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Louis Leterrier. “Our mandate was to figure out the movie as told through [Leterrier’s] eyes,” Hay says. The two clicked with Leterrier right away, and they continued their close collaboration through the film’s production. All agreed that the look and feel of the film needed to be very specific. Hay jokes, “The movie should feel like it’s painted on the side of a ’70s custom van.” Manfredi adds that while their version differs in many ways from the 1981 original, they definitely overlap in tone. “What makes a good adventure is the characters,” Manfredi says. “They feel real, their plight is a serious one, but the movie doesn’t take itself too seriously. That’s what defines an adventure rather than an action movie.”

Hay and Manfredi spent the first two weeks sitting in an office with Leterrier, “throwing out every feeling we had about Greek mythology, about the story, about Perseus, creating a depot of ideas,” Hay explains. The pair outlined meticulously, taking into consideration both narrative and budget constraints. When they were ready to begin writing, the two camped out at the studio for six months, divided the scenes up and worked separately. “Once we have a draft, we’re sitting in the same room,” Manfredi says. “One of us is typing and we edit together. It’s funny, in the past when we have accidentally written the same scene, they’re eerily similar.”


Beacham’s work provided a solid template to build from, but the new screenwriters decided to return the story to its traditional setting in ancient Greece. “The Gods we wanted to see were the Greek Gods,” Manfredi says. That change was important, because Hay and Manfredi’s scripts added much more focus on the machinations of the Gods. While Beacham’s script kept the Gods fairly distant, Hay and Manfredi brought the divine intrigues front and center. Beacham’s Set the Void and Tiamat were out, replaced by the power struggle between Zeus and Hades (Ralph Fiennes). “In our version, Hades is a slighted brother who has been nursing a grudge against his more powerful, more successful brother, Zeus, for centuries,” Hay explains.

While much of Beacham’s fantasy world and story structure carried over into Hay and Manfredi’s scripts, the duo gave special focus to fleshing out the band of adventurers who accompany Perseus on his quest. The writers wanted a *Dirty Dozen* vibe for the group, making sure each character had “a

distinctive voice and a point of view, no matter how big that character’s role,” Manfredi says. This character work also included ensuring that Hades had motivations beyond those of a mustache-twirling cartoon villain. “That’s what makes a movie like *Batman* so interesting: You’ve got characters who have a very distinct and arguable point of view,” Manfredi explains. “We’re trying to give Hades a personal motivation. It’s not just, well, he’s the king of the underworld and thus inherently evil.”

Another casualty of Hay and Manfredi’s rewrite was Beacham’s Wilting Girl. While much of her character remains in the supernatural Io (Gemma Arterton), the romantic triangle between her, Perseus and Andromeda was significantly downplayed in the final film. The relationship between worship and power is still a thematic focus, but it is mostly explored in the motivations of the Olympians, with much more “palace intrigue” revealing insights into the psychological makeup of the Gods.

Filming was rapid and the schedule was tight, ensuring that Hay and Manfredi wound up interacting with almost every aspect of production. “So much of the writing of this movie was geared toward incorporating all these elements of physical production and being constantly in communication with all the departments about what was going on so they wouldn’t be inventing stuff in a vacuum,” Hay says. All told, the writers did 10 drafts of *Titans*, not counting smaller work such as tweaking dialogue during filming or putting together a character bio of Hades to help Ralph Fiennes get inside the head of the God of the Underworld.

With *Clash of the Titans* set for release on April 2, all three writers are eager to let the world see their take on the legend of Perseus. For Hay and Manfredi, *Titans* was an experience that taught them just how valuable collaboration can be. “Even the person with the smallest part has an idea about their character,” Manfredi says. “You may think, ‘That part is really insignificant,’ but it’s going to make everything deeper.” Beacham once again gives credit to how much he learned from reading Lawrence Kasdan’s polish of his draft and to the heady experience of working on his first big-budget Hollywood film. “It’s hard to quantify how much I learned from [*Titans*],” he says, “but much of the screenwriter I am today, I became because of it.” 

# The Hero's Two Journeys



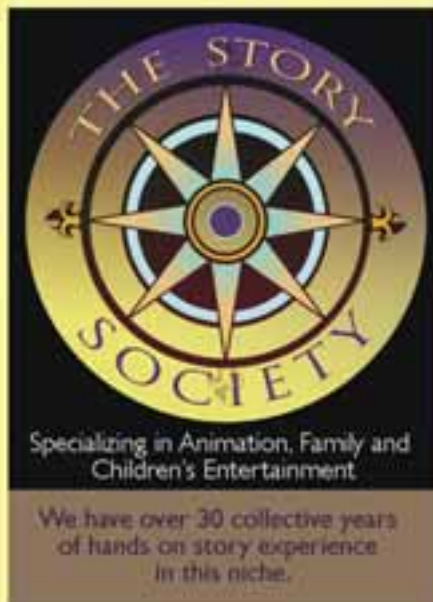
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## Brooklyn's Finest

### Screenplay by Michael C. Martin

**IT'S BEEN SAID** that inspiration can come about in the most unusual ways. For screenwriter Michael C. Martin, one of those ways included a car accident that left him with a serious back injury and loads of free time on his hands as he worked through physical therapy. The other bit of inspiration came via the memory of his former roommate, a gung-ho police academy cadet. "Something happened and it just completely broke his momentum and spirit," Martin recalls. "That's probably happened to every police officer. It's something I'd love to see in a movie. Not the case or [whether it] gets solved, but what's the cost of being a police officer on your soul and your morals." Martin decided to use his recovery time to write out the story that had been brewing in his mind and used an upcoming festival contest as his deadline for completion.

Although Martin studied film at Brooklyn College, this was the first time he tackled a feature script. He considers himself a devout follower of screenwriting professor and author Syd Field, but admits he learned how to write the screenplay just by sitting down and doing it. He recalls, "As much as I plotted it out with index cards, it all happened on the page."

*Brooklyn's Finest* follows the parallel stories of one week in the life of three police officers in one of New York's most crime-ridden

precincts. Eddie (Richard Gere) is burned out after two decades on the force and refuses to do anything but drink and count down the remaining days until his retirement. Sal (Ethan Hawke) is a devout Catholic and family man who's come to realize that busting drug dealers might be the way to solving his financial problems. Clarence, better known as Tango (Don Cheadle), has been undercover for so long that he's having serious doubts about where his loyalties lie, especially when he's told the feds want to bust his friend Caz (Wesley Snipes). As the days tick by and tensions mount across the city over a rash of officer-related incidents, each man finds himself pushed into a series of ever-murkier moral conundrums.

