

## I WROTE A 120 PAGE SCRIPT BUT CAN'T WRITE A LOGLINE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A LOGLINE

by Christopher Lockhart

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Upon completing a screenplay, most writers will set out to market their work. This can be a Sisyphean task in a town where tens of thousands of scripts compete for the attention of busy agents, stressed producers, and overworked executives. In a business where supply exceeds demand, it would be impossible for an executive to read every script on the circuit.

Each year, the Writers' Guild West registers over 40,000 scripts. (This does not include the screenplays registered with the WGA East, the U.S. Copyright Office, thousands of unregistered scripts, and the endless stream of ideas that are pitched yearly in the hopes of landing development deals.) The majority of these scripts will attempt to make the rounds but only a handful will be purchased. The end of the year does not result in these 40,000 scripts disappearing. They continue to fight their way through the maze while another 40,000 enter the system, and so on and so on. As a result, there are hundreds of thousands of screenplays struggling for success.

Professional screenwriters with proven track records make up for the majority of spec sales, narrowing the entrance for aspiring pros. Despite all the gloom and doom, aspirants can (and do) land credible agents, development deals, and spec sales. The first step in this process is enticing someone within the business to read the screenplay. This arduous journey usually begins with the “**pitch**.”

“**Pitching**” is the art of presenting the story in a COMPACT and intriguing manner that creates a desire within the listener, resulting in the solicitation of the screenplay. Whether one pitches the story verbally or in writing, the scribe must successfully present his sprawling screenplay in a way that imparts the dramatic heart and soul of the piece without confusing or boring his audience. A common tool utilized by both writers and executives is the **LOGLINE**.

### A LOGLINE IS....

A logline **conveys the dramatic story of a screenplay in the most abbreviated manner possible**. It presents the major throughline of the dramatic narrative **without character intricacies and sub-plots**. It is the story boiled down to its base. It's a window into the story. A good logline is one sentence. More complicated screenplays may need a two sentence logline. There are available templates to assist writers, but theses aids often leave the logline sounding pedagogical rather than dramatic and slick. A writer must learn the elements of how to construct a logline.



As simple as this seems, it can be difficult for a writer to extract the center of his story to create a logline. A writer bonds to all aspects of her narrative, and bias can prevent the scribe from isolating which story elements are crucial for logline presentation and which elements can be temporarily brushed aside. Crafting a logline takes a great deal of practice and an understanding of basic dramatic structure. Often, the writer must exhaust all possibilities in order to devise the perfect logline.

A logline must present:

**who** the story is about (**protagonist**)  
**what** he strives for (**goal**)  
**what** stands in his way (**antagonistic force**).

Sometimes a logline must include a brief **set-up**. A logline does not tell the entire story. It merely uses these three (sometimes four) major story elements to depict the dramatic narrative in an orderly and lucid manner. For instance, a logline for THE WIZARD OF OZ may read:

*After a twister transports a lonely Kansas farm girl to a magical land, she sets out on a dangerous journey to find a wizard with the power to send her home.*

## PROTAGONIST

When referring to the protagonist in a logline, **do not use a character name**. Character names are meaningless to the reader and can crowd and confuse the logline. The one exception would be if the character were a famous person (like George Washington). Instead of using a name, use an occupation or life-status like politician or teenager, brain surgeon or homeless man.

Use a **well-chosen adjective** to bring greater clarity to the character like a “liberal” politician or an “angst ridden” teenager. The adjective should be accurate in describing who the character is. For instance, the farm girl heroine in THE WIZARD OF OZ (Dorothy) could be considered “lonely” or “neglected.” These words will resonant with greater significance (like irony) when juxtaposed to her goal (to get back home).

