Ep #82: BURIED First Ten Pages

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On this episode, we're talking once again about the importance of the first 10 pages and how visuals really pull it off. 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?

0:25
Hi, guys. This is Desiree. This is Scott, and we are the Script Reader Pro Podcast.

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We are. That's actually what we go by. We change our names. We are officially the Script Reader Pro Podcast. It's on our driver's licenses. No,

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mine is the Script,

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and I'm reader pro podcast. Screwed me. I'm trying to think of what was the next word.

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Wow! Why are you wearing the same clothes as last time?

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Oh, I forgot to change. What? Why are you wearing the same clothes? Weird. It's

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almost like we're doing two podcasts in one day,

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or we're really making these people think they're tripping.

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Yeah, tripping. Either

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or. But welcome to the podcast. It

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works.

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This is Desiree. She is the host. She is the hostess with the most s. She is here to keep me on task, to make fun of me here and there, and to offer pearls of wisdom from a non-screenwriter.

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Yes, I love these episodes.

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And who am I? What do I do?

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I don't know what he does, honestly. To tell you guys the truth, what does he do? Wow! I talk about screenwriting makes my

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life a living wonderland. Oh, sweet! I mean, you talk about screenwriting. I would say I'm not a I'm not a guru. I don't. I'm not the end all and be all of everything. I just

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he thinks he is.

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I just have a different kind of way of explaining things that sometimes makes more sense to certain people. So, like any other teachers out there, have got their own style, and I say a lot of the same things, talk about the same kind of stuff. There's only so much you can talk about in writing, but I know I just have a different perspective on it. That's all.

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Yeah.

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So if I that's it, that's all. Thanks so much for joining. Bye. Thank you. Thanks, bye, guys. If I if I say anything that makes you understand something a little bit better, that's whole reason I'm here. And I've done my job. So and yeah, and then I get to sit beside her all day and look at her. It's nice.

2:11
Uh huh.

2:12
Nice gig.

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Nice yegg.

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So as we said today, we're talking about first 10 pages. Our previous episode, we talked about the medical drama *The Pit*. First 10 pages of pilot today. We're going into a feature film called *Buried*. Yes, I'll get to that in a second. But how do we normally start our show? We always talk about what we've seen, and I want to just touch on two different movies. First of all, this one I went to myself the other day. A friend of mine gave me the book, and I kind of wish I had read the book before I went to the show. Oh, really?

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Yeah.

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Is it? I wonder if it's any different.

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I don't know, but it's really made me want to read the book, which is pretty big considering I hate books and I hate reading. I like audio books. Yeah,

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you read like 14 this week. You listened to

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no four. I did when I was crafting, doing things around the house. But I wish that, and I did look. I looked to see if it was available as an audio book, and no such luck, Chuck. But it was Verity, is what I went to. For those of you that have seen it, you maybe can let me know your thoughts. But I thought it was so good.

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Yeah, same author as it ends with us,

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Colin Moover. Yeah, I wanted to read it a

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long time ago, but anyways, it was really good. You said I'd see it the second time. Yeah, so I didn't tell because you normally never see.

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No, and I did tell Scott that I'm not going to tell him any part of the movie because I do want to watch it with you. Yes, we'll watch it. But I kind of want to watch it to see if I see anything. You know, when you watch second time, yeah. But also like

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some twists and turns and stuff.

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Yeah, it's really. Oh,

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okay. Yeah, those are fun to watch second it's the

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Colleen Hoover book that's kind of what you get second thing that because I wanted to bring you into the discussion was we went to Clayface

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oh yes we did go to for your birthday that's right yeah

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yeah

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yeah it was good I thought it was getting it's funny because Desiree doesn't like superhero movies typically

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I don't

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no no comic book movies even like this, could be

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real.

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This, yeah, because that's the thing with DC and the Batman universes. They're not superheroes, right? They're they're just regular people who are either good or bad.

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Have extraordinary gifts. Yeah.

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Well, this guy gets his face injected because he got cut up, and then we don't don't talk too much. But then these nanobots start invading his system and change what he could do with his face. And so, but it was really good. I

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was telling my best friend Johnna this. I was telling her I actually really liked it, and she was like, "Really? This is shocking for you." It is. And I so I told her briefly about it, about the nanobots and how it potentially these nanobots could potentially cure things, and and she was like, "Well, that's why you like

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it, yeah, because you're thinking

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of like you're thinking of in the medical sense how it could heal people with

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yeah

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lack like lacking a certain gene, which is where they're going anyway. There's

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nano putting nanobots in people,

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right? And so the whole concept, like, is with my particular condition or disease, is it's just. A depletion of a specific gene, and so we were talking back and forth. And there's gene therapy,

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which

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is very similar. If you think about it,

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rewires all your genes. It's

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similar to this nanobot, and then that's why she was like, "That's why you liked it because of the gene there." You know, kind of being in the same field.

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Yeah, yeah. Does that

5:21
make sense?

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It does make sense. And I mean, the medical stuff is crazy. I don't know if you ever see it on face on on Instagram, but sometimes it'll be like, "Hey, stop all this crazy bad stuff out there." Here's things that happen around the world that you probably don't know about. And it was crazy. They made a heart out of like parts, like a you know fabricated heart that will that is built so it will never stop beating?

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Interesting for

5:43
heart transplants.

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Yeah,

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a guy had the very first is a guy who just had like little pieces of his limbs.

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Yeah,

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they put like arms, shoulders, hands. They transplanted into him, and he can use them.

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Crazy.

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And like, and then they found in Japan these researchers, these doctors, they were able to identify the chromosome that causes Down syndrome and eradicate it, so that before no one will ever be born with Down syndrome again.

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Wow!

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Like crazy what these people are doing. Yeah, it's crazy. It's wild.

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It's kind of a crazy time to be here.

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Crazy time to be alive. Right. Like good and bad. But man, there's technology. What it's done. So that's

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why I think I liked the movie. That's probably why I did. It was good though. That's what she she was the one that came up with that. I have to give her credit that she's like, that's why you like it.

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Makes sense, yeah, right? Makes sense because I could

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relate it to like lived experiences. Yeah, and it was

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hard. Like the characters, it's hard not to feel for this guy. Face cut off. Like imagine if your

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face is cut, and you're an

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actor, and you're like your face is everything. Anyways, yeah, it was good. We always really good. So today we are talking about. Well,

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we're talking about a movie.