Though Martin knew his characters and the arcs they would follow, he also knew that his fledgling script was still missing something. After passing the 30-page mark, he felt the story wouldn't connect with the audience sitting in a movie theater. So he went back to his opening — a scene where Sal sits in a church confessional and tries awkwardly to ask forgiveness without admitting to anything he's done — and decided to move this scene later into the story and instead start the film by showing audiences just what sent Sal to the confessional in the first place. Martin then created a new opening where a drug

dealer named Carlo (Vincent D'Onofrio) has a long discussion with Sal and explains the difference between "gooder and badder." According to Carlo, sometimes the wrong thing to do is actually the right thing to do, and vice versa. This new opening gave the independent stories and the audience an immediate thematic connection.

Martin had always pictured the film as three distinct stories, but when his script moved into development the recurring question from different executives was whether the separate threads should be tied together at the end. "I like seeing lives that feel like they're heading toward the same direction, but they don't actually have to [meet], and I think audiences are smart enough to enjoy that," the screenwriter says. "I don't want it to wrap itself up in a nice, neat package because it's not a typical Hollywood movie. It's not meant to reassure you."

At one point, director Antoine Fuqua suggested inserting an inciting catalyst that would build tension across all three storylines. The filmmakers settled on a scandal that involved a crooked cop shooting a young man in a Brooklyn neighborhood. This created political pressure for Eddie, upped the danger for Sal on several of his raids and made Tango feel even more conflicted about whose side he was on. This still kept Martin's original vision intact, though while Eddie, Sal and Tango do cross paths in the film, there's only the thinnest interweaving as their stories play out largely independently of one another.

Martin compares his final screenplay to material that came out of Italian cinema's neo-realism period. "There's a great movie, *Umberto D.*, that I watched while I was in rehab for my back," he recalls. "[It was] an entire movie about a guy who just wanted to pay his rent. It was just fascinating. There was no bad guy involved; it was just his situation in dealing with life." For all their efforts and achievements, the screenwriter points out that police officers are just human beings like the rest of us. "So I deliberately wanted them all to be in some moral dilemma," Martin explains, "some decision which wasn't going to be clean either way. I wanted the audience to sometimes root for them to do something that, on the surface, seems negative and it seems wrong. But because you've seen their home lives and you've seen what they're up against, you kind of want this cop to steal the drug money. To me, that's a great cinematic experience. **CS**

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## I Love You Phillip Morris

Screenplay by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra

Based on the book by Steve McVicker

**FOR NEWCOMERS**, it's possible to stick your neck out and write something outrageous, knowing it will land you meetings around Hollywood, even if the screenplay never gets produced. But once your career gets going, it takes a special kind of lunacy to interrupt that success in order to generate a completely gonzo screenplay.

There are exceptions to this rule, of course, with *I Love You Phillip Morris* being this year's most obvious example. Written by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra, the team behind *Bad Santa* and *Cats & Dogs*, the film tells the true story of a Texas con man who falls in love with a fellow prisoner while behind bars and bends every rule imaginable (from suicide attempts to jail breaks to ambitious corporate fraud schemes) so the odd-ball couple could live out their unconventional romance.

The idea that such a script exists in play-it-safe Hollywood is strange enough. Even more mind-boggling is the fact that Jim Carrey agreed to play the openly gay character. It even attracted Gus Van Sant who initially wanted to direct, but ultimately handed that

job over to the writers, taking a producer credit instead. And though the comedy seems a doozy to market, it was invited to screen at both the Sundance and Cannes film festivals.

"Our mojo wasn't very strong back then," Ficarra recalls, referring to that weekend eight years ago, when the writing partners first read journalist Steve McVicker's stranger-than-fiction book proposal. "We were well respected in the industry, but *Bad Santa* hadn't come out yet, so if we said, 'We want to do a gay prison escape movie,' people were like, 'Well, good luck.'"

Being provocateurs by nature, the pair wanted to be in-your-face with the material: Think *Fargo* as the Farrelly brothers might tell it, or an irreverent *South Park*-style version of *The Informant*, centered around a surprisingly sweet gay love story. "We always knew there was just no way we could write this for money, because no studio was going to pay what our rate was at the time to tell this unconventional story," Requa explains. "You can't blame them. If we wanted to tell it our way, the one way to get control over our script was to write it for free."

The reason established writers seldom pull

a stunt like this is simple: Long-shot pet projects eat up time that could be spent working on real-world assignments and steal resources from scripts that stand a better chance at getting made. But the duo was determined. Though *Cats & Dogs* was a hit, the writers desperately needed a challenge. "We were feeling a little stale," Requa admits, and McVicker's book introduced the perfect character in real-life repeat offender Steven Jay Russell.

"He's our kind of guy — completely deluded, a pie-eyed optimist, but then it all comes crashing down and he becomes a bit of a wreck. That's just the kind of stuff we love," Ficarra says, comparing Carrey's character to *Bad Santa*'s dark, delusional antihero. As a bonus, the project presented all sorts of challenges: They'd never adapted a story based in reality, nor had they attempted a romance or anything with genuine dramatic elements before.

Writing typically comes easy to Requa and Ficarra, but not with *Phillip Morris*. They spent the better part of a year brainstorming, writing and revising. "That's unusual for us," Requa claims. "When we write a script, it takes no more than two months, and this was a year without pay." In some respects, the process took longer simply because they were working on spec. "We weren't handing it in. Usually you have people who are your partners — the producer or the studio — you hand it in and get notes. We were those guys, and we kept kicking it back to ourselves," he explains.

McVicker had based the book on interviews with Russell himself, which made the character especially tricky to write. It was straightforward enough to catalog his cons (including a great many that weren't especially cinematic and, therefore, left out of the film), but Russell was such a consummate shape-shifter that he was rarely ever honest with himself. "He's Don Quixote," Requa says. "You can't really lock down that he starts here and he ends up there. It's not really in the material, so we thought, 'Let's just make the whole movie where you don't know who he is at any given time.' Maybe the journey of the film is coming to the realization that he doesn't know who he is either."

The other guiding idea was the book's title, which pointed to a love story, although building a story around a homosexual antihero didn't make things easy. Since the book was due to be published by Miramax Books, Requa and Ficarra approached the company's film division about financing the adaptation. "They wanted Phillip to be a woman," Requa recalls.

"In so many words, it was like, 'How can we normalize this because there are so many wild elements?'" But the pair wasn't willing to sacrifice that aspect of the story, which they felt was one of the details that set it apart. Instead, they latched onto the idea of Russell's crazy ride as a search for self, fascinated especially by the character's chameleon-like nature.

The screenplay seems to require a narrator, says Requa, who admits, "We were looking at *Goodfellas* from the get-go because that's an incredibly dense movie with tons of information." Even so, the duo had knocked out a 140-page draft before arriving at their big breakthrough: Rather than showing all of Russell's cons, what if the film itself was a con? Or, at the very least, constantly changing, according to the character's amorphous self-image? "As filmmakers, we were like, 'Forget the truth. Let's tell Steven's story from his point of view,'" Ficarra says.

