

So you want to come out to LA, huh?

Are you sure?

I mean, you've heard the rumors, right? That the industry is cutthroat and vicious, where your bosses will yell at you and make you do humiliating things.

You've seen [Entourage](#), right? You're probably going to end up working for [Ari Gold](#).

Because that's what the industry is.

A shit hole of a world filled with bitter, fast-paced people who expect you to be bitter and fast-paced too.

Well peeps...here's the deal: It's not like that at all.

At least not in my experience...

...and it's that very experience that I'm going to share with you in a series of columns.

But first, a warning or two:

There is no straight, easy answer on how to get into the industry and there are literally a billion avenues that you can take. BUT, there are certain things you can do to help your case no matter what road you're on. "Universals," if you will. That's the point of this column. To touch on the universal things that everyone has to know to survive. If you know those, then you can succeed no matter what door you find your foot in. Don't worry, I'll point them out along the way.

Second, I'm pretty blunt with a very colorful array of blue-collar words in my arsenal. That being said, I'll always be honest and will definitely spout such honesty with an array of "fucks," "shits," and whatever other word I think appropriately paints the picture I'm trying to convey.

With that out of the way, are you still with me?

Good.

Let's go back to the beginning...

In 2006, I was afforded the opportunity to attend the [Austin Film Festival](#). For those of you who are unfamiliar, I suggest you become familiar. The AFF is THE place to be if you want to learn, talk to or pretty much stalk working screenwriters.

It's here that I met my first contact in the industry: [Jessica Bendinger](#).

At the time, Jessica was at the AFF to promote her film [Stick It!](#) which she had written and directed.

First, about two weeks prior to Austin, a friend had convinced me to rent **Stick It!** and watch it. I'm fairly certain there was a bit of negotiation...as in "fine, but then you have to watch [Swamp Thing](#) with me" or maybe it was a little bit more, um...well, ahem...personal than that. Wink Wink.

Anyway, I had seen [Bring it On](#) in the past but still knew nothing about Jessica or **Stick It!** In fact all I really knew about **Stick It!** was that it was written and directed by the woman who wrote **Bring it On** and that it wasn't called "gym-nice-tics." (See the trailer or better yet, see the movie if you want to be in on the joke.)

We sat down and watched it and I have to say...I loved it. It was pretty fucking good. The scene I loved the most was the montage training sequence. Sure, every sports movie has one, but Jessica had redefined it. It's actually quite amazing. Little did I know how much this specific scene would play such a part in my life.

So why did I tell you this story? I'm getting to it...calm the fuck down.

Through a weird twist, I ended up at a panel on the Art of Pitching and the two panelists were Jessica Bendinger and [John August](#).

During the Q&A a woman stood up and asked Jessica about pitching **Bring it On**, if it was hard for a woman pitching a movie that only appealed to a very small demographic...teenage girls. Jessica said it was very difficult and used an anecdote to aid her point. According to her, one executive told her that "chicks don't go to the movies."

Anyone seen those [Twilight: Eclipse](#) numbers lately? I'm going to go out on a limb and say that there probably not too many dudes camped out in front of the Nokia Theater for the last Twilight Premiere.

I went up to meet Jessica after the panel. She was just a phenomenal person during the panel and I wanted to tell her how much I enjoyed what she had to say. Plus, I really wanted to ask her how she wrote that montage sequence. It was so fresh and original that I wanted to find out if she wrote it all out or had it in her head and just wrote "Groovy Montage Sequence" in the script and left it at that. (The answer? She wrote it all out.)

I was about to introduce myself when Jessica grabbed my outstretched hand...

"Hi! I'm Jessica! What's your name?"

I tell her my name and then I tell her the following:

"You know, there was a question about your demographic and I just want you to know: I'm 28, single, straight and I've seen both **Bring it On** and **Stick It!**"

Jessica laughs. Then I add...

"And just so you know, neither were for masturbatory purposes."

Jessica laughs even harder and replies with a "thank god."

Boom! Friends.

She told me that I should come to her panel the following day. We exchange pleasantries and I was off.

After her panel the next day, I stood in line to chat with her again. Just to say thank you and ask her if I had any questions, could I send them to her via some of the chat boards I found out she posted in.

Plus...I had one more question up my sleeve.

I wait my turn to re-introduce myself. I'm not an idiot. These people meet hundreds of random people a day. There's no way she's going to remember my name.

I'm about to say my name when she turns to me and says:

"Hi Manny. Glad you came out. How was this panel compared to the one yesterday?"

Wow. Is this woman cool or what? I told her what I thought bluntly. The panel today was weak compared to the one yesterday, but it was still interesting.

Then I ask my question...

"I have to ask you a *really* geeky question, if you don't mind."

"Shoot," she says.

"I just wanted to know...what did you think of the Rock's performance of your dialog in [Be Cool?](#)"

She LOL's big time and responds with:

"Do you know that no one has ever asked me that?" then follows with, "it was the funniest part of that movie."

I agree. We chat for a minute or two. I get her email and say our goodbyes.

And that was that.

I had a friend in the industry.

At the end of the festival, I sent her a nice email thanking her for her time and telling her that the pitching panel was the best panel (and the most informative) of the festival and look forward to talking to her again.

She responds by telling me that I was one of the few people that she met that really seemed to know my shit.