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Yes,

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that is thrilling.

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Yes,

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in the same like I just as thrilling to me as Clayface. Clayface I found very thrilling. Yeah, this to me once you made me watch the trailer made me force me

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forced me to, yeah, forced to

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watch the trailer, and then I this time, you guys, I was so good, and I was so good for last episode too because I read the notes, so I knew what I was talking about. Um, once I saw the trailer, I was like, I remember this, yeah,

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so good.

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And watching the trailer, the two-minute trailer of this show, I instantly felt like I couldn't breathe.

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Yeah, I, I, I totally get it. Yeah, totally get it. If you haven't seen it, it's called Buried. So you watch that trailer and you immediately felt like claustrophobic. Yes, like I

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couldn't breathe.

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Yeah,

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and I could just feel that weight and not being able to move at all.

7:44
Yeah,

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like how the heck you're uncomfortable and you can't get comfortable.

7:47
Yeah, yeah, and it's insane how like this is a movie of one guy in a box. That's the whole movie coffin. It's he's in a coffin. He's he's in this tiny little space, and there's other people on a phone and stuff, but it's just him and it's Ryan Reynolds and that was like I think this was the first movie when Ryan Reynolds really like

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doesn't love Ryan Reynolds right, but

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this is where he first like pushed his acting chops like hey I can actually act and he was so good in it we should call

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him Canada's Prince

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yeah Canada's Prince sure that sounds good

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yeah

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that sounds good

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he's a nice guy.

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Yeah, he's awesome. We

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go way back, me and

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Ryan. I

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think we went to school together or something.

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Maybe, but yeah, I wanted to include this because number one, this was on the blacklist way back, right? Which is the blacklist. If anyone doesn't know, it's the industry list that would come out every year, where all the managers and agents, all the reps in the business would would vote on their favorite scripts they read that year, and this was one of them. And I I thought that's good to to know, good for writers to study. Yeah, we're gonna we should be if it works, it works, and you'll see the pages up on the screen here as well. Um, but if not, you can check it in the show notes. The script is there. You can download it and read along with us, but I wanted to do this because because a lot of people are trying to write a contained thriller or horror or drama or something because it's a it's a cheap movie to make.

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Let's let's just refresh the listeners and viewers out there about what a contained script is. And there's also another word I thought that you used for it. There's something that we've learned over many podcasts ago.

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I don't know. Maybe it'll come to mind.

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Yeah.

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Um. But yeah. So basically, a contained movie of any sort is something that happens in very limited spaces. So either like in one house, one house can be contained. At the same time, it it it may not be contained because if you're in a big house and there's 27 rooms, and you're in most of them. That means every you got to do a whole camera setup. You got to do lighting. You got to do all these things. That makes it expensive, right? Contained means try and stay in one main space, main room, main area, a coffin. It doesn't have to be that bad. A lot of horror movies are contained because it's people stuck in a house or in a cabin or something like that. So that's what contained is. You're containing the story from becoming too big. You're keeping it nice and controlled.

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Okay, got it.

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So it's a great way to get into the business because if you could deliver something to someone that they can shoot for very little money, that's attractive, right?

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Yeah, like what we saw last night that we talked about in the previous episode with animals. Animals,

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yeah. It was it was fairly contained.

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Same with this one; it's fairly contained. Yeah,

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because as a new writer, and you're breaking in, you're trying to get people to pay attention to you. You're trying to make some waves. You're not going to be able to pitch to studios. You can't go and pitch to Sony or pitch to MGM, or you're not at that level yet. You need a rep to do that. So, but there's so much that writers can do without a rep, and they don't think they can. You can approach anyone you want. You find a list of different producers who make movies that are probably cost around what your movie might cost. If you're not sure, throw it in online. Even like I'm not a like AI is good for certain spaces, but you can throw your own script on AI and say, "What do you think the budget for this would be?" And it'll tell you. It'll come right, and so you'll be like, "Oh, okay, it's not going to be 100 accurate, but it's going to tell you. But then you'll find producers, and then then just find out how to contact them. Use IMDb Pro, whatever. Find them and say, "Hey, I have this movie. It's contained. Goes along with your style." Yeah, they

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love contained stuff.

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Yeah, but you can get to those people because they're not upper echelon people with all of these, you know, walls and walls and walls of legal barriers.

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Right, and you also don't know though what connections those people have to

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exactly, and that's how I built my career is going after smaller producers and then staying on their radar. And as they do bigger things, they remember me. Hey, I got a project, or they say, Hey, Scott, I have a project. I think you're right for it. Can you write for us? Right. That's how you build a career from the ground up. So having something contained. That's not to say don't write your $200 million budget hi-fi high stakes crazy high concept sci-fi action movie. Go ahead, right? But have the have one of these as well. Have something smaller that you can get to people. So that's why I included it, and it's also incredibly visual. And there's not a lot of dialog in it, but there is dialog. So yeah, go

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through it. We'll go through it, and you'll just note areas that are working really well, or if there are areas that might need some improvement. That you would think,

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yeah. If you watch the last one, you would have seen that. We'll read it. I'll pause for a second and say, "Hey, I like what they did here. This is what made me think. What about you, Desiree? Yeah. So yeah, and

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I think just keep in mind the whole reason we're doing this episode as well as why we did the previous one is the importance of the first 10 pages and how much that can make or break your script really?

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Yeah, and and the the thing you want to keep in mind also is how you write your pages. You want to make sure that you end a page with something that makes them monitoring the page. You can't always do it because it's not always going to work with what the wording is or what is happening. But if you can, you always want to like a like a like a novelist ends a chapter? They end it in a way that you can't put it down and go to bed. You have to see what the next right. That's what you want to do. Yeah. And the 10th page, that's the money maker. You want to get to page 10 and have that reader be like, well, there's no way I can stop reading now. Like that's what the pit did for me last episode. I can't stop reading. I have to see, right? And then if it keeps

going, keeps going, building momentum and pacing, they're not going to put it down. And that's when a reader doesn't even notice the page number because they're just in it.

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There was a book that I just read that I told you. Actually, I had told you about this. That throughout the whole script, you're wondering who's done

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what,

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who's guilty, and then you don't find it out until the last line of the last

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page, yeah.

