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comes in looking a lot like the story they discussed, you may then be asked to write the script. That's the jackpot—not only are you getting paid, but even more important, you're getting a "written" by credit. Other producers will want to meet you and agents will want to represent you. You are now in the game!

CHILDREN AND TEEN PROGRAMMING Children's programming (The Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, and others) is an active market that can often be more open to new writers. While it pays less than prime time, it can be a good opportunity to get experience. A lot of these shows are animated and you might want to consider writing a spec animation show. If you do, be sure to study the conventions and formatting thoroughly, as they are different than live action. Some of the production companies that supply programming to these networks use new writers and may be willing to look at your specs without submission by an agent. Of course, just like anything else, it's always much better if someone can refer you, like, for example, another writer who has worked for them (see above, about making friends). You can try submitting your specs for consideration directly to the networks that do kids' shows. Write query letters to the Development Executives in the Children's Programming Departments. Executives move up and around frequently, but you can find out who is currently sitting in the chairs through the company's corporate website or the Hollywood Creative Directory. TV MOVIES AND TRUE STORIES The Movie-of-the-Week (MOW) is a rare, if not extinct, format for the major networks, but some cable networks do produce made-for-TV movies. Most are based on existing material, either true life stories or published books. If a company or cable network has optioned rights to a life story or book, they will then be looking for a writer to adapt the material for filming. A client of mine wrote a spec pilot which remains unsold, but the development execs at Hallmark Network read it, loved her work and she got three (3!) made-for-TV movie assignments for them. If you know of a true life story or published material that has not been picked up by a network, and it's a story you love and think could be adapted for a TV movie, or made into a series, you could write the script as a spec. But before you write a word, you MUST get the rights. Writing a script without the rights is A) illegal and B) a huge waste of your time and creativity. Acquiring the rights to a story does not necessarily mean you will have to pay big bucks; you may be able to acquire the rights for as little as \$1, or what is essentially a free option. However, if you are adapting any preexisting material, you must consult an entertainment attorney to arrange such a deal and that will cost you, but it is smart money. You need an option that protects you and covers all contingencies. An entertainment attorney will know what those are. Your college pal who is now an assistant DA will not—neither will your dad's tax lawyer. Even though they might be willing to do it for you as a favor, you won't get the protection you need, and you could wind up losing the whole project. CAUTION: Having the preexisting material can be a bonus and might add interest to your package, but do not write the story thinking that if you interest a company in the project, they will spend the money for the rights. They may very well be willing to buy the rights, once you have kindly brought it to their attention, but there is no incentive to keep you on a project if you do not hold rights to it. You can't copyright your script, because it is based on material you don't have rights to. If you bypass you entirely, and you will have no recourse. Get the rights and, during the option period, write the script and approach producers who have deals with the networks and studios. If they think it's salable they will know the appropriate places to take it. Where do you find these producers? In the weekly list of "Television Productions" found in Variety and The Hollywood Reporter. You can go to the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and look up projects that have been done recently that are similar to your material. You'll be able to find out which network aired it and who the producers were; now do some more research and find out how to contact development people at those companies. You can find this information in the Hollywood Creative Directory or often online. [For more on "true stories," see "Find a True Story" in the next chapter.] MINISERIES If you think your TV movie or series idea is a miniseries, like Game of Thrones or House of Cards, do not write the whole miniseries. Write only the pilot episode and a short synopsis of subsequent episodes to indicate how the series story arc plays out. There is no advantage to writing all those episodes on spec. For one thing, no one will read an entire series of episodes. They are thinking ahead to marketing and know they will have to hook an audience on the first episode; therefore, if the concept doesn't generate enough interest from the pilot story, they simply won't be interested in the project. REALITY TV You can make money "writing" for reality shows, but you should consider it a day job, not a building block for your writing career. The workload is demanding and you will not have time to make dental appointments, shop for food, or even get enough sleep, much less pursue your own writing. You might be better off at Starbucks. At least as a barista you get to go home and write your spec script. While much of the work you would be doing on a reality show would involve structuring plot points and even suggesting dialogue, which is indeed writing, it is not recognized as such. You will not receive any