## GOAL

**The character’s major goal is the engine of a screenplay**, and it must be present in the logline. In THE WIZARD OF OZ, Dorothy has many goals. She must protect the ruby slippers; she must meet the wizard; she must retrieve the broomstick of the wicked witch. But her major goal is to return to Kansas. It is this goal that the entire dramatic story hinges upon. This is the heart of the dramatic narrative. A screenplay’s major goal is most often found at the end of the FIRST ACT. This is the turning point in classically structured screenplays. **The character’s goal, whether it is physical or psychological, should be established by the end of the first stanza.** (If the writer is unclear as to what the



character's major goal is, he must examine the script's climax. The climax is the moment where the protagonist achieves or fails her goal.)

Often, writers introduce the character goal late in the screenplay. This is a fatal flaw. If Dorothy landed in Oz at the end of act two (or even at mid-point), one could not legitimately state the story is about her desire to return to Kansas. If more than half the story sets up the character goal, then the dramatic narrative is about the set-up itself and not the goal. To say that UNFAITHFUL or GOSFORD PARK are stories about murder would be inaccurate, because the homicides occur deep in act two.

## ACCURATE PORTRAIT

For example, many would construct a logline for IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE like this:

*A suicidal family man is given the opportunity to see what the world would be like if he had never been born.*

However, this is disingenuous, because this story element is not introduced until the final third of the film. Hence, this is *not* what the story is about. IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE is the story of a small-town man who yearns to escape his mundane piece of Americana for success in the big city. (His goal, which is internal, is to find success.) Sadly, the script's third act hook is more intriguing than the throughline of the story. But it would be death for a writer to use the logline above because an executive would expect this hook early in the screenplay and could be disappointed to find it introduced on page ninety instead of page thirty.

**A logline cannot simply ignore the first two thirds of the story.** However, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE has such a memorable third act, one must include it in the logline, which could go like this:

*A family man struggles to escape small town America for a more successful life in the big city. When his constant efforts fail, he contemplates suicide but his guardian angel visits and the man experiences what the world would be like if he had never been born.*

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE is a screenplay that would be severely rewritten today, because modern story executives would insist that the intriguing hook be introduced at the end of the first act and not the beginning of the third. Regardless, this new and improved logline is a more accurate portrait of the actual story boiled down to its base.

## ANTAGONISTIC FORCE AND STAKES

The logline must present the **antagonistic force** – the story element that prevents the protagonist from reaching his goal. The writer needs to be careful here and not weigh down the logline with too many details. In the logline example for THE WIZARD OF OZ, the



phrase “dangerous journey” intimates the antagonism. Some purists may take offense in omitting the wicked witch.

However, mentioning another character in the logline can crowd it. **The trick is to create a logline that is succinct but not sparse.** When crafting the first draft of the logline, a writer may want to throw in everything (including the wicked witch) and then whittle and winnow until it reads smoothly and effectively. In the IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE example, there is no mention of misanthropic Mr. Potter. One could certainly use him as the antagonistic force in the logline. However, here the family man’s constant failure (as he sees it) serves as the antagonistic force. **It must be clear that the antagonistic force is an obstacle to the major goal.** It must imply that something is at stake; it must suggest that something can be lost. The reader must get the sense that death (literal or figurative) is a risk.

## SET-UP

Another element that may be necessary in the logline is a **set-up**. For instance, some screenplays have complicated worlds (like sci-fi), and it may be necessary to describe that world. In some cases, the hero could have a “past” - like a secret or a scar - that must be included in order for the logline to work. For instance, it is imperative to include the concept of “precrime” in a logline for MINORITY REPORT.

*In a future where criminals are arrested before the crime occurs, a despondent cop struggles on the lam to prove his innocence for a murder he has not yet committed.*

Without the brief set-up, the logline would read like:

*A despondent cop struggles on the lam to prove his innocence for a murder he has not yet committed.*

To someone who knows nothing of the story, this would make little sense. Notice that the first logline does not go into the detail of “precrime,” nor does it mention it by name. For the purposes of the logline, we only need to understand “precrime’s” most basic function.

## CONCISE LOGLINE

**A logline is not a screenplay. It is merely a representation of the screenplay’s dramatic story.** The information needed to understand the screenplay - as a whole - is not necessary to understand the logline. A logline does not require the same information and details in order for it to be cogent. A logline is its own little story, and it only needs certain information in order for it to make sense. The loglines for THE WIZARD OF OZ and IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE introduce the protagonists and their goals with a minimal amount of additional information.