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And then you're like, "Wow, that was mind blowing!" Right? Yeah. And that is what you want to remember as a writer.

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Yeah, you have to.

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Yeah. So, okay, so we're gonna get started with buried. And again, you guys can grab this copy by going into the show notes. Go in the

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show notes, download it. If you can't find it there for some reason, just go to any, just Google buried screenplay PDF. You'll find it, and with some little editing magic, we'll have it on the screen for you too. Okay, so buried. Here we go. I'm gonna read the narration, and and we'll figure it out. Main character Desiree will read every Dani. Okay, so here we go. Fade in interior unknown room night smart. It doesn't say coffin. It just says unknown room, not unknown space. So he's trying to trick us right off the start. So night, darkness, silence. After a long beat, we hear movement, confined and contained. We then hear the sound of a man, Paul Conroy, groaning, making confused attempts at words. We hear his movement, short, abrupt shifting, ending almost immediately with the sound of his body banging against wood. Okay, so just gonna point out here, you hear a lot of like that internet chatter of you can't use we hear or we see, right? Yeah, you can, and you do it like this, right? We're in the dark, right? So we

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you're with the person, you're with that person,

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we're there. You're the audience because you don't really

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have very many senses except for that ability to hear.

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Yeah, and if it's a black, like you can say, "Oh, there is a sound," or "There is this," but there's nothing wrong with saying, "We hear it. We then hear this, right?" And then they introduce the character while it's still black, like we don't even see him yet, right? Right. So this is just a way to. Us what we need immediately. So he screams, though it's though it's clear from the sound that his mouth is covered by something. That's good. After attempting to sit up, he immediately bangs his head against something. It's terribly warm, and his breaths are labored. So that's an interesting choice because we can't feel. No, but you

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know what it's like when you're hot and your breath is labored, and you're like, you're just like, get me out of here. I was like that in when we went to Disney World, Florida. I was like, I can't, I can't breathe. Like it, it's just like it, it just sits on your chest.

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Yeah. So yeah,

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heavy.

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Exactly. So it says it's terribly warm. His breaths are labored. Tells us that he's he's probably sweating. He's probably warm. So there's nothing wrong with having that. A lot of these new writers are like, "Well, you can't say that. You can't say that it's it's warm. You can't show warm. You have to take some liberties to make sure your reader knows exactly what you need them to know. Liberty, liberty,

15:53
liberty,

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and experiences it right. So, so he attempts to move to his left and right, and again, this is still in the dark. Only to find that he is confined on both sides as well. He frantically shifts about, only to discover by touch that he is encased in something. Something is very wrong, and he doesn't need to see to know that. That's just you're putting us in his brain, right? It's so good. It's just that psychological, and the way the writer is using the page, right? He didn't put that in the previous paragraph. It's all by itself. Something is very wrong, and he doesn't need to see to know that. That's just such a great line. Finally, we see him lit by the flame of the zippo he holds in his hands, which are bound together in front of him with rope. See, I would have been like,

like you suddenly hear that little spark, right? Rather than all of a sudden the zippo is just on, right? It didn't tell us that he was lining it. So I would have liked that. Which are bound together in front of him with rope. So not only is he confined, but he's his hands are tied. A rolled up, dirty rag is tied tightly around his head, stretched across his mouth. Dried blood stains his hair, his and forehead. Okay, he's been through a lot. We see that he is lying in an old-fashioned wooden coffin, nothing more than a few rotted, rotted-out planks of wood nailed together. Realizing the same, Paul is struck by an overwhelming instant panic. Well, yeah, you wake up in a coffin, like I would die, like I would not, especially if a spider came through. Oh,

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I don't know what I do

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with great difficulty, and while still holding the lit zippo, Paul removes a muzzle from his mouth. Yeah, that'd be tricky because his hands are tied together. Paul says, "What? What is this?" His words become almost unintelligible as he flails about through. Though fear is understood in every utterance, he screams aloud, but his voice is captured by the coffin walls. This first page is fantastic because I like like you said in the preview. You're like you felt like you couldn't breathe. It's doing a really great job of that. One thing I noticed too that you guys may notice because this is another one of those things that people think you have to do is capitalize every single sound. Oh, and you don't. Bam. Yeah. Or or like the door creaks open and the footsteps pound on the floor. Like pound will be in caps. It's like no, that's it gets distracting. You want to use caps when we need to really pay attention to something. So here he doesn't doesn't say screams. He doesn't capitalize screams. Lowercase. He doesn't need to. We're in the moment. We can feel it. So he doesn't need to. He could have. It wouldn't have been distracting, but if it was every single one, the bump and the rub and like it would have been too much. So, page two, Paul says, "Oh my God, help me, help me!" He kicks and slams his hand against the top and the sides of the coffin, all to no avail. His violent movements cause small grains of sand to trickle in through the space between the sides and on top of the coffin. So, what does that tell

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us? Well, then it's

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he's he's underground. He's under. There's

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there's stuff trickling. Yeah, he's coming off.

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Yeah, not just the sides, right? Um. So as well as a small gap that exists between one of the coffin's broken wooded planks, so got some movement there.

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How horrific of a feeling, though.

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Yeah, especially when you don't know what's going on?

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It's the same. It's in the same, like, for me as drowning, right?

19:06
Oh yeah, that

19:07
same feeling.

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Panicked. Like, how do you not take a breath, right?

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Yeah.

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Sweat cascades down the side of his neck, dripping from his dampened brow. The heat inside the extremely close confines of the coffin is stifling. Okay, so that line I don't think is even needed about the heat because you're telling us his sweat is dripping. That tells us it's hot. We know,

19:27
and we already know because he's having trouble breathing, right?

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So that's one of those lines that I don't think needs to be there, but it doesn't hurt it. Paul says, "Somebody help me, please." Paul continues with his futile efforts to pry off the top of the coffin. The sides, the top, the bottom, all are too thoroughly reinforced by the force of what surrounds the coffin. Sand, that's different too, because it's not dirt. Sand, so that's different. It becomes clear to him that he is buried. I would put that on its own line. I would have been like, he is

19:54
buried on its own line.

19:55
yeah.dot.or just he period is period.

19:59
Yeah.

