

As many of you know, a couple of weeks ago I attended the Inktip Pitch Summit. While there I met a young woman from out of town who, like everyone else there, was trying to get her scripts read.

At one point she pitched to me and one of her ideas sorta sounded like it might be interesting, but as always with me, it depends on the writing. So I asked her for her first 15 and we'd go from there.

Later on, during the wrap party, I went outside to find friends who were smoking on the patio. As it turns out they were sitting with this girl shooting the shit.

I came up and we started talking about the craziness of the day and some of the shittier pitches we got throughout the day. As I'm sure I don't need to tell you, I don't give a fuck what I say in front of who so I have absolutely no problems making fun of writers in front of other writers.

Fair point to make, I'M a writer too...so it's not like I'm taking the executive high road here.

Anyway...she started asking about some of the crazy things writers do and as you know from reading this column, I have a lot of them.

So after hearing horror story after horror story, she said "Well I hope you like my script."

To which I replied, "It's all going to depend on the writing."

And she curses herself with the all time greatest curse a wannabe writer can give oneself...she states the following, "Well I know I can write."

I heard this line so many times from writers that I immediately cut her off and said "Yeah yeah, everyone claims they can write."

She was adamant.

"Well, I'm not like everyone else, I know I can write."

Look, let's face facts, if you can manage to put a sentence together, you can write. That being said a majority of the population "can write."

But it doesn't mean they should be screenwriters.

I've said this before and I'll say it again...screenwriting is HARD. There are so many things you can and can NOT do in a script. Then you add in the fact that you have to

paint a very specific visual picture with words. Plus there's character development and story arcs and subplots. Oh yeah and you have to get all of that right in 110 pages.

So yes. You might be a "writer" but it doesn't mean you can be a screenwriter.

More on that in a bit.

So I get her pages and sure as shit, they were crap.

Now I know a lot of you have a negative opinion of me and make certain assumptions of how I would be in real life.

Most of them are true. ;)

BUT, a lot of the times I try not to be a dick.

So here are the first few things that were red flags before I even read the pages.

- 1) she made the comment to me at the wrap party that she had over 30 completed scripts. Which, as I've stated before, is never a good sign because that usually means none of them have been rewritten. And I'd age her at about mid to late 20's...so yeah, these were written quickly.
- 2) she wrote the script in word. When I asked her about it, she told me that she her copy of magic movie screenwriter wasn't working. Now, I don't really care what tools you use. Nothing against Magic Movie...I've never used it and supposedly it's the program Matt and Ben used to write Good Will Hunting...but it's hard to take anyone too seriously that doesn't use Final Draft. The reality is, it's the industry standard. I didn't make it that way, it just is what it is. And if you want to get into the industry, then you should probably know what they're using, right? You want to be taken seriously, don't you? Then you need the tools. (to her credit, once I told her the industry standard was Final Draft she went out and got it.)

and...

- 3) She quickly became a "problem writer."

So what do I mean by the last part? It was clear that I left an impression on her at the wrap party. I made myself very vocal about the fact that I have high standards and she really wanted to live up to them. I'm not sure what the rest of the day looked like for her, but I'm going to guess from experience that not many people asked to see pages from her.

I did.

So I was her shot and she didn't want to fuck it up. Okay people, I want to make this very clear...BE CONFIDENT!

This town regularly chews up and spits out strong willed individuals...weak ones don't have a fucking chance. I want to see some fucking backbone and I tell you these stories for teaching purposes. LEARN FROM THEM.

Okay, so she didn't want to fuck it up and by having that thought in her head, what did she do?

Fuck it up.

Here's her first email to me...

*Hello Manny,*

*We met at the Inktip Summit on Saturday and at the Wrap Party. I'm the girl with 30 films. Anyway, I am sending you the first fifteen pages of The Black Crusade as you requested. Let's just hope that I am the good writer that you have been looking for. I would love to follow up with you soon.*

*Thank You For Your Consideration*

Okay, first mistake, before we even talk about the email...no attachment. I Know it happens, it's happened to me and it's embarrassing as shit. So how do you stop from making those mistakes?

Get into the habit of just checking off the shit you need to do. One of which is attaching your script!