With an unreliable narrator in place, the duo was now free to wreak all sorts of havoc. In subsequent drafts, as the film opens, audiences meet Russell as he narrates from his deathbed. (Or is it really his deathbed? Surely the writers wouldn't jest about someone dying of AIDS?) They withheld the gay twist as long as possible, with a sizable chunk of the first act focused on the other crazy facets of Russell's life. He'd worked in law enforcement and was married with children — all of which seems to contradict the persona he embodies by the end of the film, and yet, as Requa points out, "His whole life is based on this idea that he becomes whatever he needs to be at any given time, and he loses himself in that."

Russell's marriage may have been another disguise, but that doesn't mean it wasn't authentic. "If you talk to Steven, he would say, 'I loved my wife and making love to her was like for any straight man to make love to Julia Roberts,'" Ficarra explains. "There were never any half measures there, and in fact, his wife and daughter think of him as a fundamentally good man who tried his best to support them. Who knows if that is true, but that's what Steven believes."

Political correctness was of little concern to the pair, with the film offering equal-opportunity offenses to gays, Christians and a variety of other groups. When Russell as a narrator first breaks the news of his homosexuality (doing so in a characteristic bit of

"Oh, did I forget to mention...?" revisionism), the film earns its biggest laugh by rubbing that revelation in audiences' faces.

"We called it 'the inoculation,'" Requa says. "Early on, we thought we would inoculate the audience to the overt gayness of the movie. We wanted to give people a chance to walk out of the theater, and that way, when we have some honest emotion, they're hungry for it."

Striking the right tone was key and it helped that Van Sant bowed out (when the stars aligned for him to make *Milk*) and left the writers to direct the film themselves — not an easy debut. "We were walking a tightrope," Ficarra acknowledges. Though neither of the writers is gay, they were determined not to portray homosexuality as an affliction. Instead, they wanted to capture the spirit of their screenwriting mentor, Pratt screenwriting professor, Paul Corrigan, to whom they dedicated the film. "We want to show that guy who loves being gay and flourishes being gay," Requa says. With Russell's character, he adds, "Part of the joke is that he's in this boring, horrible, middle-American place and, as a gay man, it's like prison. He's hiding his true self in this oak-paneled hell." But given his criminal tendencies, Russell spends plenty of time in and out of actual prison during the film, and it is there, of all places, that he meets his soul mate (played by Ewan McGregor as an aw-shucks Southern boy).

"How do you show two people falling in love in the worst place on earth?" Requa asks. Like everything else in the film, the scribes found film humor in the love story by playing against certain expected cinematic conventions — including the longstanding homophobia of prison sex. "People are used to reacting to scenes in a certain way and we're using the clichés of heist movies and con movies, even romantic comedies the way a magician uses misdirection," Requa says.

In many respects, that misdirection was riskier than the material itself. "There's always a danger that once you reveal the con, the audience will be angry with you. That's why being a comedy comes in handy," Ficarra says. "You start putting in a couple of laughs. By the time you get to the third laugh, they've forgiven you. That's something we learned from *Bad Santa*: We could make a movie about the life of Joseph Stalin, but if the character is funny, they forgive you." **CS**

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## A Nightmare on Elm Street

Story by Wesley Strick

Screenplay by Wesley Strick and Eric Heisserer

Based on characters created by Wes Craven

**ERIC HEISSERER THOUGHT** he was walking into a general meeting at New Line Cinema in the winter of 2008, so he was a bit surprised to find himself sitting with development executive David Neustadter and executive producer Walter Hamada. He recalls being both confused and worried. “I’m thinking to myself ‘Why am I in the big conference room? Did I say something bad about New Line? I’m in trouble, aren’t I?’” It turned out the studio needed someone to do a quick turnaround on a script for a new take on *Nightmare on Elm Street* and Heisserer’s previously scheduled meeting that day was pure serendipity.

New Line already had a draft of the script by Wesley Strick (*Doom*), but decided to go in a different direction. The meeting where Heisserer and the others hashed out what kind of movie they wanted this new *Nightmare* to be also included producers Brad Fuller and Andrew Form of Platinum Dunes. As Heisserer points out, there were conflicting versions of the iconic villain Freddy Krueger who as the franchise progressed, evolved from a demonic killer into a

wicked comedian. During the meeting, all agreed that it was time to take the character back to the basics. “Once we were all on the same page in terms of the tone of Freddy Krueger,” Heisserer says. “I went off into my cave and I wrote for three-and-a-half weeks in order to get a draft to them as fast as possible.”

Heisserer is a big believer in note cards and loves starting with established material. “It puts a lot of stuff on that cork wall right away,” he says with a laugh. “I don’t mind coming in with something that already has ingredients set out for me.” His board starts as a “trash pile” of dialogue snippets, action sequences and character notes that he slowly weeds through and organizes before committing to an outline of 20 pages or so. “Once I’ve got a decent outline, I use that as the spinal column of the script,” he says. “And I make sure before I go to the script phase that everybody else on the project has seen it and they’re happy with the skeleton of the piece.”

*A Nightmare on Elm Street* is the story of a handful of suburban teens who all suffer from

bad dreams. Their parents and teachers shrug it off as stress brought on by the apparent suicide of their friend Dean (Kellan Lutz). The teens, however, begin to suspect differently when they realize they’re all dreaming of the same person — a horribly burned man in a striped sweater who wears a monstrous, blade-fingered glove. As their friends continue dying under questionable circumstances, Nancy (Rooney Mara) and Quentin (Kyle Gallner) discover the man haunting their nightmares is Fred Krueger (Jackie Earle Haley), the groundskeeper from their old preschool and a suspected child molester who was hunted down and killed by the teens’ parents. Nancy and Quentin strive to stay awake as they search for a way to put Freddy’s spirit to rest before he kills them, too, but their search turns up something even worse — the possibility that Krueger may have been innocent.

The idea of questioning Freddy’s guilt came from Strick and was the sole element carried over from his script. “What made it appealing,” Heisserer explains, “was it forced an investigation, some procedural elements, into the story.” Once the characters had these suspicions, it allowed the creation of several investigative beats that helped propel the story. It also gave a greater depth to the background and the character. “Just the idea that he’s

evil and he shows up in dreams and he’s killing people... there’s not a whole lot to do there story-wise,” the screenwriter laughs.