kind of writing credit—and without credits you will still be at pre-entry level with regard to scripted television series. Your job description on a reality TV show will be something like "Segment Producer," and that will lead to moving up the ranks of producing more reality shows. Nothing wrong with that. It can be creative and fun and it pays. But it will not be considered experience by scripted television show runners and will not in all likelihood lead you to any credited writing assignments. You will still need to write those spec scripts. As an aspiring writer you would probably do better working as a dog walker to the stars, an on-set gofer, or a desk receptionist in an agent's office. You won't be getting paid for writing, but you will be playing in the right ballpark. You will meet other ambitious people on the way up—these are your new best friends. You may even meet some higher-ups who will be interested in reading what you write because now they know you. And most important, you will have some downtime for writing your own scripts and pursuing your dreams. Jump-start your career now! After you write your first screenplay, the path to glory seems clear: find an agent who will get you a six-figure deal. A hundred and fifty query letters later, you're languishing at your laptop. You've received a lot of encouragement, but, as Pauline Kael put it, "Hollywood's the only town where you can die of encouragement." Maybe it's time to try another approach. BUILD A PLATFORM in the film marketing business. If you lack resources but have a winner, you platform that winner by showing it to one or two markets at a time and letting it accumulate positive reviews. In other words, you build momentum. Charlots of Fire and American Beauty were both distributed in this manner. If you've written a winner, maybe it's time to build a platform so that Hollywood players can see you and "discover" you. Your first sale may not be a blockbuster, but it could lead to one later in your career—maybe sooner than later. The idea is to gather strength with each positive step you take and get in the game rather than pace on the sidelines. What follows are numerous platforming strategies that you can use to give your career momentum and direction. Success in any of these can lead to more successes, until you are recognized as the next great screenwriter and a bona fide player. These include many small markets that are often overlooked. WRITE THE BOOK For the last several years, there has been a greater movement towards writing the novel version of your script, and selling rights to both the novel and screenplay at the same time. The large agencies (CAA, ICM, William Morris) and some small agencies (Paul S. Levine, Charlotte Gusay, David Higham in the UK, among others) handle book-to-screenplay deals. Another angle is to write the graphic novel version of your script. Screenwriter Joseph Calabrese did that with The Eyes of Mara and Frank Miller with Sin City. BECOME A READER OR ASSISTANT Almost any writer can find a job as a story analyst, that is, as a reader. It pays almost nothing, but the experience teaches you what works and especially what doesn't work in a screenplay. You will also make connections. Michael Arndt, screenwriter of Little Miss Sunshine, started out as a story analyst, as did Sherry Lansing, former Paramount CEO. Apply for this position with agents and producers. A college education is a plus, especially if you majored in literature or something similar. Submit a résumé plus a coverage of a script for a produced movie, one that they will be familiar with. Offer to write a free coverage for a script that they are currently considering. It's not particularly important where you live, but don't ignore local opportunities. One of my Texan students reads for local production companies and festivals. That experience and the contacts made led to a deal to write a screenplay. The script is being produced and she is getting a writing credit. Get a job as an assistant. If you become an assistant to a TV staff writer or TV producer, for example, you may get a chance to write for a TV show. Duppy Demetrious from Pittsburgh started this way. He became an executive story editor for The Closer. It is not unusual. The same is true for agent assistants, production assistants (gofers for the production crew), script coordinators, desk receptionists, transcribers, and so on. Michael Nachoff began his career as a set decorator and grip at the Canadian Film Center. He later became a postproduction staffer for Brightlight Pictures. That led to writing a spec, and the spec led to two writing assignments. Bloodrayne: The Third Reich and In the Name of the King: Two Worlds. Both were produced. Some writers take advantage of internships offered by some production companies and studios. You will meet people and learn about the business. Many writers and other film professionals begin this way. If you live in L.A., you might try a temp agency, such as Apple One. Studio temp pools keep résumés on hand. Apply for these jobs like you would for any other job. Send résumés to studio or production company HR departments, TV show runners, networks, and so on. Get your hands on the UTA Job Board, a job list circulated among agency assistants. MAKE A SHORT FILM Learn more about the business by making a short, inexpensive film that you can enter in a festival of some kind or even show on YouTube. The experience of producing and directing will improve your skills as a writer, plus the film might get recognized and find you valuable contacts. If you act in it, you will—at last—fully understand subtext. Hollywood types often view short films and peruse YouTube and similar sites. Filmaka (www.filmaka.com) is an organization that you might find helpful in terms of networking and getting your