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Period, something like that. Yeah, more dramatic. Yeah, sure. Because that's how you can use your page to make us really pay attention to stuff. Is is play with your paragraphs, so don't have everything grouped together. Really pull our eye down. Because these are there's a lot on these. They would do the same in

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a book. A book would have done the same. It would have done a separate paragraph. Yeah, that's what

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I do. I mean, I'm not saying I would do this any better because this is fantastic. Um, but I'm just saying, just like to point out things that you have options with, right? So he tries his best to calm himself, though he has trouble catching his breath. It takes him some time, but he eventually achieves some semblance of calm. So semblance, just a little bit. Great word. Getting a good look around him for the first time, we see that Paulo somewhere around 37 years old.

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See, I wouldn't have said that

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year around. I wouldn't have said I

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wouldn't have said around and not that we see I would have just said in his late 30s early 40s or in his early 40s I wouldn't have said around 37

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around 35 or around 40 right not 30 like 37 such a specific number it's

20:56
kind of odd yeah chose that

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see me like me as a writer this is what I do: is I I give everyone I put their exact age on the page.

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You don't have to say because

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I would say he's 37 because to me that says because if you're 37 or you're 31, that's a major difference in life experience, right? Like, or if you're 37, also physically

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to your body, what you can do when you're 31 versus 37 slightly. Except for Ryan Reynolds,

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because look at him, he's like 50. But yeah, I I I would be more around. Yeah, I noticed that too when I

21:26
was reading it before.

21:27
So unshaven and physically unremarkable. He embodies the blue collar American everyman. So yeah, so not that Ryan Reynolds does, but so he coughs. The minimal amount of oxygen in the coffin makes it hard for him to breathe. Okay, that's that's crappy. That's awful, right? He has to be very careful with his oxygen. His eyes widen a bit upon seeing an exposed, rusty nail. He tries desperately to use the nail to cut through the old, frayed ropes that bind his hands. Doing so is no easy task. The incredibly tight quarters make his every action nearly impossible. After a lengthy struggle, the rope snaps. Paul quickly frees his hands. A small victory, very small. The heat is unbearable. So you're telling us that again. I don't think you need to tell us again. We already know. No,

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but I think that it adds to it. Just to remember, it is stifling. And

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or there's so much sweat that he's having trouble with keeping his eyes open. Like something that tells me more that it's heat than just telling me it's hot. But imagine

22:17
being buried in a box and it being very, very hot.

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Yeah, I know, but I'm just saying that line. I know it's repetitive. Yeah, I didn't need it, but it's not doesn't hurt it. But it took me. I'm like, ah. So Paul takes off his button down shirt, leaving him in a t shirt. Okay, so how does he? That's what I didn't understand.

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You're in a coffin. You can barely move. Your shoulders hit the walls, but you can take your shirt off.

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There's not a lot of room in. I

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understand he now cut his hands and he's got to take his shirt off because he's hot. But you just told me he can barely even move.

22:42
Right, like he's like literally. So you're going to

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use all of your exertion and your oxygen to shovel. I guess you're hot. I know. I know. Yeah. Anyways, just just pointing out again, not picking apart the writing, but just pointing out that made me think this, so that you understand when a reader reads something, the reader isn't just reading it right to the end and that's it. The reader's thinking these things, paying attention to stuff, making notes, processing. Oh well, I need to know. Like so, that's why I like to show you how a reader is receiving things. I think it's important. So his body battles against the walls and the ceiling of the coffin with every movie makes. He tosses his button-down shirt down by his feet. His undershirt is drenched through with sweat. That tells us the heat's unbearable. That's why I didn't need it. Still trying to calm himself, but having wait. Just a second.

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How does he also toss his button down shirt down?

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I can see that because if you take it off and then just like right, it's going to be out of your way. It's not on top of you anymore. Yeah, I probably would just put it to the side of my arm, but still trying to calm himself, but having little success in doing so. Paul looks around the coffin. His feet, though, only his body length away, seem miles from him. That's kind of a neat, a neat line. Page three. He looks at the top of the coffin and then back at his feet. With great difficulty, he shifts his body so that his feet are pressed against the top of the coffin. He attempts to use his leg strength to push the top off of him, but it doesn't move even a millimeter. Okay, so that I'm trying to picture that. I don't

24:02
think that makes sense. It's like

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like that. And he's not. He's probably not my height. He's probably like 510, six. I don't.

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I can't visualize that. If he said there's like no room in there, yeah, because

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you got to bend your knees first of all. Then you got to bend your ankles back to get your feet. I can. He could have just been pushing on it. Yeah, I'd love

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to rewatch the movie to see. Yeah,

24:21
yeah, I'm sure that's. I'm sure it's how it is. But that almost makes it less claustrophobic for me that he can put his feet up. Because why can't he sit up a bit then? Anyways, he attempts to use his leg strength to push top. Okay, after several failed attempts and with his legs exhausted, Paul drops his feet from the top of the coffin. He lay for a moment in silence, followed by an outburst of crying. Okay, good. This guy cries, and that's the thing. Is like, I was working with this one guy. I was writing his story for him, and you know, we were getting to the final stages of the script, and he's like, "Okay, I have one thing. I don't want this this character's me. I don't want him to cry. I think it's weak." I'm like, "Dude, that's a problem." First of all,

24:58
I see crying as a strength.

24:59
Yeah. And he's he's Eastern European, and I don't know if that something to do with it, but I was like, cultural. There's something so vulnerable about about a man crying in a movie, right? Just because like we're told men don't cry though. So when you see someone break down, like when we watched Animals, right? When Ben Affleck is talking to his wife, not gonna give it away, but he he has a really emotional moment, and I was like, oh my gosh, like I really really see this guy now, I feel for him. So something about a man crying. It's just almost different. So he cries. So close to his head on the corner of the floor, we see there's another broken plank, a small hole. He closes his cigarette lighter, extinguishing the flame in total darkness. He continues to cry. So yeah, and then and then Paul, what

25:39
is this?

25:40
With his sobbing slowly subsiding, the coffin soon grows eerily silent. The sound of Paul's labor breaths are all we hear softened under the blanket of absolute darkness. After a beat, the silence is interrupted by a subtle buzzing sound. I would have capped that. I would have put a cap on that. Yeah, to make it stand out, right?

25:56
Yeah.

25:56
The muted sight of strange bluish light flickers in the coffin by Paul's feet. He's he is extremely startled. This is where I'd also use contractions. He's extremely startled. He is just doesn't feel natural because no one talks about it. Nobody

26:08
does, and it will shorten the script overall.