Now the email...

The line "Let's just hope that I am the good writer that you have been looking for" doesn't exude confidence.

Now, before any of you jump down the hypocritical path let's chat about my comment in the beginning. The curse of "I know I can write."

That statement isn't confident and I'll tell you why...it's a shitty writer cliché. Those words have been tarnished by every fucktard writer out there and when you use them you get lumped with them.

It's a curse. Don't use them. There are better ways to be confident.

First lesson, less is more. Reread the email and take the line in question out. It would have gone from “here are the pages you requested” right to “let’s follow up soon.”

That can easily be read like “here’s the pages bitch, call me” and then dropping the mic and walking off stage.

Cool. Respect.

So I write her and tell her no attachment...which I didn’t have to do and others won’t.

She responds with: *“Let’s try this and see if it works. Hope you like it. I do hope I am a good enough writer for your taste.”*

Hmmm...the desperation to please is overwhelming.

So I read the pages and they’re pretty bad. Her opening sequence was 12 pages of guys talking. And it’s supposed to be an action movie. In fact, she even has characters talking about action that happened instead of showing it.

So I tell her that’s a problem and she should start out showing the theft instead of having people talk about it.

She thanks me for her notes, understood what I meant and told me she would send me the rewrite after she did it.

Presumptuous, but alright...let’s see how well she can take notes.

45 minutes later she sent me the new draft.

Okay, that doesn’t show initiative, that shows me that you’re going to do a rush job to make me happy.

You think that’s what I want?

Her new opening action sequence was SO poorly written it was sad. I don’t even know how to describe it other than it read as if she had written it in...well...45 minutes right before class.

It was half a page and the characters when into a building did some stuff and came back out but she didn’t bother to write any of it out. It was basically like I just said it...they go in, rob the place and escape. Okay? Rob how? Steal what? Can a brotha get a scene heading up in this bitch?

Apparently not.

Plus the formatting was all fucked up because she didn't take the time to learn final draft...so she sent me a copy and paste job where all of the formatting was off. Her 110 page script was like 277 due to all of the extra spaces that were present.

Presentation people. Look like you know what's up.

Now, I TRIED not to be harsh in my criticism but that's not always easy to do when you're offering ANY kind of criticism.

I basically told her that the writing wasn't up to snuff and that she had a lot of work to do. I encouraged her and told her that anyone can become a better writer so she had that going for her. I told her that it was scary that she had 29 other scripts out there because if this one was in this shape, those couldn't necessarily be better.

This was her response:

*I'm sorry you feel that way, but you obviously don't realize how determined I am about my work. I have been pushing at this for over ten years and I will continue to do so. I told myself despite what your decision would be about my script that I would not let that dampen my dreams. I believe in my work and I am confident "not cocky" that my work will be a success. I do appreciate your interest and I am sorry that it doesn't work for you.*

I was deeply fascinated with the fact that she had been "pushing at this for over ten years" and that she didn't want my response, no matter what it was, to "dampen her dreams."

Which leads me to a question, and I want all of you to take this seriously because I'm really interested...

Why do we all want this dream?

After I read her response, I started to question myself...why do I want this? Is it REALLY a dream of mine to be a screenwriter? Why am I doing this.

So now I want to throw it out there to anyone and everyone who reads and are writers. Why are you doing this, what's your dream, what level of success do you want? I really want to dig into this and I want all of us to learn something from this. Maybe we'll discover something interesting, maybe we won't.

So send me your stories. Who are you? What's your dream as a screenwriter? and Why are you chasing it? Be as honest as you can. I don't give a fuck if it's because you want fame and glory or if you want to try and change the world.

Send it to be by next week and we'll start a dialog about why we're all crazy enough to deal with this bullshit.

One last thing...quick shout out to J Gideon Sarantinos who has a screenwriting blog, albeit a "clean" one. He gave me a nice little shout out and I want to return the favor. Check out his blog about me and what he's learned as well a lot of other great tips at: <http://gideonsway.wordpress.com/2010/11/18/confessions-of-a-hollywood-reader/>

Glad to see the word is spreadin'!

Till next week...