short film noticed. Dozens of my clients and students have made short films and won awards. One of those is Tom Basham (www.safflms.com), who recently produced his first feature film, Bright Lights & Promises. He is in the game. One example of a successful short film is The Pizza King, which won four festival awards. Jared Hess wrote and directed the 10-minute film Peluca while at BYU; it was shown at the Slamdance Film Festival. The cost of the shoot was \$500 and the film attracted an executive producer to finance the feature film, entitled Napoleon Dynamite. The feature film was produced for \$400,000 and was sold at the Sundance Film Festival for over \$3 million. EXPOSE YOURSELF Finally all of the platforming strategies I name are aimed, at least in part, at meeting people, getting discovered, and making contacts—networking. Never underestimate the value of a contact. A former student and now working writer (Max Adams) tells the story of who she was just trying to break in. She met "an assistant to an assistant of an industry pariah." This assistant went on to become a studio executive. Together, the ex-wannabe writer and ex-assistant put together a feature deal that the studio bought. There are three things writers do: They continue to learn their craft, they burn the midnight oil writing, and they yearn so much for a writing career that they get out and connect with people. There are plenty of seminars, workshops, publications, conferences, expos, pitch-fests, writers groups, professional organizations (including online organizations) to help you meet people and continue your education. Wherever you go, schmooze. Part of the schmoozing act is to remember that you have two ears and one mouth, and to use them in that proportion. Don't try to be cool; be you. If you are already cool, that's hot, which is supercool. Literary manager Mason Novick saw Diablo Cody's blog and contacted her about her work. Get yourself and your writing out there. Some established and beginning writers have used Facebook or developed a website as a pitching tool and/or to post credits. Here is one example: www.joelenders.com. If you create a website, you will need to drive traffic there. Perhaps, when you meet someone or deliver a short pitch, you could give that person your URL and perhaps a password to your secret projects. That person could read or view your pitch, read your synopsis or treatment, and use the password to read your script. WIN CONTESTS I recommend you look into two or three contests that seem right for your script and that have some kind of reputation behind them. Some contests provide notes, and some writers have made valuable connections with people associated with the contest they entered. See the section on "Contests" in the chapter entitled "Create your strategic marketing plan." USE INTERNET SERVICES Some writers have sold their scripts through Internet marketing services such as InkTap, Triggerstreet, Script P.I.M.F., and others. I tend to favor a focused approach rather than a shotgun approach. Nevertheless, you may find these services to be worthwhile. There are many Internet writing-services companies that promise to get your story concept or synopsis seen by executive producers. Many advertise promising results. In evaluating these, I recommend caution but also an open mind. Try to substantiate their claims. Scrutinize success stories. Ask yourself questions as you study the specifics of the deal. Is the site connected with industry professionals? (That might be a good sign.) Are they contacting potential buyers directly, or are they just hoping buyers will find their site? How are they contacting potential buyers? And so on. BECOME A HYPHENATE Billy Wilder was once asked why he became a director. His answer: "To protect the script." If you decide to produce and/or direct the movie yourself, that makes you a writer-producer-director (a hyphenate). However, before attempting a feature production, make a short film and get a feel for the head-banging experience putting together a film. It's you've heard of Murphy's Law—If anything can go wrong, it will! Well, Murphy was a filmmaker, so you want to be prepared. There are books and short courses available, some only a weekend long. Oh, and don't use your own money to cover production costs. What follows are some tips on becoming a hyphenate. Package your project You already have the script; now add talent (an actor or director) or other creative element, and —shazam!—you have a package. A client of mine added a known singer to his package, and now has access to her music. With a package, you can act as a producer and approach other producers about your project, or you can simply mention your package elements in a query letter or pitch. My co-writer for Hemingway's Twin worked as a kid for the Hemingways at their house at Walloon Lake. Based on that relationship, we secured family cooperation on the script. I also secured a letter of interest from Mariel Hemingway to play the main role and, with the help of others, Alfonso Arau (Like Water for Chocolate) to direct. On that basis, I made a deal with a producer who had a deal with the 20th Century Fox, but some legal issues got in the way of a production and everything fell apart. The bottom line: I was paid, I met people, and I still own the script in case someone is interested. Why not take the initiative yourself to put together the players to make a movie? When you interest talent in your script, you are "packaging an element"—a function of a producer. When you secure the rights to a true story and take the story to a producer, you are, in effect, co-producing. Adapt a book About half the movies made are from material adapted from another medium. Novels, children's books, plays, graphic novels, and even short stories are converted into