26:10
Yeah, the buzzing continues as does the minimal splashing of light. It's coming from underneath his discarded button-down shirt down near his feet. We know where his shirt is, so you don't need to tell us down near his feet. More words

26:21
for no reason. Yeah,

26:22
he lights the Zippo to get a better look. I don't think to get a better look. He lights the Zippo. We know that he is. Yeah. So that's not that. These are options you can you can choose. Pulling the shirt away, he realizes that what he is hearing and seeing is a vibrating ring and display features of an older model cell phone. He frantically reaches for it, though the coffin is far too small for him to reposition himself easily, but he was able to put his feet up. Right, that's confusing. To his dismay, the phone stops ringing. But his efforts to reach it continue. He uses his feet to search for the phone. After some trouble finding it, he eventually locates it, clamping the phone together between his clasped feet. Paul then painfully angles his body so that he can reach his feet with his hands and grab it. He is soon able to reach it. Immediately thereafter, he flips the phone and puts the receiver in front of him. Okay, so here we go, page four. Now that's a that's a lot of words on those pages, right? But but it's not like a novel. You're not over explaining everything. You're keeping it short, keeping your paragraphs three or four lines as you should. So we see that there is a text message waiting for Paul on the phone. However, Paul barely notices. The time on the phone reads 6:12pm. While the numbers are display, while the numbers and display screen icons are familiar to Americans, all the words are in Arabic. That says maybe something, or maybe just wants them to think something. What he does notice is that the phone barely has one bar of signal strength. Worse yet, there's only half of the battery life remaining. Good details. It raises the stakes. He tries to remember the safe number he was given.

27:45
Safe number and why is that capitalized?

27:48
Well, how does the audience know that too?

27:50
That's what I'm saying,

27:50
right? How do you

27:51

how do you see that?

27:53
And yeah, like this, this this takes me out of it right now. Like yeah, safe number. What? Why is it

28:00
capitalized?

28:01
And how how do we know what he's trying to remember? Unless he says safe number, safe number, safe number, like something I don't know. But I was like, he's got it tries to remember because we

28:09
can't see that as an audience that he's trying to think of a safe number. He's not there like this,

28:13
right? You can tell us. Are we just looking at him thinking, or he's whispering? What was that number? What was that number? 3109. Yeah, like something, yeah,

28:22
yeah,

28:23
that, yeah. I see. I, I. Oh, here

28:25
he says, "Come on, come on." What was it?

28:27
Yeah, that's all we need. I think is show him thinking, and then come on, come, and then show him trying to adapt. Right, this

28:31
whole paragraph here can be taken out. I would think.

28:33
Yeah, struggles to recall the information because it's like I don't know. And maybe like,

28:37
yeah, that could be moved down because I don't know.

28:39

So getting only two digits into dialing number, he cannot remember much more and closes the phone. See, that's hard. I like to see how they did that in the movie. Anyways, he wedges his lip into the sand, which is compacted against a small hole in the wall of the coffin. Paul reaches into his pants pocket, frantically searching for something. He hastily removes a prescription pill bottle and a small metal flask. Both are not what he was looking for. He then reaches to his back pocket and removes his wallet. It's empty. His license, his credit cards, his cash, and most importantly, at that very moment, a piece of paper with the safe number written on it are all missing. So you're telling us something that we don't know. We haven't been

29:12
shown or told it.

29:13
No, like that's the thing: is the audience isn't going to know he has missing a safe, you know, missing a piece of paper with the safe number. That's just I don't. I don't know. I just don't like that writing. Well, no, it's important to point that.

29:23
I know, but but that's the thing.

29:24
Yeah. So

29:25
it's not clear. That's the point.

29:27
Yeah.

29:27
And I'm curious to know if the those of you that are following along or reading, if you caught on to that too. Yeah. Again, like he capitalizes the safe. You know.

29:36
Yeah, it's important, but how though? No one's going to know that watching.

29:39
Right.

29:39
So Paul says, "No, where the hell is it, son of a? Come on!" That tells us something. He screams aloud again, hoping greatly that someone can hear him. He's frenzied, maneuvering, puts out the flame of the zippo. "Help me, please! Somebody help me!" His words barely make it past, make it past the coffin walls. With the cell phone still in hand and laboring to reclaim the

breath he just expended, Paul turns to desperation. He dials the international. Code of 001 and then dials 91001

30:04
right away. You know he's not where we think he might be in America. But

30:09
911 isn't 911 everywhere either,

30:11
is it not?

30:12
No, because then in Britain it's 999,

30:15
right?

30:15
So wherever he thinks he is, wherever he was before he woke up here,

30:20
yeah.

30:20
But he knows to dial international. Oh, because it's an Arabic cell phone,

30:23
right?

30:24
Okay, got it. All right, so page five. Here we go.

30:27
No, but if it's an Arabic cell phone, then why does he have to? Why does he have to dial 01? That's what I'm

30:32
saying. That I'm saying, if it wasn't, he would have just dialed 911. Right, because it's Arabic. He thinks it's from another country, so he dials 001. Or

30:38
he knows he's in another country already, which

30:41
tells us something about him. He knows, like he's he's he knows kind of something. Knows where he is. Knows what to do. So something's going on. Okay, so female. Okay, so then 911 operator is right.

30:52
911, please hold.

30:54
The female. Why

30:55
would you put the guy on? Why do they tell people to hold? I don't know. Okay,

30:58
the the female 911 operator places Paul on hold. Well, okay. No, wait. Paul accidentally bangs the cap of Zippo against the coffin while putting out the flame. She quickly returns.

31:08
911. What is your emergency?

31:10
Hello.

31:11
911. What's the problem, sir?

31:13
Paul is so incredibly panicked that he has trouble remaining coherent. After a few sparks, the Zippo is relit. See, this female 911 operator should have a voiceover next to her name because she's not actually there.

31:25
Right? She's not in the same room.

31:26
Yeah, you might just be not wanting to put voiceover in the whole script that because that might, which is fine. I'm buried. You have to help me. You have to help me. I can't breathe,

31:34
sir.

31:35
I'm buried in a coffin. Please help me. Send someone to find me,

31:38
sir. Slow down. What is your name?

31:41
Paul. Paul Conroy.