A logline consists of three major elements:



The **character**  
his **goal**  
the **antagonistic force**

When necessary, the logline will include information to establish a world or pertinent character facts. Try to present the logline in a linear fashion – even if the screenplay is presented in a non-linear manner. Linear fashion would introduce the set-up first, then the protagonist and his goal, and the antagonistic force. Of course, there can be variations of this.

## DRAMATIC QUESTIONS

Screenplays ask **dramatic questions** throughout the course of the story. These questions create tension and motivate the reader to turn to the next page. **A logline does the same thing in miniature: it raises questions that evoke curiosity and stir up potentiality.** In THE WIZARD OF OZ logline, one may be curious about the “mysterious land” or wonder what the “dangerous journey” entails. Perhaps, an executive will be motivated to know if the lonely farm girl meets “the wizard” and wonder what he may be like. Hopefully, the executive will want to learn whether or not the girl finds her way back to Kansas. For this reason, **a logline should avoid revealing the script’s conclusion.** This should remain part of the intrigue.

Writers often claim the best part of their screenplay is the “surprise” ending, and they feel the need to include it in the logline. A recent screenplay with a surprise ending is THE SIXTH SENSE. An effective logline for this story may go:

*A psychologist struggles to cure a troubled boy who is haunted by a bizarre affliction – he sees dead people.*

David Benioff’s STAY (a script that sold for 1.8 million dollars) also has a surprise ending. The logline could read like:

*As a psychiatrist races against time to prevent the suicide of a patient, he unexpectedly finds himself trapped in a surreal and frightening world.*

In these examples, the “surprise” ending is not included. **A good logline (like the screenplay itself) should boast a story that is not dependent on its ending.** Providing too much information in a logline can backfire by giving the executive more information in which to find fault. A brief but well constructed logline should tease and raise many questions to successfully pique the interest of the executive.

## ACTIVELY STRUGGLE WITH THE LOGLINE

A logline must **convey the action of the story** and carefully chosen words must be used to give the logline **momentum**. The most useful word in writing a logline is “**struggle**,”



because it presents the **goal (and scope)** of the story and conveys **drama**. Conflict (the basis of drama) is inherent in the word “struggle.”

JAWS:

*After a series of grisly shark attacks, a sheriff **struggles** to protect a busy summer beach community against the bloodthirsty monster, in spite of the greedy chamber of commerce.*

ORDINARY PEOPLE:

*After being institutionalized for a suicide attempt, a teen **struggles** for sanity and closure but must overcome his greatest adversary first – his mother.*

CHICAGO:

*After murdering her lover, an aspiring singer **struggles** for stardom by using her crime as a stepping-stone to fame and fortune.*

**Always keep the protagonist active in the forefront of the logline.** The protagonist must be responsible for the thrust of the story. In the logline for JAWS, it is clear that the sheriff has a goal, and this goal is the thrust of the narrative. In the ORDINARY PEOPLE logline, the struggle of the suicidal teen moves the story forward. (Timothy Hutton, who plays the teen and won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, is clearly not a supporting player within the actual dramatic narrative. His “supporting actor status” was merely a political ploy to ensure him an Oscar nomination.) In the CHICAGO example, the felonious singer actively pursues stardom.

## FOREGROUND VERSUS BACKGROUND

Keeping the protagonist on the logline’s front burner is an important point. Aside from it demonstrating the dramatic engine of the story, **it allows the executive to envision the lead role (hopefully a “star vehicle”)**, which increases the possibilities of solicitation and even a sale. Putting the protagonist in the background of a logline would look like this:

*A disturbed boy seeks the help of a psychologist as he struggles to free himself of a bizarre affliction – he sees dead people.*

Although the most intriguing element in THE SIXTH SENSE is the boy’s dilemma, the story does not belong to him, and this logline would be an inaccurate portrait of the dramatic narrative. It is necessary for the logline to demonstrate that the protagonist is doing the struggling. In this example, it is the boy’s struggle. The earlier (and more accurate) logline for THE SIXTH SENSE puts the onus of the struggle onto the psychologist (where it belongs), because he is the protagonist.