movies, usually because an audience already exists for the book. Exploit a life What about writing about famous people? First, consult an entertainment attorney. Second, don't assume anything. Third, don't write anything until you control the rights. As a general rule, if the person has exploited his life by granting interviews or running for office, still, then he is "fair game"—probably. You don't want to run the risk of lawsuits or a libel charge. Truth is a defense of libel so long as there is an absence of malice. (Sounds like a movie I saw.) History, of course, is in the public domain, but history books are not. For example, although the life of Charles Lindbergh is in the public domain, Steven Spielberg still paid a large sum of money for the rights to A. Scott Berg's biography of Charles Lindbergh. If you base your story on real people or a real incident, just make sure that your script is totally fictitious. If your script is based on a real person, and if that person's peers can deduce from the movie who the movie is about, then that could be invasion of privacy. My advice is to avoid anything that could possibly get you into a legal entanglement. You should think twice even about buying an option to the rights to a book or someone's story. Make sure you want to make the financial investment. If you decide to forgo ahead, you will want to avail yourself of the services of an intellectual property (entertainment) attorney. It's expensive, but worth it. If you decide that you want to be the producer from start to finish, then you need to do your homework. This is an area where you can lose your shirt if you are not careful. Read books and talk to other producers. Consider the Hollywood Film Institute's two-day course or the New York Film Academy's courses. Find a true story What if you are aware of a little-known but compelling incident or interesting person and don't want to fictionalize the event or the person's story, but want to tell it straight? Follow the same procedure as with an adaptation of a book. Buy an option to the rights first. After you have secured the necessary rights—and that might involve contracts with more than one person—write the script, and take one of the following approaches: 1) produce the screenplay yourself from start to finish, 2) produce the project and take it to a producer, or 3) approach producers that specialize in true stories. National true stories are already locked up before you've even thought of them as a possibility. However, sometimes you can find unknown stories about major events. Oklahoma City—A Survivor's Story is a TV movie about a woman saved by a fireman after the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. A few movies have been made of unknown stories stemming from 9/11. [For more information, read the section "TV movies and true stories" in the preceding chapter, "Television Markets."] GET CORPORATE BACKING OR A GRANT Ask Procter & Gamble to help you. Approach corporations for funding. The makers of the independent film Film Camp received help from PepsiCo and Ty Inc. One client wrote a screenplay that indirectly highlights the sights of a particular city. She contacted that state's tourism office and film commissioner for financing and production assistance funds, which she received. I worked as a script doctor with the producer of a \$40 million animated film. They have raised \$20 million already from businesses and organizations interested in the content of the film (including Procter & Gamble). To get you started, the blog financingfilms.blogspot.com chronicles corporate and other sources for indie film financing. There are also funding organizations like Kickstarter (kickstarter.com), which focuses on funding within the United States, and RocketHub (rockethub.com) which is global. IndieGoGo (indiegogo.com) operates a little differently from the other two and is riskier. There are many grants available for making documentaries and other films. You'll need to do your research to find these. Also, beware of scams. Perhaps one place to start your search is to Google Michigan State University's compiled list of film grants. EXPLORE OVERLOOKED TV MARKETS There are many small TV markets besides those mentioned in the previous chapter on "Television markets." See the section in that chapter on "Children and teen programming." There are hundreds of cable channels and TV stations looking for content (movies, sitcoms, reality shows, and so on), including HBO, Showtime, Turner Broadcasting, and other cable networks, stations, and channels. Have you considered a documentary? Erik Stahl wrote two documentaries, which led to his producing and hosting a TV show in Colorado. Another client, S. A. James, wrote a feature screenplay for the big screen, and that sample, eventually led to an adaptation of the Danielle Steele novel for a TV movie. One evening after presenting a seminar on the East Coast, I received a call from a very young 18-year-old who had never written so much as a page. He told me that he had called a PBS station and presented a series idea over the phone. The producer loved it, but since the kid did not have a sample script, the producer suggested that he connect with a professional writer or write a script himself. Imagine! If this kid had had a decent sample script (or had been willing to write one), he may have been hired. The PBS network includes such stalwart affiliates as KCET in Los Angeles, WNET in New York, WGBH in Boston, and ETV in South Carolina. Approach these stations individually or PBS directly. Investigate local stations. Don't ignore the many magazine shows, educational shows, soap operas, children's shows, game shows, and infomercials (direct response television). ANIMATION Thanks to the information age and the development of computer software, animated