31:42
Okay, mr. Conroy. Can you tell me your location?

31:44
I don't know. I'm in a coffin. I don't know where. I'm scared. Please help me.

31:48
You're in a coffin.

31:49
Yeah, it's like one of those old wooden ones.

31:51
Are you at a funeral home?

31:52
No, I don't know. No.

31:54
How are you calling me right now?

31:56
What?

31:57
If you're buried in a coffin, where are you calling from?

31:59
A cell phone. There was no cell phone in the coffin.

32:02
You're calling me from your cell phone.

32:03
Yes. No, it's not mine. But yes, I'm calling from a cell phone.

32:06

There was a cell phone in the coffin when you climbed in.

32:09
I didn't climb in.

32:10
How did you end up in the coffin? I was put here in the coffin.

32:13
Yes. Please send help. Holy, I'm getting frustrated with this lady right now. And

32:16
you're saying the coffin is buried?

32:18
I think so. It's it's hot in here. I can't breathe.

32:21
Do you know your location, sir?

32:22
I told you I don't know. Somewhere in Iraq. Iraq. Iraq. So he knows he's in Iraq. Maybe that. Well, obviously that's where he last was.

32:29
Iraq.

32:30
So he's in Iraq. And see, I feel like I'm being, I'm, I'm, I'm cheating a little bit. I'm seeing behind the curtain because they told us he had a safe word in his pocket, but the audience doesn't know that yet.

32:39
No, I know. So I feel

32:40
like it's unfair for me to know that because now I'm trying to take pieces, but I'm just get

32:44
past it. It's unfair.

32:45
I'm just life

32:46
is unfair.

32:47
I'm just playing it out. The

32:48
audience doesn't get to know the. It's unfair.

32:50
Okay, so I can't breathe. It's hot. I can't breathe.

32:53
Ah, where are you now?

32:55
Right here.

32:56
I know. I said Iraq.

32:58
Oh yes. Sorry, I'm lost. Um. Okay. Yes, I'm a truck driver, an American. I work for CRT.

33:03
What is CRT?

33:04
No idea.

33:06
That should be.

33:07
Maybe they'll tell us.

33:08
Okay. Are you a soldier, sir?

33:10
No. Please, please listen to me. I'm a truck driver. I work for CRT. I'm a civilian contractor working in Iraq. We were attacked in Bakoba. They, they. He starts crying. Shot them, all of them.

33:21
They shot who, sir?

33:23
All of the other drivers. And you're

33:25
saying this happened in Iraq, the country?

33:27
Yes, please. You have to help me. They gave me a safety number to call, but I had it stored in my wallet. And

33:32
mr. Conroy, this is 911 emergency in Youngstown, Ohio.

33:36
Okay, that's how you end a page because I'm like, what? You have to turn Youngstown, Ohio. What? So that was really good. That part here. See, this is why it wasn't needed. All we needed to see him was reaching for something in his pocket, trying to find it. Can't find the paper. Where is it? Is it trying to find a number? That's all we needed to know as readers, because then he says, "I have right." They gave me a safety number to call. Okay, then that's all I needed. I didn't realize that. That's more surprising. It's like, oh, that's what he was looking for. It involves me more, right? Remember we talked about it before. More,

34:07
more a contributing party to the whole.

34:09
Yeah, your audience gets to participate. That's huge, right? Okay. So, anyways, yeah. Okay. So now he's in Ohio. Okay. This is getting really, really interesting. Okay. Ohio.

34:19
Yes, sir. I'm not sure exactly how you called here. If you're in another country, but if you'd like and can patch me through to the sheriff's department.

34:26
Sheriff's department? No, you don't understand. Forget it. Realizing that his conversation is both lengthy and useless, Paul ends the call. He checks the battery life on the phone. It still holds steady at two bars. He immediately dials another number, one that he can recall with ease. Okay. He again enters a 001 international international code before making a call. Paul then dials his home phone. It rings several times so far unanswered. Come on, come on, pick up, please. After sitting through the agony of a few more rings, Paul is met with the answering machine. The voice of his young son Shane is heard on the answering machine greeting.

34:57
Shane says on the greeting, "This should be.". What he's not in the same room again.

35:01
Yeah, but I think that's why because a lot of it is on the phone, and it's just like that's a lot of extra words on the page with all the voiceovers.

35:08
Thanks for calling the Conroys. We're not home right now. Please leave a message at the beep. Thanks.

35:12
At the sound of the beat, Paul leaves a frenzied, rambling message. See, I don't, I don't, I don't like that. I like that because you're you're telling me what you're about to show me, or you're about to give me. Like we're gonna hear his rambling, frenzied voice. So we don't

35:25
have to have the writer tell us if we're gonna be seeing it in the next line.

35:29
Exactly, and we know he's frenzied because he's in a freaking coffin, right? He's not calm. So okay, so Linda, honey, it's me. Listen, I need you to contact the National Guard right away or the Pentagon. Tell them we were attacked in the Dayala province in Bacoba, you have to find me, please. My, please help me, baby. Please help find, help them find me. Paul hangs up. He dials his wife's cell phone right away. After several rings, her cell phone voicemail picks up. We hear the sound of Linda, Paul's wife, on her outgoing message.

35:54
Hi, this is Linda. Please leave a message. Thanks, and have a great day.

35:59
She's boring. The beep sounds. I look at beep

36:02
is just the first letters capitalized. Yeah, the

36:05
beep. So instead, it seems like yeah, but no, but he

36:08
did the with the number,

36:09

and it wasn't a sound. No, it's like okay, yeah, it's just different. Yeah, um, not that it's bad. It's just different. So the beep sounds, and Paul immediately tears into his voice message. Linda, it's Linda, it's Paul, and you need to call me right away. This is an absolute emergency. Call the number that comes up on your phone. Call me at that number. If I don't answer, call the Pentagon or the FBI. I don't know what the hell is going on, but I'm buried in a box. Hearing himself say the last words gives him pause. The gravity of this situation fully takes hold. I can't breathe in here. Make sure you call me right away, please, baby. Please call me. I wouldn't leave a message telling you that because I know that you would lose your mind.

36:40
No, I just say call

36:41
me immediately. I say I'm stuck on a bear. I'm burying the coffin on the ground because then you would cry and freak out. You couldn't even make a phone call.

36:48
I know.