## EXTERNAL VERSUS INTERNAL

Since a screenplay provides the story for a motion picture – a visual medium – it is important that the logline **convey visual/external aesthetics**. For example, **words like “decides,” “realizes,” “learns” should be avoided when constructing a logline** – especially when presenting the major conflict of the story. These words connote an *internal* process that is not wholly appealing to the cinema (or story executives). **If the crux of the screenplay is based on an internal process, the logline must present the conflict in an external and dramatic manner.**

HAMLET, perhaps the greatest drama ever written, is based on a decision. As a play, it uses soliloquies to externalize the thoughts of the protagonist - a device that is theatrical and not cinematic. (However, films use the voice-over.) Regardless, a writer should present this internal process in an active manner. A logline for HAMLET could go:

*After learning his father was murdered, a brooding prince struggles with whether or not to kill the culprit, his uncle - the new king.*

Ultimately, a writer who conceives a story for film may want to concoct a concept that is inherently **external/visual** in nature. It seems a sure thing that Hollywood powerbrokers would force William Shakespeare to reinvent HAMLET if the Bard were a modern day neophyte peddling his story as a spec script.

## OFFENSIVE VERSUS DEFENSIVE

Be sure the logline presents the **character as initiating the essential action of the story**. In THE FUGITIVE, it appears as if the title character is on the run. One might create a logline like:

*A doctor falsely accused of murder flees a relentless federal agent who is in hot pursuit.*

This problematic logline puts the protagonist on the defense and not the offense. He flees – which is a defensive maneuver. A closer look at the story reminds one that the falsely accused hero is in search of his wife’s killer. It is this goal that keeps him active and on the offensive. A healthier logline for THE FUGITIVE would read:

*A doctor - falsely accused of murdering his wife - struggles on the lam as he desperately searches for the killer with a relentless federal agent hot on his trail.*

## ENSEMBLE AS PROTAGONIST

If the screenplay features an ensemble as its protagonist (like THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN), the group can be presented as the protagonist.



*A group of gunslingers struggles to save a Mexican town from a murderous posse of banditos.*

A logline for THE WARRIORS could read like:

*After they are wrongfully accused of murder, a street gang struggles to get back to their home turf - as every rival gang in the city pursues them.*

THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE could go:

*After a luxury liner is capsized by a tidal wave, a group of survivors struggles to escape through the bow before the ship sinks.*

However, ensemble pieces often have one central character and the logline could be presented from his point-of-view. If one considers Yul Brenner the central character in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, the logline could read:

*A professional gunslinger organizes a unique posse that struggles to save a Mexican town from a murderous group of banditos.*

If Michael Beck were considered the central character in THE WARRIORS, the logline could read:

*After being accused of murder, a gang leader struggles to get his crew back to their home turf - as every rival gang in the city pursues them.*

If Gene Hackman is considered the central character in THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE, the logline could go:

*After a luxury liner is capsized by a tidal wave, a radical priest struggles to lead a group of survivors to escape through the bow before the ship sinks.*

Although both examples (featuring the group as protagonist or focusing on a central character) present accurate portraits of these stories, **it is smarter to concentrate the logline on the central character.** Again, this allows the executive to know that there is a star role at the forefront of the story, which always increases the overall worthiness of the project and whets the appetites of producers, agents, executives, and actors.

## SLICE-OF-LIFE AND THEMATIC LOGLINES

Slice-of-life screenplays are stories that employ a psychological goal as the dramatic engine instead of a physical goal. Physical goals (which create the “hero archetype”) are the preferred screenwriting modus operandi in Hollywood. Slice-of-life screenplays eschew Hollywood’s comfortable mode of structure and always depend on the quality of



writing versus the actual concept. For aspiring pros, writing these kinds of screenplays can make breaking into the business even more difficult.