Heisserer also wanted to strip away many of the comical layers that had built up on Freddy across seven films. “I’ve noticed that a lot of franchises, by the time they’re at the third or fourth film, they bend more and more toward comedy,” observes the screenwriter. “I think if we start there, there isn’t much elbow room for Freddy. He can always become more wisecracking later on in the franchise, but what makes him an icon of horror is that, first and foremost, he’s scary. I knew that he still needed to have some sense of humor, but I wanted to make it sadistic rather than wise-cracky.” As shown in this script excerpt, Freddy’s humor has been replaced with a menacing wit.

INT. BOILER ROOM IN NIGHTMARE -  
CONTINUOUS

--but sounds distant; far off here.

Freddy has hoisted Jesse's bloody frame up next to Kris'.

Jesse coughs up blood, eyes rolling in his head.

FREDDY

The brain keeps working for up to seven minutes after the body dies.

Freddy leans in close to Jesse's face.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I still have four minutes with you.

Freddy stabs Jesse again and TWISTS as Jesse SCREAMS--

Heisserer also sought to keep the horror escalating as the script moved into the third act. "Looking at the original," the screenwriter says, "there's a long gap in the last half of the film between appearances of Freddy Krueger, because people have figured out, at that point in time, that once you go to sleep — that's when he gets you." In Wes Craven's film, which Heisserer followed the structure of, Nancy spends almost 20 minutes of screen time booby-trapping her house so she can pull Freddy into the real world and fight him. A then-unknown Johnny Depp is also killed at this point, but the villain is barely glimpsed. "So there's this long period where you feel like, in this day and age, the movie would drag," he explains. "There's a lot of stuff that may have worked in '84, but it doesn't translate well now."

The solution came to him while researching insomnia and the health issues that come with it. Heisserer learned after someone spends about 70 hours without sleep, their mind begins to take "micronaps" that shut down different sections of the brain for brief periods. "So you are actually asleep even though you're conscious and you feel awake for the most part," he explains. "That was my doorway into allowing Krueger to show up at unexpected times while the characters were awake and screw with the idea of what is reality versus what is a dream."

This idea also leant itself to another one of the screenwriter's goals: to simplify Krueger's dream world. While Strick had continued with the surreal imagery of the

later franchise films, Heisserer was determined to make the nightmares as close to reality as possible. "The scares are harder to deliver when the audience realizes they're in the dream world," he explains, "because once they're keyed into that, the audience — at least [some] of them — starts to give up and think, "Well, they're screwed now." Because Freddy has full control there." By keeping the dream world grounded in reality, it allowed him to play with the moment the characters fell asleep and slipped into the nightmare. "That just hit the buttons for me more as a horror writer than playing with a fantastical landscape." Keeping the dream imagery simple also kept it inexpensive, which made Heisserer's script more appealing to the budget-minded producers who had a number in mind for the film's budget.

For a remake of such an iconic slasher film, Heisserer's script has an extremely low body count. He attributes part of this to simple story dynamics. "We wanted to spend more time with our characters," he says. "Do our best to get to know them and the relationship between their parents who are involved in covering up what happened to Krueger." However, there was also, unusual as it may sound, the matter of suspension of disbelief. "It's harder, I think, in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* world, to get away with a whole slew of murders in a town and not draw a lot of attention." With a wry smile, Heisserer gives the example of an isolated summer camp far off in the woods by a lake. "Then you can kill 10 or 12 people in one movie," he says. "But here we are in Springwood, a pleasant suburbia, and even one or two [murders] is going to draw a lot of attention — local, state, national. Even if it looks like it's accidental deaths, there are a lot of eyebrows being raised. So you have to be careful about that and not have body count be the focus of the story."

But perhaps the scariest thing for Heisserer was the heavy responsibility of re-launching one of his favorite film characters. "I had to do my best to do Freddy Krueger justice," he says. "I wouldn't have taken the job if I thought all I was going to do was deliver something that was a little bit better than what they already had. I had to deliver something I felt would really fit in with the mythology and restart him properly." He laughs and adds, "It was scary as hell." ☐

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## Greenberg

Story by Noah Baumbach and Jennifer Jason Leigh  
Screenplay by Noah Baumbach (also directed)

**THROW A STONE** at the box office and you'll likely find a film about some man-child struggling with arrested development. Most of these protagonists seek only to laugh at their situation and the process by which they try to mature, but *Greenberg* wants to understand why he ended up stunted in the first place.

*Greenberg* chronicles 42-year-old Roger Greenberg (Ben Stiller) who comes to Los Angeles to housesit for his brother and get back in touch with old friends. When asked what he's doing with his life these days, he simply answers, "I'm really trying to do nothing right now." It's a great conversation piece for parties but, as the film continues, it seems that even the task of doing nothing is daunting for Greenberg.

"Greenberg is a contrarian," says writer-director Noah Baumbach. "He's one of those people who doesn't feel it's a conversation if you're agreeing. He has an active mind and actually wants to do quite a lot, but when he does make an attempt, he immediately regrets it and feels he didn't do it well enough. So his cover story is that he isn't really trying."

As a script, *Greenberg* began with just that: Greenberg, a character who Baumbach wanted to explore. "I wanted to write about someone who couldn't get out of his own way," he says. "The early drafts were about trying to figure out the character and what

the basic situation he was going to be in, or the exact point in his life where we were meeting him."

Although some of the best moments in the film include conversations Greenberg has with others about being in his early forties, the film almost existed without them. "Greenberg was much younger in early drafts," Baumbach says. "But even then, it was always about somebody at a point in their life where they start to feel like they don't know how they got there, and how they would like to be seen in the world starts to contrast with how they actually are seen in the world. Sometimes there are lines or subjects that I know I want to try and deal with, so even though early drafts are just experimenting with characters and scenarios, these elements carry through."

While Greenberg is house sitting, he meets Florence (Greta Gerwig), his brother's personal assistant. She's 25, just out of a bad relationship and pathologically unsure of what she wants. As Baumbach explains, a lot of Florence was found during writing experiments with the character during his revising process. "I had an idea of who this girl was and I wanted to include her in the story," he says. "So while I'm writing scenes with Greenberg, I would bring her in and see how they communicate. It wasn't until later drafts that I had the idea that Florence is a personal

assistant, which not only gave me a way for Greenberg to meet her, but also clarified what kind of person she is. The script used to begin with Greenberg, but in a later draft I realized that starting with Florence accomplishes so many things this movie needed. Most importantly, it doesn't indulge Greenberg's myopia, but it also shows that Florence exists without him, and it was a way to bring L.A. into the story."

As a fan of the L.A.-centric films of the '70s, Baumbach wanted to tell an L.A. story of his own. He just wasn't sure where to start. Since his wife, Jennifer Jason Leigh (who shares story by credit on the film) grew up in Los Angeles, she heavily influenced Baumbach's view of the city. "We started spending time together in L.A. and seeing the city through her eyes really changed how I saw the place," he says. "I felt a different relationship with the city [after] being here with her. In some ways I felt like Greenberg, in that I was an outsider in this place, but I was also starting to feel more at home. I just felt that I wanted to shoot the place that I was starting to see."