productions continue to increase, but historically animation has gone through many ups and downs. Feature animation projects (such as Shrek, The Incredibles, and Finding Nemo) are developed much like feature films are, since they feature top talent voicing the characters. There is little chance that you can sell a spec animation script for a blockbuster animation film. You have a better shot at smaller films or TV. Although most animated TV shows do not have staff writers, they use a pool of writers to write scripts. There are two kinds of animated series: weekly and daily. Because of the greater number of episodes produced by daily shows, they might be better targets for new writers. For your information, animated scripts for television can include camera directions and angles. (That's because they're being written for a storyboard artist rather than a director.) You will probably need only one imaginative and fanciful sample script to break in, and animated shows generally are open to queries from writers without agents. If your sample script gets you noticed, you can pitch with treatments, synopses, and even premises. Research the show you are interested in before contacting them. The pay for animated TV scripts and feature direct-to-DVD projects is about half of the basic rate for projects featuring human characters (rather than toons). Generally, you earn no residuals, no ancillary rights, and no royalties on toys based on your characters. REGIONAL AND FOREIGN MARKETS Dig in your own backyard. Acres of Diamonds is the story of a man who searched the world for diamonds without success and finally returned home to realize that there were acres of them on his own farm. So what's available in your own backyard? Look at regional markets and specialty markets (such as the Christian market, for example). Contact your state film commissioner (and nearby state film commissioners) about local production companies. My screenplay The Penny Promise was produced by a Utah company. The film won "Best Feature Comedy" at two film festivals, plus I got paid. The BBC set up the Writer's Room (to assist writers interested in writing for the BBC. Since there is no major studio in Canada, the Canadian film business operates much like the independent film market operates in the United States, in terms of selling your work as a writer. Many American films are produced in Canada with Canadian talent and writers. That's because the government provides financial incentives for those who produce in Canada. If you are Canadian, your research question is this: Who produces or is about to produce in Canada? There may be an opportunity there for you. There are also many Canadian productions for the Canadian market. One Canadian writing resource is the Writers Guild of Canada (www.wgc.ca). If you live south of the border or overseas, realize that the film business is increasingly global. There is a growing market for films written and produced in Spanish, if that is your first language. And some online companies like amazon.com are now producing movies and other media. GO INDEPENDENT Consider the huge independent motion picture market. See the section entitled "The Indies" in an earlier chapter of this book (Book V). DIRECT-TO-DVD The direct-to-DVD market (formally referred to as the direct-to-video market) provides opportunities for many writers. These are low-budget features (\$1 to \$1.5 million, but often in the \$50,000 to \$250,000 range) made specifically for DVD sales. The most common genres are horror, action/adventure, and thrillers, and they are not released theatrically. To find the names of these producers, simply look for the credits on recent direct-to-DVD releases and otherwise conduct your research. I received a thank-you letter from a prior student, Daniel Springner, who wrote, "I...have six feature films available for rent." Daniel is in the game. Related to this area is the information/instructive DVD market. Films such as Buns of Steel and How to Remodel Your Home are examples. Keep in mind that regardless of the market, the basic approach is similar in each. In years to come, direct-to-DVD productions may give way to Internet feature productions. In view of that, let's look at the current Internet market next. THE NEW MEDIA BECAME a writer or hyphenate for a New Media production. Atom Films was one of the first shortfilm Web producers in this arena. They were bought by MTV and eventually became part of Comedy Central. Initially, Atom Films productions were often paid for, at least in part, by ads. The Web series phenomenon is well established. Some of the original Web series, such as Quarterlife and Afterworld, can still be seen on YouTube although they were once featured at their own Web sites. In the early days (which was not long ago), webisodes were about three minutes in length. With Afterworld, there was little dialogue but a lot of narration, and no big action scenes. These days, webisodes of Web series such as Broad City, Burning Love, Neil's Puppet Dreams, and Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl (which premiered on YouTube) are about 3-12 minutes in length. Internet productions such as these may be a place to start and get noticed. Some productions have had tens of millions of views per webisode, and that will increase in years to come. And Web series can also be viewed on smartphones. You can create your own pilot or write webisode scripts for other shows. It's a wonderful challenge and opportunity for writers. If you create your own series, you can promote it on YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, and similar sites and/or secure funding through some other means, including via corporations and organizations. The Guild in its early days solicited donations from fans and produced episodes from those donations. Do