36:48
Paul ends the call. He nervously looks at the amount of battery life remaining on the phone, still holding strong at two bars. He notices the flickering light of the zippo. It too appears to be using up small amounts of oxygen. That's smart. He closes the lid, extinguishing the flame. Total darkness, silence. Save for Paul's increasingly heavy breaths. He begins hyperventilate. He knows that preserving oxygen is paramount, so he does his best to calm himself. The healthy swig he takes from his flask helps. He flips open the cell phone. The light of the display screen partially illuminates his face and some of the coffin with a bluish hue. Paul again enters the overseas dialing code. This time, dialing 411 information. The 411 operator answers.

37:24
What city and state, please?

37:26
Um, I don't know. The FBI, wherever they are. Paul reaches for his button down shirt, fishes for pens, stashed in his lapel pocket while keeping the phone pressed to his ear with his shoulder. 411 operator says,

37:36
"Do you have a specific city you'd like me to connect to, sir?"

37:39
I don't care. Any city, just connect me to the FBI,

37:42

sir. I have FBI field offices listed in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, New Haven, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver.

37:50
Paul cannot bear to listen any further to this list that seemingly never ends. Anywhere, any city, just connect me, please.

37:55
I'm sorry, sir, but I'm not allowed to do that.

37:58
Fine, Chicago, okay? Please hold for your number. Paul is transferred to the automated message. The number

38:03
you requested: 312-421-6700.

38:08
See, that is a perfect way to end a page because what did it make you think? I want to know

38:13
what's going to happen.

38:14
Yeah, is it saying it's not in service? Is it saying like what's going on? Yeah. So those are pretty intense first 10 pages, right? A lot in those first five or six pages is a

38:24
lot took you out though. As as a script analysis, analyst,

38:29
analyst. Yeah, just and and again, I think it's important for writers to understand how readers receive things because maybe as a writer and you read it, you didn't think of those things, it didn't pull you out, you didn't note it. But I mean, I read I've read 1000s of scripts, and so certain things pull me out. And if you notice, especially it's the stuff that don't give me what I shouldn't have, right? Or don't give me things I don't need. Don't tell me he's leaving a frenzied message. Show me that, right? It's always the show, don't tell. Same with the like you're telling us about the safe number. No, show it. And and it just remember

39:01
that we're not reading a novel.

39:02
Yeah,

39:03
like this is potentially going to be on the big screen.

39:05
Yeah, it's a blueprint for a movie. So if it can't be shot, don't give it to us. Right. So, anyways, that that's a pretty cool 10 pages. I want to watch the movie again after seeing it.

39:14
Me too. After reading through that, so so

39:16
those are some things that you can kind of like put in your toolbox. Things to keep in mind. You know, formatting stuff isn't as important, but still, if there's formatting that people are expecting things to be a certain way and they don't end up that way, it takes them out.

39:29
It does any time that it takes you out. Yeah, like is a problem, right?

39:33
Yeah, you want to do everything you can to keep your reader engaged. The minute they step out, they may not come back into it. So, anyways, think about those things while we take a quick break, and we'll be back with some questions. Listen to listen

39:45
service that we offer.

39:46
Yes, that's what she said. True to pro. Bye. See you in a minute.

39:52
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 idea. That are in your head properly on the page, but imagine having a professional screenwriter jump in and rewrite it for you to create a market-ready script. Send us your script for a rewrite proposal, and the pro of your choice will write up a page or so of notes on exactly how they'd approach a rewrite. Head on over to www.scriptreaderpro.com/rewrite and use the code Rewrite15 during checkout for the rewrite proposal to get 15 off.

40:35
Hey guys, this is again the Script Reader Pro podcast, and this is the part of our episode that we answer questions from listeners and viewers

40:44

like you. So if you have a question and you want us or show idea or anything, you can email us where Desiree

40:50
at hello@scroopetreaderpro.com. Scott, do you know what it's like? You don't have hair.

40:56
Uh huh. I don't.

40:58
You don't.

40:59
I do. When you get a hair

41:01
stuck in your eyeball, and then you're like, and then you pull it out, and you can feel it pull in your

41:05
eye. I can't even handle like when my hair is on your head. How do you handle this? You owe

41:11
nuts. Anyway, submit your questions to hello@scriptreaderpro.com. Yes. So what do we

41:17
got today?

41:18
We have Ellen from Iceland.

41:20
Ooh, Iceland! That's cool.

41:22
Very cool.

41:24
Iceland isn't even ice; it's Greenland. That's ice.

41:27
Where is Iceland?

41:29

It's in the Nordic part of the country.

41:31
Nordic,

41:32
Nord. I didn't say Nordic like a newfie.

41:36
I know. If

41:36
you haven't watched Below on Netflix, so good. Pretty cool show.

41:41
Okay, everyone always talks about writing what you know, but what if the stories you really want to tell are completely outside your own experiences? How do you approach writing characters or situations you have absolutely no personal connection to? Isn't that what writing is?

41:57
Yeah, I understand the question because that's a lot of people say. Well, don't write what you don't know. Only write what you know. What you experience? No,

42:05
you can learn.

42:06
Write what you want to know. I can't remember who said that. Yeah, I think it might have been Craig Mason.

42:11
Probably me because it sounds like something brilliant. I would say it could have been,

42:14
could have been you. But write what you want to know. Everything I've written, I don't think anything I've written is about something I've experienced or I know, right? All the all of the characters that show up in my stuff are all. But I've never killed anyone. I haven't. But in my screenplay, a lot of people are killed in my scripts. True story, right? I don't like. I wrote a script about the medical students opening up a body, and I I've never opened a body, but I really I haven't, but I called. I met with with residents, with doctors. I asked, like my aunt was, like my aunt taught surgery, microsurgery to to medical students. So, so I said, hey, tell me what you do in this situation, and what are the what is what are they going to hit? What's the scalpel? What's the problems? Like, I didn't just make it up and say, oh, I think I saw this on ER. Let's do it this way, right? You have to want to know, and then research. I mean, these days research is is too

easy, right? You can go to AI and be like, "Tell me everything you need to know about this," but you still have to.

43:09
You have to still fact check.

43:10
Yeah, you and you have to you have to do like talk to someone. People love talking about what they do. Talk to someone who is in the field that you're researching and say, "Hey, tell me about tell me a cool story." You tell me this, right? Yeah. So write what you want to know, not just what you know. You, especially if you don't have a lot of life experiences, what do you write?