Typically, Baumbach's process begins with him writing ideas for characters, concepts and conversations into a notebook or on the computer. As he finishes one project, he'll go back into these notebooks and see which idea seems the most alive to him. While he kept coming back to *Greenberg*, he knew the script had problems. "I was having trouble finding the movie, so I showed Jenny an early draft," he recalls. "We have different strengths. I come at things more intuitively and she's very clear and a very good editor who knows the story and where everything is and should be. She was instrumental in really getting it going and helping it turn into what it became."

What it became is a film about people who don't know what they want — a film not just about people in transition, but about transition itself. "It did occur to me that I had made my life more difficult than I needed to in telling this story," Baumbach says. "But I think that's why it took the time it took. [With] the two movies I made before *Greenberg*, everything came together when those scripts were written. *Greenberg* was something I picked at for years. I feel it's something that I could still be working on. It just kept changing, but when the movie came together — it just felt like, 'Let's do it, let's make this movie.'" **CS**

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Love Letters – Riley LaShea

Strawberry Mansion – R. Scott Shields

A Severed Romance – Todd Rheingold

A Different Shade of Black – Dana Congdon

My Girl Daisy – Sue Yeats

A Severed Romance – Todd Rheingold

A Different Shade of Black – Dana Congdon

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Chasing Brenda – Pauline Hayton

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Love Letters – Riley LaShea

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Strawberry Mansion – R. Scott Shields

Sophonronia L. – Tim Bridwell

The One That Got Away – Ryan Belenzon

When Harry Tries to Marry – Ralph Stein &

Nayan Padrai

#### Suzanne’s Prize Semifinalists

5 Dates – Kyle Michel Sullivan

### 2009 Top 10 And Top 20

#### Top 10 Winners

“Book of the Missing” – Kate Douglas

“Premonition” – Thriller – David Bousquet

“The Phoenix Effect” – Sci-Fi/Action – Margaret M. MacDonald

“The Blue Planet” – Sci-Fi – Svet Rouskov

“Horror Comic” – Thriller – Stephen Hoover

“Karmically Correct” – Fantasy – Erin Donovan –

“Wolves in the Winter” – Horror – Sarah Del Collo

“Roadside Assistance” – Thriller – David J. Sakmyster

“Running Boys” – Sci-Fi – Peter Kennedy

“When Harry tries to Marry” – Nayan Padrai & Ralph Stein

“The Underground Castle” – Jacqueline Stewart

#### Top 20 Winners (including ties)

“Freud” – Daniel Ragussis

“Premonition” – David Bousquet

“Bang Bang Butterflies” – Amy Rider

“The Phoenix Effect” – Margaret M. MacDonald

“The Blue Planet” – Svet Rouskov

“The Svengali Effect (Thriller)” – Jeremy Shipp

“Horror Comic” – Stephen Hoover

“Karmically Correct” – Erin Donovan

“Wolves in the Winter” – Sarah Del Collo

“Roadside Assistance” – David J. Sakmyster

“Running Boys” – Peter Kennedy

“Brooklynese” – Troy Ransome

“Ice Cold Feet” – John Fein

“Rye & Rice” – Craig Rosenthal

“Aza’ Zyel” – Terrence Manns

“Wither” – Evette Vargas

“When Harry Tries To Marry” – Nayan Padrai

& Ralph Stein

“Book of the Missing” – Kate Douglas

“Big Band Butterflies” – Amy Rider

“The Underground Castle” – Jacqueline Stewart

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## Season of the Witch

Screenplay by Bragi Schut

**SCREENWRITER BRAGI SCHUT** (*Threshold*) confesses with a laugh that he often gets *The Seventh Seal* and *The Seventh Sign* confused. It's the Ingmar Bergman classic, though, that inspired him to write his Nicholl Fellowship-winning script *Season of the Witch*, which finally makes its way to the screen seven years after it won. "There's a scene in [Bergman's] movie where a bunch of knights pass a woman who has been accused of witchcraft on the road," Schut recalls. "You just feel bad for her. She's clearly been abused, and I think her wrists are actually broken because they're afraid of her — they don't want her to cast any spells. I remember that scene just stuck with me. She's obviously innocent and a victim, and it's a horrible moment. But it just got me thinking, 'What if she really were a witch and we just thought she was innocent?' That was the kernel of the idea."

Another kernel was Schut's long-running fascination with characters trying to redeem themselves for past actions. "There's some-

thing noble in my mind," the screenwriter says, "and very interesting about a character who's trying to undo something that they've done in their past that they're ashamed of." Schut thinks part of the appeal of such characters is that this element is entirely self-contained and internal. "Nobody outside of the protagonist may even give a damn," he says. "But I'm very intrigued with the notion of a character who is judging himself and finds that he is wanting. That to me is very rich, dramatic stuff." This led him to the idea of a knight so scarred by the things he had seen and done that he had lost faith in God — a knight who, in the script, eventually became known as Behman.

Schut is not a fan of outlines and tends to work mostly with note cards. "I think outlines are a little bit limiting in that you see them in a very linear way," he explains. "You start from A and try to figure out how to get to B and how to get to C. With note cards, what I found interesting was when you put all these cards up on the board, you stop

thinking in such a linear way. You see scenes that would work better somewhere else, or you start to look at it more on a structural angle." He points out that on the board for his current project, a single glance tells him his first act has far more cards in it than his second act. "So I'm realizing that my act one is a little heavy, and there's probably some stuff I should be moving around or fixing. I don't know if I would've noticed that if I was writing an outline because it's just not as easy to see."

In *Season of the Witch*, Behman (Nicolas Cage) and Felson (Ron Perlman) are two knights who have returned to France exhausted and near-broken after a failed attempt to launch a new crusade. During their long absence, Europe had been gripped by a dark plague that killed thousands. A local cardinal (Christopher Lee) has determined the cause — a young peasant girl (Claire Foy), whom the church has denounced as a witch and accused of poisoning the land with her spells. The cardinal charges the

knights with delivering the prisoner to a distant abbey where they can "destroy the witch's powers." Behman, bitter and skeptical after his time abroad, accepts the duty to ensure the helpless girl will get a fair trial. The road to the abbey is long and hard, though, and the knights and their companions begin to suspect their prisoner might not be that helpless after all, let alone innocent.

*Season*, as Schut sees it, has a very simple structure. "It's a journey film," he explains. "The first act is the arrival in the world and setting the stage. Then you slowly bring together your team, you give them their orders, and you set them off on the journey."