you carry an iPod, iPhone, or iPad? Consider writing for that arena. A webisode is an episode of a show written specifically for mobile phones, iPods, and similar devices. Most Web series can now be viewed on smartphones; in fact, most new media can be viewed on most devices. The production company Fun Little Movies (funlittlemovies.com) produces "fun little movies" for your cell phone. Check them out. You can learn a great deal about writing for, or producing for, Internet movie companies by searching the Web. The WGA now has a section for New Media writers. Sign up for their updates. New Media companies are monitored by feature producers. You may get notified with a New Media production. Many companies have Internet connections or are Web-driven. One example is the Oxygen channel. The New Media market is growing rapidly, and the parameters may change rapidly as well. There are many interactive companies now. Most studios and many special-effects companies have formed interactive divisions. Contact them directly or have your agent call. Certainly, additional opportunities for writers will materialize as new distribution channels are created and innovative technology continues to expand. I foresee more entertainment distributed directly to home computers, tablets, smartphones, and future devices. GAMES Videogames, videos based on video games, virtual reality, 3DO, interactive programming, and multimedia represent markets on the rise. This broad area has become a huge growth industry with increasing opportunities for writers. In fact, production has increased markedly in recent years, and agents have materialized to handle multimedia material. Producers in these areas are generally open to ideas. Surprisingly, it is better to approach these people with a treatment than with a completed script—at least for now. Also include game concepts and flowcharts if applicable. Your final script may earn you tens of thousands of dollars. For information on writing or designing video games, I recommend Creating Emotion in Games by David Freeman (www.freemangames.com). SUCCEED IN OTHER WRITING AREAS Diablo Cody, before she wrote Juno, wrote a critically acclaimed book entitled Candy Girl: A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper. Prior to that, she wrote for a Minneapolis newspaper. Why not sell a short story to a magazine or write in some other area to get your career moving in a positive direction? Some screenwriters keep body and soul together with business writing, magazine writing, copywriting, column writing, and so on. I started out as a copywriter of marketing collateral, advertising, and scripts for business videos before moving on to more "creative" areas. I learned that more money is spent in non-broadcast audiovisual than in the U.S. motion picture industry. Writing video and DVD scripts for business and education can be both profitable and fun. You will contact media producers for possible assignments, or call video production managers at corporations. Present yourself as a freelance writer and have a sample 10- or 12-page script handy. In some instances, your other writing experience may be sufficient. Pay is about \$150 per finished minute of the eventual DVD, or 10% of the budget. That comes to about \$1,500 a week for your time. You can earn up to \$10,000 of writing an infomercial show. Infomercials are written by writers, so why not you? Find producers by searching the Internet or reading direct-response magazines such as Response Magazine. Visit www.retailing.org. GET YOUR "DEGREE" The position of screenwriter or TV writer is a profession, like a doctor or a lawyer. Usually, it takes years of education to prepare for a profession; consider these platforming strategies as part of your professional education. There is one step you should take before you try any of the above platforming strategies, and that is to write one or more original, feature-length screenplays. You will need them as proof you can write, and by applying some of the above strategies, you might even sell them and become a player in the game. How to break into Hollywood when you live in Peoria Living outside of the Los Angeles area is not a problem when you are selling your first script. You can sell it from anywhere. It is seldom a problem even after you've sold your first script. In fact, one's domicile is becoming less and less of an issue in our technology-laden society. Most Hollywood producers are more concerned about your writing ability than your current address. If you write well and know what you're talking about, their fears will be allayed. However, an L.A.-based agent will want to know if you are willing to visit Los Angeles on occasion to attend meetings with producers and executives. That raises the following question: Don't L.A. writers have an advantage over others? Yes, of course they do. It's simply easier to meet more people. But it is not a requirement for success. People break in from all over the world. The idea of relocating after your first big sale may occur to you or be suggested. Obviously, if the deal is sweet enough and the situation warrants it, you will relocate. But you likely will not have to. And even if you do, it won't be forever. Once you have established your name, you can buy an island in the Caribbean and write there. On the other hand, you may want to move to the Los Angeles area, just to have more opportunities to meet people. Living in L.A. does have its advantages. If you want to write for episodic television, you must live near production headquarters, but don't move until you get the assignment. You'll be pleased to know that more regional opportunities are opening up all the time. There are three reasons for this: Union shots in Southern California have become very expensive, California is generally unfriendly