43:26
Right, right,

43:28
right.

43:29
Okay. Question from Rachel Donnelly in Asheville, North Carolina.

43:35
Nice.

43:36
What's the biggest difference between a screenplay that gets a consider and one that gets a recommend. Is it usually one major thing that separates them, or is it more about a whole bunch of smaller things working together?

43:47
I'll tell you exactly what it is. The reader.

43:51
I was going to say it depends on the person. It's the

43:52
reader

43:53
because sometimes people can look past small mistakes and stuff and be like, "I need to make this movie." Right?

43:59

Yeah. Plus, everyone has a different opinion and a different experience. Yeah, I had this project set up at this production company at my script mine, and everyone loved it. Everyone's ready to go, and then the producer was like, "No, I can't. I can't even read the script because his grandfather died in in a mining thing when he was young, and so it's just a trigger for him, and it killed the project dead. Done, right? So it doesn't matter how great it was. You don't know. One person like, no, that's not it. That's not great, right? And so a lot of times I might give a script to recommend, and then the resident will get back to me and be like, I don't get it. You said it was late, but I'm getting people aren't liking this and that. You can't control that.

44:35
No,

44:36
all you can control is do your best job on the page. And if enough people are telling you, I think this is ready to go, then it's probably ready to go. You you can't control that. It's about the script landing on the right desk at the right time with the right person.

44:47
Okay, next question comes from Nathaniel Price in White Horse, Yukon, Canada. I've noticed that some of my favorite movies take quite a while to really get going. Yet everything I read about screenwriting says you need. To hook the audience almost immediately, like we just were reading. Do you think writers have become too obsessed with pacing and forgotten the importance of letting a story breathe?

45:10
No, no, it's that audiences change, right? Like today, for example, people want things instantly. People are bombarded with 30, 40/52 clips, and that's it. So if their

45:23
attention span is no attention span, and plus people are

45:25
like, like you're bad for that, not bad for it, but like you are second, you are second screen for sure. You put stuff on while you're playing your game or something, and just have in the background. And a lot of people are doing that these days. So you can't have a slow burn that takes 30 minutes for anything to happen, or people are hitting the back button.

45:40
Yeah, they're bored.

45:41
Used to have to pay however much to get a babysitter. You go out to the movies. You go to dinner. You go to a movie. Get your popcorn. You bought your ticket. You're in there. If that movie is slow, you're not leaving. You're staying there because you've invested at home. You've

paid for a month's worth of endless stuff. Why are you going to sit around? So movies of even like five years ago, right? Those can't happen like they could then, and so it's about making sure that. And the reader has there's more readers. There's more. Everyone wants to be a screenwriter now, so readers' piles are even bigger. They don't have time to wait around. You have to have someone hooked immediately and keep them hooked. So it's you can't compare things to what you could of your favorite movies anymore. It's just it's not going to work. Like writers saying, "Oh, I can have an 187-page screenplay because Christopher Nolan did that with Interstellar." No, it's because he's Christopher freaking Nolan. Memento was like 78 minutes long, his first movie, and it was insanely paced. So you can't do that. You have to write something for today's audience. Okay, last question from Riku in Japan. Riku says, "If you could give one piece of advice to a screenwriter who's been working at this for 10 years, has written several scripts, received some encouraging feedback, but still hasn't managed to get anything produced, what would it be? At what point should someone reconsider their approach?" The time when you should reconsider your approach is if you don't want to do it anymore. You don't enjoy it. Yeah, I, I, every writer, every successful writer struggles. You will see a writer sell a script for a million bucks, and then maybe don't have anything again for 15 years. Like you can't control it. Everything changes. Everyone has a favorite project. If you are excited about it and you enjoy writing your scripts and you keep putting them together and you you keep that hope, then that then then keep going, right? I I mean I've only had one feature film that I wrote produced one, but I've written like 47 screenplays. I've been hired to write a whole bunch of screenplays that never became movies, because getting a screenplay written and a movie made are two very different things, very different worlds. I've I've sold scripts, things fall apart. I buy scripts back. I've optioned endless things, the options run out. You never like it's just that's not how it is. As a writer, you're likely going to need another job on the side. Even working writers I know have jobs on the side because they sell a script. Whatever my my buddy he he wrote a lifetime lifetime bought a movie hire made it. He had enough money to live for the year, and then he didn't sell another script for three years. He had to go and get another job while he kept doing this. It's not that kind of thing. You have to you have to manage your life, manage your time accordingly because you got to pay your bills, right? And so it's just I

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think if you're passionate about it and you and you know if you're passionate about it and you enjoy doing it, who cares? That's what

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I mean by it doesn't matter. Yeah, as long as you're passionate about it, you're having fun, you're enjoying

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it. Who cares?

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Just try to get better. Have keep pushing, keep marketing. You never know when that. Like, look at the guy who wrote the King's speech, right, with Colin Firth about the stuttering king. He won

an Oscar for that. Do you know how old he was? 84 years old. Come on, like it's. It doesn't mean it's going to happen overnight. You're going to have to go and go and go, and then one one script will hit someone, and they'll say, "Holy crap! I have to make this movie," and it'll happen. It's just how it is. But again, that doesn't mean your career is set. You got to keep going, keep writing, keep getting better. Yeah. So that's it. So if you like the podcast, if you had fun, if you learned even one little thing that was worth it, let your other writing friends know. Let people you know subscribe to our podcast audio if you're listening, video if you haven't. We're on video on YouTube as well. If you watched it here, thank you.

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Yes, if they

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liked what they said, what they heard and saw, yeah,

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please give us five star reviews if you

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can. That'd be great.

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And like I mentioned, any questions you have, ideas for future episodes, comments, you can submit those at hello@scriptreaderpro.com. Yeah,

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and check out that website as well, scriptreaderpro.com. We have everything a writer could need. We love. We're all working writers at one point or another in the business in some phase of it. So we all have a different different kind of perspective, and you can choose who you work with, which is what also makes us different. But we know what it's like to get notes, and so we have a. Specific way of delivering them to you. Check it out. Even if we don't have something that you're wanting, let us know what that is. We should be able to pull it off for you. Because at Script Reader Pro, we're all about helping writers craft wonder one page at a time.