However, he's quick to point out that his story ran up against the same problem Bergman's did. "His script was not historically that accurate," Schut explains. "His script takes place during the time of the Black Death, the plague, and he shows these knights returning from the Crusades."

When he first wrote *Season*, the screen-

writer handed off his drafts to his father, an amateur historian, who shook his head at the gross inaccuracies. "The Black Death really happened 100, 200 years after the Crusades," Schut points out. "And that was after the tail end of the Crusades. If you're talking about the Crusades everyone thinks of, the sacking of Jerusalem, that was much earlier." While he decided to let these mistakes slide in order to meet the Nicholl Fellowship deadline — a wise choice, in retrospect — once he was awarded the Fellowship and the script was sold, he began to fret over the errors. "Oh, my God, everyone's going to realize the plague didn't happen during the Crusades!" he chuckles. "And then of course [director] Dominic Sena did. Those are the things you don't worry about so much when you're just sitting there writing it and then, suddenly, oh my God, this is going to be in theaters! We've gotta figure this out!"

Like any good writer, he hit the books. Books on the Black Plague, the Crusades and the different medieval orders of knights, giving a special nod to "The Monks of War" by Desmond Seward. His research helped him define his characters better and also figure out what war they were returning home from. "There were six or seven Crusades and ours is not one of those," Schut says. "Ours is a very obscure battle much later. It was sort of a last-ditch effort to get a Crusade going again, but it was a bit of a joke and a lot of people were killed for nothing. Not that they were killed for anything in the real Crusades. They were all ill-conceived, misguided efforts."

An unusual round of changes to the script occurred once the film went into production. When filming began, the main character was still named LaVey. "We were telling a story that was originally set in France," the writer says, "so I thought, LaVey — that's a cool, strong-sounding name." Only a few days in, however, before the name had been established, he was approached by Cage on set. "He comes over and he says, 'Bragi, you realize we can't call him LaVey. You realize that, right?'" Schut feigned innocence, but Cage gave him a sly wink and pointed out playfully that Anton LaVey is the name of the founder and High Priest of the Church of Satan. "I really wasn't

trying to be snarky about it or subversive or anything," the screenwriter insists. "I just liked the name LaVey. I did know of Anton LaVey and I just figured if nobody raised any red flags I'd get away with it. And then Nicolas Cage, two days into the shoot!" He laughs again.

However, changing LaVey to Behman created a new problem: Now the majority of the characters had names ending in a hard "N" sound. Besides the knights, there was their guide Hagaman (Stephen Graham) and the altar boy Kaylan (Robert Sheenan), who tags along on the journey hoping to become a knight himself. Cage, a fan of Arthurian legends, stepped in again with a solution, pointing out that if the altar boy's name was shortened to Kay, the implication would be that earning his knighthood would make him Sir Kay, one of the knights of Camelot, a subtle nod Schut liked as well.

Also notable is that the title character, the peasant girl, is never named in the story. "I liked that device," the screenwriter admits. "I've seen it in one or two other films, where they just have a character named 'the drifter' or something. Usually it's the protagonist in Westerns."

In his Nicholl-winning draft, it was apparent from the start that the girl was evil and the knights were being tricked. However, Sena pushed for a draft more in line with the screenwriter's original kernel of inspiration: What if the characters and audience thought the girl might be an innocent pawn. "The challenge then is, how do you keep it scary while still not revealing that she's evil right at the outset?"

Schut points out that, given modern marketing and even the film's title, it will be hard for audiences to walk into theaters not knowing the girl is a witch. "I think it's more about hiding it from our characters in the film," he explains. "The fear comes from the audience knowing that she is dangerous but the characters not knowing that yet. It's the old Hitchcock thing about the bomb under the table. The audience sees it but the characters sitting at the table eating dinner don't and that creates, hopefully, suspense. So it was about giving us scares and creating suspense but in a way that the knights could still think she's innocent." He pauses and adds, "At least, for a little while." **CS**

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## The Losers

Screenplay by Peter Berg and James Vanderbilt  
Based on the graphic novel written by Andy Diggle

**BEFORE DIRECTOR** Peter Berg stormed the box office with *Hancock* in 2008, he became enthralled with Andy Diggle's Vertigo comic book series *The Losers*. The story revolves around a Special Forces team that is employed by the CIA and subsequently betrayed and left for dead by the agency and its handler, Max. After recovering the group begins conducting a series of covert operations against the CIA and Max. Berg completed a first draft of the screenplay, but realized his schedule as a sought-after filmmaker in both film and television would not allow him to continue the project, so he called his friend, *Zodiac* scribe James Vanderbilt.

The pair worked together previously when Vanderbilt wrote the screenplay for 2003's *The Rundown*, which Berg directed. Both men enjoyed their experience with one another on that project and Vanderbilt was excited to pick up where Berg left off. "I loved the draft he showed me," Vanderbilt says. "I just looked at him and said, 'I'm in.'"

Vanderbilt then set out to immerse himself in *The Losers'* world, reading both Berg's first draft and collections of Diggle's comics.

Though Berg laid the groundwork for the basic story beats, Vanderbilt had free reign to add and subtract elements that he felt were necessary, including culling more material from the comics. "Peter was very much about how cool the comic books were," Vanderbilt recalls. "He didn't want me to just go off what he had written."

Both writers wanted the drafts to be similar to the comics' tone, something Vanderbilt says sets this film apart from most of the other comic book-based movies. "It's very fun and even though there are some dark elements to it, there's a wonderful anarchic spirit to the work," he explains. "Declaring war on the CIA is fun and cool, and we really wanted to capture that!"

The first major change Vanderbilt made was to the script's structure. Berg's draft followed the comics' plotting in that right from the get-go, the team was together and in the middle of a mission. "For comics, in the first issue you need to already be into your story," Vanderbilt says. "The origin story usually comes later, but I thought the film needed to be told more chronologically." Vanderbilt shifted the team's origin

story to the beginning, telling the tale of how the team was burned by the CIA and how they came together.

Vanderbilt's process was unusual on this film since he was the second writer and much work had already been done before he came onboard. To nail down the structure, he began typing out the spine of the film in a document. "I suppose it's like note carding," he explains, "but it's not on note cards. It's just a guide for where the thing is going. It's one-line descriptions of events or moments. That's how I piece everything together." Another obstacle he encountered was the sheer volume of characters in the comic. "In a way it was good because there's so much incident in the comics that we were never lacking for something for the characters to do," he says. "But, at a certain point, there are so many characters in the movie that the real estate gets smaller and smaller. That's another place where the spine comes in handy."

