Guy, what a guy would look like who ate cigarettes? Because

45:03

Dane Cook has he?

45:05

He just disappeared. He fell off.

45:06

Where is

45:07

he? He's here and there, but he's has he

45:09

written a movie?

45:10

No, he's been in movies.

45:12

I know, but his career just-I

45:13

don't know why his career stopped. He did some-he did some work on his face, and he looked really funny after. But he was so funny. He was

45:19

amazing, but it does take me a long time to laugh.

45:21

Yeah, it does.

45:22

Okay, next question: What are the biggest misconceptions new screenwriters have about the film industry? And this comes from Marcus from New Orleans. What

45:32

do you think the biggest misconception is when they're going to start?

45:35

So I'm going to write this script. It's going to take me two weeks to write. Going to send it to three places in Hollywood,

45:43

or one.

45:44

No, you know what? Let's do a happy two.

45:47

Two, okay.

45:48

Let's meet me in the middle here.

45:50

Yep.

45:50

Um, I shouldn't have to do three, two max, and then they're gonna call me back like the next day after they've gotten my script. They're going to offer me a paycheck for \$2 million.

46:02

Yeah, that's going to happen. Yeah, that that is the biggest misconception. Writers think that they're going to write a screenplay and and everyone's going to want to read it and someone's going to read it and and and buy it and and make

46:12

it. No, they're also going to fight over it. There's going to be 14 studios fighting. Well, not if

46:18

they only sent it to two people.

46:19

No, because they're gonna pass it along to their friends.

46:22

They will. So great. That that is the biggest thing. And and I hear that all the time. Oh, you know, can you? It's like this is a movie. The people are gonna make this movie. This is this is gonna be an amazing movie. It's gonna just blow up. And it's like, okay, sure, but that doesn't mean it's gonna happen overnight. And like that's the biggest mix of that. You have to do the work. You have to put in the time. You know, most writers work years and years and years and write dozens of scripts before something happens. Some get lucky. Some have a really great connection. Some magic happens if a script lands on someone's face in the right time. Some are in the right family. It's just it's it's there's no specific way in. Right, right, right.

46:56

Steven Spiel. Steven Spielberg. If Steven Spielberg,

47:01

yes,

47:02

was my uncle.

47:03

Yes, you'd probably have an easier time getting people a script, right? Yeah, so you can't control those things, but that's the biggest mixture.

47:10

Next question that we have comes from Nathan from Detroit. Ooh, okay. Nathan says, "When do you know you're rewriting and not just procrastinating by endlessly tweaking.

47:22

That's a great question, and I know a lot of writers who do that. The best thing you can do is whatever program you're using. When you finish your latest draft, there's a feature in most programs. I think the ones I've used where you there's an option called script compare, where

you can take here's version one, here's version two, and then it it analyzes them and tells you highlights this line is different. This line is different. This line was crossed out. If you look at that and nothing has really changed story wise, and it's just you're playing with sentences. Stop. That's when you're done.

47:54

You know why?

47:55

Yeah,

47:56

you're growing up to be a

47:57

loser. Yes, and if you don't have a problem like that, see for me, AI generating having AI write your stuff. No, no, that's a no-no. But taking two scripts and saying, "Hey, ChatGPT, can you tell me what's different about these two scripts? They can probably just give you a breakdown of what's different. And if there's not a lot that's different, you're

48:14

done for

48:14

now until you get a major note from someone that wants to make it.

48:18

Once you send it in to two people, and then people offer each million dollars. Then you know. Then you're good.

48:23

Yeah.

48:23

Okay. Last question comes from Priya from Mumbai.

48:27

Ooh, Mumbai. Nice.

48:28

Should writers pursue representation first, or focus on making industry connections on their own?

48:36

I mean, you should always be trying to seek representation because a lot of the time in this business, you can't get your script to someone who can actually make your movie or or you know set meetings up or anything without that. But the way to get to them is make connections. If you watch a movie you love, for example, look them up on IMDb, find out who made it, who directed it, who wrote it. Go and find them online. Everyone's online: LinkedIn, X, Facebook, wherever, right? Just look them up and send them a message or post on their thing saying, "Man, I watched this movie, absolutely loved it. I loved how you did this and this. So unexpected. There you go. They might get back to me, being, "Oh, thanks. You know that. Like you never know. So that's also networking, right? You're not sucking up trying to use them, but you're trying to build your network of people. You have to do both, right? But none of it works unless, because that's the question: Should writers pursue representation first? You should write a great screenplay that every time you submit it somewhere, they tell you it's great. Then you do those things. If you have a script that's mediocre, doesn't matter. Doesn't matter who you open a door, that door closes forever if it's bad. So that's it. That's a question. That's all. Awesome. So hello at Script Reader Pro. If you want to do com to send us a question or a show idea,

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we also would love if you guys would give us five star reviews, share this podcast with other writers that you know.

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Yeah, if you found this interesting, if you were entertained, obviously you. Probably were great if you felt like you learned something, which is my hope. If you know, I know I don't know everything, and and what everything I says isn't isn't always the right answer, but I try to explain things in a way that is different than someone else might. That hopefully that little tidbit, something you've learned, you can put in your in your toolbox and and and hone your craft. So check us out, ScriptReaderPro.com. We have everything a writer would need. Our team-we're all working writers. You can pick who you want to work with. We've all been there. We know the struggle. So, ScriptReaderPro.com, where we are helping writers craft wonder one page at a time.