to business, and the Information Age has created a huge demand for programming. Many new opportunities exist in areas outside of Hollywood. Production companies are sprouting up all over the map. Some of these can be found in industry periodicals, directories, or literary reference guides. Call around. Your state film commissioner should have up-to-date information concerning the film industry in your state. Revisit the previous chapter. In summary, don't let your current residence deter you from pursuing a screenwriting career. Concentrate on your writing first and your geographical issues second. A personal challenge Now just a few words concerning your writing career. Take it seriously. You are a screenwriter. Create a vision for your career. Pretend that 20 years have passed and that the PBS program American Masters is going to present a tribute to you and your career. Or, if you prefer, Entertainment Tonight is spotlighting your work. How do you want to be remembered? What kind of work will you do during the next 20 years? Where is your career going to be in 20 years? (Or 10 years, if you prefer.) Write this down. What would you like to accomplish this year (or within the next 18 months)? What excites you the most? Is it to sell your spec script to a company like Imagine? Is it to be a story editor for a TV show? Set this milestone goal. Spend some time with this; you need this motivating energy. Think of the script you're working on now. When do you plan on finishing the first draft? How about the final draft? Or, if you're beginning the selling process, by what date do you want to sell your script? Or how many requests for your script do you want by a certain date? Remember, goals should be specific and measurable. They help you work faster and with more focus. Use them as motivators, not guilt inducers. If you fail to achieve a goal, learn from the experience and set new goals. Have a writing schedule. Four hours a day is ideal, but if that is unfeasible, try to set aside whatever time you can. That's your time to write. Your loved ones need to understand that. I recommend weekly goals, which is why I have included a "Weekly Action Plan" worksheet in this book. How many hours will you spend writing next week? Keep logs of contacts, power lunches, phone calls, script submissions, queries, and anything that would affect the "business" of your career. You need this information for follow-ups. This business is built on contacts and relationships. Even when your script is rejected, if anything positive takes place between you and the contact, nurture that contact with occasional notes (once or twice a year), emails, or calls. In doing this, do not impose on their time. And hold on to your screenplay—it may be the perfect vehicle 10 years hence. Keep track of your expenses. I'm afraid the IRS will insist on it. You will use the Schedule C to report income and business expenses. As a sleeping aid, consider reading IRS Booklet 334 for small businesses before going to bed. If you have a writing partner, make a written agreement before you write. Keep a writer's notebook of thoughts, ideas, clippings, bits of dialogue, etc. Many writers use their smartphones for this. Treat your writing career with respect. Continue your education, but don't stop writing while you learn. Learn how to take criticism. Be able to stand apart from your work and look at it objectively. Don't rush into rewrites; let advice sink in. Consider what others suggest, but remember that you are the screenwriter and the script is yours until it is sold. Most of all, enjoy writing for the sake of writing, whether you sell anything or not. Creating something new and original is its own reward. Writing is a fundamentally worthwhile way to spend your time. It is the best therapy I never paid for. If you write because you want to, then the financial rewards are more likely to follow. Writers write. Now, finally, I'd like to take a moment to salute you. You have not chosen an easy road. You will need to draw upon your inner resources and believe in yourself. When you get up in the morning, face the person in the mirror and say, "I am the next great screenwriter." Then perhaps one morning, you may awaken to find that you are the next great screenwriter. Don't be surprised. Just keep writing. Resources Numerous links to resources can be found at the Community page of my Web site keepwriting.com. These include Internet sites, industry organizations, writer organizations and groups, schools, software, directories, periodicals, bookstores, and contests. You will also find helpful information on contests in Book V; use the handy-dandy index to find the exact pages. When you visit my Web site, make sure you subscribe to my free newsletter for more screenwriting tips and tricks at keepwriting.com. If you would like copies of all of the worksheets in this book, visit the store at my Web site where you can purchase them for a nominal fee. Otherwise, please feel free to photocopy anything from The Bible, as long as it is for your individual use only. For more information on formatting, consider my book Dr. Format Tells All, which can be purchased at my Web site store. For updates and changes to this work, visit keepwriting.com and click "Community" and "Book Updates." My "Keep Writing with Dave Trotter" Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/keepdave. Also, you can follow me on Twitter at www.twitter.com/DRTrotter. My clients and students include two Nicholl winners, a National Play Award winner, and dozens of working writers. For more information, visit keepwriting.com or email me at Visit the Consulting page at keepwriting.com for information about my script consulting services. I also evaluate query letters and one-sheets.

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