Vanderbilt was also appreciative of the source material he was handed, as the characters brought to life by Diggle were already fully formed long before the film adaptation was in the works. "When you're adapting something and the characters are really well-drawn and already great, that only helps me and makes me look good," he laughs. "Or, if there's a great line in the comic, and there are many, just use it." He also relished the opportunity to bring a lesser-known work to a larger audience. "That's what makes it so much fun," he continues. "It's a great found treasure that not a lot of people know about, and it's my job to take the wonderful stuff and throw it out there."

One comic known to most moviegoers is Marvel's *Spider-Man*. Vanderbilt was hired to write the fourth installment of the highly successful franchise for Sony. While all principals involved in the project lauded his draft, original series director Sam Raimi and star Tobey Maguire had to drop out due to scheduling issues. Rather than wait, Sony scrapped the project and decided to reboot the franchise with a young Peter Parker. Proving their confidence in Vanderbilt, he was hired to write the reboot as well. Though he is disappointed *Spider-Man 4* probably won't make it to the screen, he is happy to remain with the franchise. "It's been such a great opportunity to work with all these people," he says, "and I think people will enjoy the one we're working on now." **CS**



## Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps

Screenplay by Allan Loeb\*

Based on characters created by Stanley Weiser & Oliver Stone

**PART OF THE** decade, screenwriter Allan Loeb was having trouble breaking into the studio system. Feeling dejected, he thought he should begin working on a Plan B. He ended up getting his license to become a stockbroker, but before he could ever take up the profession, he sold his first script and has been a successful screenwriter ever since, penning *Things We Lost in the Fire* and co-writing *21*. Little did he know that just a few years later, he would be back in the financial world — as the writer for the sequel to Oliver Stone's 1987 classic *Wall Street*.

Loeb was approached by Fox in the summer of 2008 to revisit a *Wall Street* sequel written by Stephen Schiff. "The financial crisis was really picking up at the time," Loeb recalls, "and they wanted a new script to tailor itself to that." He pitched his ideas over lunch, where Fox exec Alex Young gave him the good news: The studio loved it, but he still had to pitch to Gordon Gekko himself, Michael Douglas, the star of the original film.

In a scene reminiscent of when green stockbroker Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) pitches Gekko some stocks on Gekko's birthday, Loeb pitched to Douglas on the actor's own

birthday. Douglas loved it and signed on immediately. But Stone, the original's director, was on record, both publicly and privately, saying he didn't think a sequel to *Wall Street* was necessarily justified.

Before sitting down to pen the script, Loeb spent a lot of time in New York in the fall of 2008, interviewing investment bankers whose worlds were imploding. Their mood, however, was upbeat. "They were excited," Loeb laughs, "because I was interviewing them for the sequel to THE bible of the financial world." Loeb is quick to point out, though, that his goal was not to make this film about the financial crisis, but rather to use it as a backdrop for the movie's plot. "I didn't want to give a message to the American people or to Wall Street in general," he says. "What I did want to do was write a great sequel to a great movie with a great character."

The plot Loeb created, titled *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, is set 23 years after the first film. Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) has just been released from prison into a very different Wall Street than the one he left. Gekko is viewed as a dinosaur by his contemporaries who no longer commands the respect he once

did. He also tries to repair his relationship with his estranged daughter, Winnie (Carey Mulligan). Meanwhile, Winnie's fiancé Jacob (Shia LaBeouf) suspects the death of his mentor was at the hand of his hedge fund manager and enlists Gordon's help in proving it.

Loeb's writing process begins with a rough outline where he sketches only basic story elements, which he calls "islands." "Almost all of my actual writing is done on the page," he explains. "But I also do a lot of writing not at my computer." Loeb structures much of the screenplay in his head while taking walks or even while sitting in L.A. traffic. "I do so much planning in my head that when I sit down at the keyboard, it flows pretty quickly," he continues. "I can write eight pages in a day and yet it may only take me two hours." His quick fingers helped him meet Fox's hard deadline for the film, as Loeb hammered out a draft in six weeks.

A tough challenge for Loeb and the producers was to make the relationship between Gekko and Jacob drastically different from that of Gekko and Bud Fox in the original. They were aided by the fact that in today's world, a man like Bud Fox wouldn't exist. "The guys on Wall Street now have grown up there and were making hundreds of millions of dollars in their twenties," Loeb says. "And that's where Jacob is coming from. He's not corruptible like Bud was because, perhaps, he may already be a little corrupted." Loeb also wanted to reverse the roles in the film. "It wasn't about this wide-eyed kid who wants Gordon to get him in the game. Now Jacob is the one in the game and Gordon is on the outside."

Rather than be fearful of tackling an iconic figure such as Gordon Gekko, Loeb found the challenge invigorating. "Gordon has a very distinct, very great and very fun voice to write," he says. "Bringing that to the page was a blast." He received high praise from Douglas who, upon completion of the script, told Loeb that he really nailed Gordon. "That felt great to hear," Loeb says. "Another wonderful surprise also awaited Loeb at the end of the process. The film's producer, Edward Pressman, passed a draft of the script to Stone who, Pressman told Loeb, "flipped out." Stone signed on to direct, marking his first sequel as a director. "He said this is something he didn't think could exist," Loeb says. "So him coming aboard and validating everything was a really good shock to have. He brought instant credibility to the piece and that was really exciting for me." **CS**

\*Writing credits not final at presstime.

The Hatter offers Alice a chair.

MAD HATTER  
Here a chair!

THE DOGHOUSE  
There's no room.

ALICE  
There's plenty of room.

Alice sits down in an empty chair. The Hare screams suddenly.

MARCH HARE  
Not there! Can't you see the dishes are dirty? And there's no time to wash them! We're already late for tea! Move down! Move down!

They all get up and move down one place. The Hatter holds the chair for Alice again. He studies her.

MAD HATTER  
You don't look anything like yourself.

And yet, there's something very familiar about him.

ALICE  
How we met!

He smiles enigmatically.

CHESHIRE CAT  
Now I've brought Alice to you, you can't say I've done nothing for the cause.

MAD HATTER  
(astonished!)  
Yes, thank you for the heroic effort. We'll take the rest of revolution from here.

CHESHIRE CAT  
You'll pardon me if I don't give a publisher's error who wears the crown. The Red Queen has never bothered me.

The Hatter angrily slams his flat onto the table.

MAD HATTER  
No matter that she's enslaved

35

half the population!

CHESHIRE CAT  
I don't know any of them personally.

MAD HATER  
No matter that she stole the crown from her sister!

CHESHIRE CAT  
The White Queen should have put up a better fight.

MAD HATTER  
No matter the Red Queen rules with fear, terror and torture!

CHESHIRE CAT  
I fail to see what any of that has to do with us.

MARCH HARE  
He failed! He must be punished! Shall we butter his ears?

The Hare picks up a butter knife. The Hatter puts a hand to his ear, speaking Dutch.

MAD HATTER  
Daggeter weel, theebey. Cheese being slurried.