We became email buddies, checking in from time to time to see what was going on.

Jessica would be the driving force that would lead me to where I am today. For that though, you have to wait to read how the story plays out.

So what are the lessons from this story?

Number 1: BE YOURSELF!

Hollywood is full of fake pricks. Why would you want to be another one?

Let's face facts. Fake pricks do very well. But only for a short time. Do you want to make your money up front and end up telling the stories of how you "used to be in the industry back in the day," or do you want a career in this business?

I don't know about you but I want to be someone that people want to continuously work with, not someone that gets a shitty reputation. Sooner or later the "you'll never work in this town again" phrase will get attached to you and no one wants that.

Now, there is a flip side to that coin. Some people are just socially awkward and lack any ability to be charming. Telling Jessica Bendinger that I didn't use her movies to jack off to really could have gone either way. In someone else's voice, it could have gotten security involved. Sometimes, the inability to be relaxed can make you sound VERY creepy.

Which brings me to lesson...

Number 2: RELAX!

These are just people too. They are artists, putting things out into the ether. They don't know if it's going to be good or not. It's been widely recorded via [twitter](#) and [facebook](#) that successful people such as [Kevin Smith](#) and [Diablo Cody](#) worry about their box office numbers on opening weekend. Like seriously worry.

Isn't that what you do when you give your friends your stuff to read? You can't tell me you don't pace a little when your boyfriend first reads your script. Your labor of love.

What makes you think success makes that go away?

Writers are writers. The shitty fucked up habits you have they have too. Don't believe me? Catch a Creative Screenwriting [podcast](#) sometime. Writers are fucked up introverts. It's what we do.

When you meet these people. Keep that in mind. You don't have to be arrogant about it, but you can't be all "um" and "uh" either. Just relax. It also helps if...

Number 3: YOU KNOW YOUR SHIT!

Nothing irritates me more than people who don't know their shit.

And it happens ALL the time.

I got in with Jessica because I saw **Stick It!** and referenced specific scenes within it. I got on her good side by talking about her dialog in another movie.

Do you know that I went to film school with a guy who had NEVER seen [The Godfather](#)?

Can we say WTF?

Between film school and my time in Hollywood, I've heard the following:

"I've never seen any of the Lord of the Rings movies, because they aren't really my thing."

One girl proceeded to pitch me [West Side Story](#) and didn't know it. Then, when that pitch was going south, pitched me [Crossroads](#), the [Britney Spears](#) movie.

My favorite is the following conversation:

HER: "I'm a huge [Scorsese](#) fan."

ME: "Awesome. What did you think of [The Departed](#)?"

HER: "**The Departed**? What's that?"

ME: "Um, the Scorsese flick with [Leonardo DiCaprio](#), [Matt Damon](#) and [Mark Whalberg](#)?"

HER: "Who's Mark Whalberg?"

Yeah...she's in Hollywood. Working at production companies. Going to film school at USC.

The scary part? She's probably reading your scripts.

You want to make it in this business? Fucking know your shit.

See the good movies and see the shitty ones. I watch, on average, 8-10 movies a week. Last week, I watched [She's Out of my League](#), [Kick Ass](#), [Repo Men](#), [Wolfman](#), [Warlock](#), [Black Dynamite](#), [The Losers](#), [Cop Out](#), and went to the movies to see [Inception](#) and [Cyrus](#).

What did you do?

Do you know what musicians do? They listen to music.

Do you know what authors do? They read.

So why do filmmakers think they get a free fucking pass?

Study your craft.

I'll say it again: Study your craft.

One more time for the cheap seats: Study your craft.

In fact write that on a post it and put it on your TV.

Watch everything. Know your shit. And that goes for you snobs too.

I think it's great that you love [Godard](#).

It's pretty sweet that you're an avid [Fellini](#) watcher.

[Truffaut](#)? Yeah, I love him too.

What? [Tarkovsky](#)? Yeah yeah, I get it, you're a film student...but guess what? On Monday? After opening weekend? The office that you WANT to work in is talking only about one thing.

The box office numbers.

And number one? Did not belong to Fellini, Truffaut, [Antonioni](#) or any other director that is currently released by Criterion.

Number one belongs to films like **Inception**, [How to Train Your Dragon](#), [Toy Story 3](#), and God forbid, fucking **Twilight**.

Do you want to be the one person out of the loop?

Study the greats, but watch the currents.

Know your shit and lastly...

Number 4: KNOW HOW TO FIND IT!

Here are several things in this article that MIGHT be obscure:

Be Cool.

John August.

The Austin Film Festival.

Crossroads (the Britney Spears movie)

And God forbid...

Jessica Bendinger

Martin Scorsese

Bring it On

Stick It!

The Departed.

The Godfather.

Or...

Mark Wahlberg.

If ANY of the above are things you have never heard of, find out about them NOW.

No, literally stop reading this shit and get your ass on the net.

It's called IMDB.com.

Use it.

It's called fucking Google!*

USE IT!

If there was anything mentioned in this article that you didn't get. Find out.

[Hulu](#). [Netflix](#). [Blockbuster](#). A bootleg from Chinatown.

SOMEone will have the movie you're looking for.

Find it. Watch it. Become informed. On your own.

Till next time...

**Really? You wanted me to hyperlink Google? That's just lazy.*