CHESHIRE CAT  
(laughing)  
Dutch!

MAD HATTER  
You are, Chester. You always have been. You'll never change.

CHESHIRE CAT  
And you're always so angry. Terence. I remember when you used to enjoy life. You used to do the best Butterbaker to all of Witsend.

The Hatter's smile is brief and bitter-sweet.

MAD HATTER  
On the Frabjous Day, when the White Queen wears the crown again. On that day I'll Butterbake.

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The Hatter and the Cat look at each other like bitter, estranged brothers.

CHESHIRE CAT  
Look after that arm, Alice.

He disappears. Alice turns to the others.

ALICE  
I want you to know, right off. I'm not sleeping anything.

THE DOGHOUSE  
As if you could.

ALICE  
There must be another way for me to get back to where I came from.

MAD HATTER  
No other way. It's stay the Jabberwocky with the Worpel.

MAD HATTER (CONT.)  
sent at Wolling on the Frabjous Day.

ALICE  
I'm not that Alice!

The Hare puts his hands on his ears and shouts.

MARCH HARE  
Stop all the shouting! I cannot abide the shouting!

He throws a teacup at her. She ducks to avoid it.

MAD HATTER  
But you're the only Alice we've got. Without you, the Resistance will fail.

The Hare/Knave taps March Hare on the shoulder again.

MARCH HARE  
Red Knight!

Hatter takes a small bottle from his pocket.

MAD HATTER  
Drink this.

ALICE

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Her.

They throw her down onto the table and force the liquid down her throat. The wine and grapes then shrink to three inches high. They stuff her forcefully into a teapot and cram her nose extremely over-large clothes in behind her. They gaze and caw.

ALICE  
(muffled)  
Stop!

They stop. Alice's head emerges from the pot.

ALICE  
You're suffocating me with my dress.

The March Hare picks up a sharp knife, wild-eyed.

MARCH HARE  
We'll back is off!

He backs most of her dress off and they stuff her back in. The Hatter closes the lid.

MAD HATTER (I)  
Watch your head.

EXT. THE TEAPOT - DAY

It's dim inside, except for a stream of light from the spout. She hangs on the lid.

ALICE  
Let me out!

EXT. THE TEA PARTY - DAY (CONT.)

MAD HATTER  
(to the Hare/Knave)  
Gollywoggyva.

The Hatter does a headstand in his chair. The Hare lays on the table. The Bloodhound runs in, nose to the ground, followed by Stayn and the Knights.

MAD HATTER  
Greetings, gentlemen.

KNAVE OF HEARTS  
well, if it's not my favorite cup of tea.

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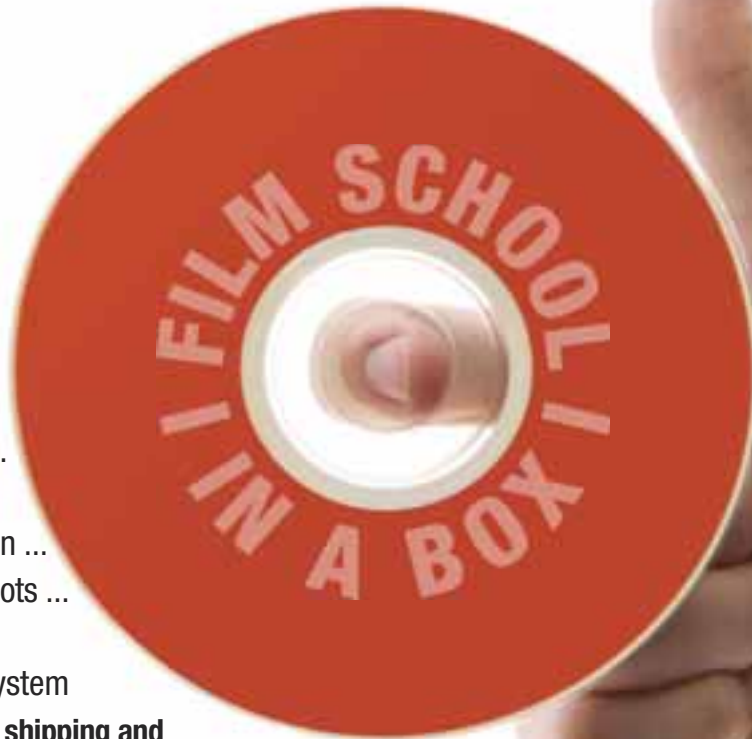
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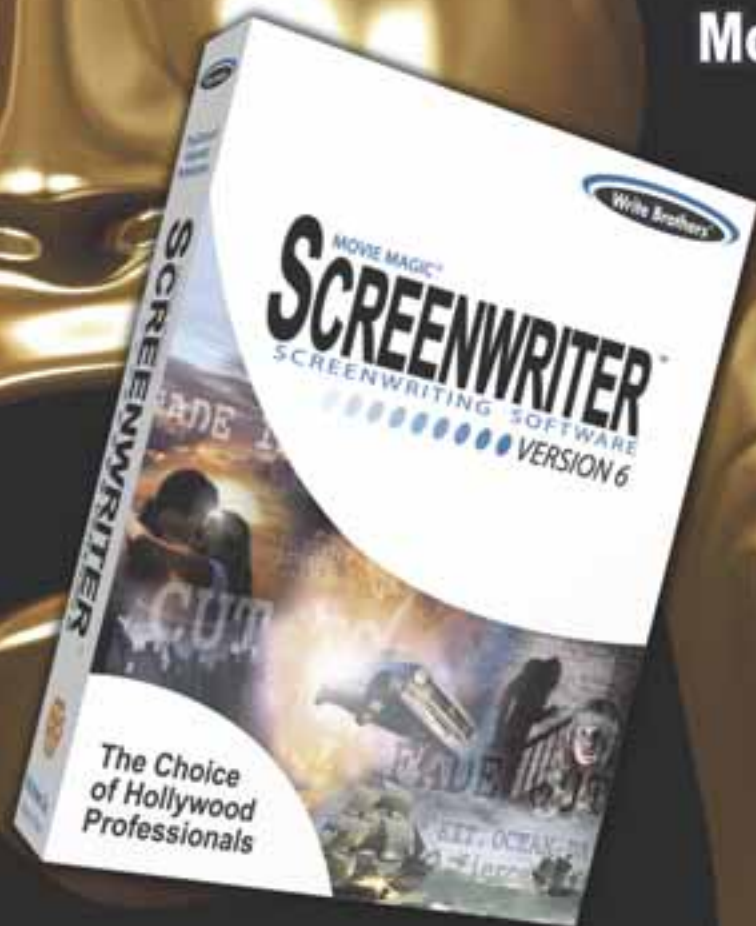
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