The commercial appeal for slice-of-life stories is limited, and the basic concept is usually insignificant and fails to thrill when presented in a logline. Since most new writers need to capture the attention of an agent or producer via the logline, the slice-of-life scribe is in a difficult and unenviable position. Although the writing may be worthy of an Oscar, few may read the script if the logline/pitch fails to impress.

Sadly, an aspiring pro is better off having written a mediocre script with a strong premise rather than a strong script with a mediocre premise, because a strong premise (by means of the logline) could capture the attention of an executive. The executive's search for scripts is like a mating ritual. As human beings, we are superficially attracted to someone based on the package, without knowing anything about who the person is; it is the package that lures us in. A compelling logline lures in the executive. Stories that feature a hero archetype are like the super models of screenplays (in Hollywood) while a slice-of-life story is like the plain Jane, who may be the greatest girl on Earth but will probably sit home alone on Saturday night. Of course, plain Jane can find popularity and love, but she may have to sit out during the prom. As an aspiring pro, a writer wants his concept to be as attractive as possible. Despite this reality, spec slice-of-life screenplays are acquired and produced.

Often, a slice-of-life script may present several different storylines – all circling around a theme or a place (like NASHVILLE). Richard Curtis's LOVE ACTUALLY features many characters in several different stories depicting variations of love – all set during the Christmas season. There is no particular story in Curtis's script that takes precedence over another, so it is impossible to focus the logline on one specific storyline or character. Instead, the logline must present the theme of the piece – which in this case (simplistically speaking) is love. The logline could go like:

*A varied group of Brits struggles with the pleasures, pain, and power of love during the Christmas season.*

This logline may fail to thrill many, but it is an accurate representation of the screenplay. For a neophyte trying to push this logline, success could be elusive. However, for Richard Curtis (FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL, NOTTING HILL, BRIDGET JONES' DIARY), who doesn't need a logline to attract attention, it is no trouble at all. The logline for the Oscar winning GOSFORD PARK, which uses the countryside as a unifying element, could read:

*During a weekend jaunt at a British country house, servants – who must keep order and protocol - struggle to please their aristocratic employers until a murder threatens to disrupt the balance.*

A logline for the Oscar winning CRASH:



*Racial tension boils over during a twenty-four hour period in Los Angeles.*

Or Emilio Estevez's BOBBY:

*The lives of eclectic guests at the Ambassador Hotel intermingle during the hours leading up to the assassination of Robert Kennedy.*

Robert Altman's take on Garrison Keillor's A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION:

*The highs and lows of the cast and crew of a long running radio program during its final broadcast.*

These loglines use a theme or a specific time, place or event to create more intrigue. (Notice that all these stories take place over a compact period of time.)

**When writing a thematic based logline, avoid presenting the theme in a didactic manner.** When crafting a logline for a hero based story, avoid using theme at all. Audiences do not go to the movies to learn “there’s no place like home.” First and foremost, they go to the movies to be excited and moved by Dorothy’s journey in Oz. In other words, one should avoid this:

*After a twister transports a lonely farm girl to a magical land, she sets out on a dangerous journey to find a wizard with the power to send her home. After killing a wicked witch, she returns to her farm in Kansas happily observing that there is no place like home.*

In general, a writer may want to steer away from interpreting the deeper meaning of his drama for audiences. Allow audiences to experience it for themselves. Allow audiences to find their own meaning to the drama.

## LOGLINE VERSUS HIGH CONCEPT

Often writers develop a “high concept” to pitch. **A high concept is a premise that immediately conveys a movie (with a great deal of conflict) in fewer words than it takes to write a logline.** A high concept often uses extremes to engender the drama and scope of a movie. The high concept for LIAR, LIAR is a “lawyer that cannot tell a lie.” The high concept for O is OTHELLO in high school. A lawyer that cannot lie demonstrates an extreme situation. The same is true for OTHELLO in high school. The concept of setting the Shakespearean tragedy in school demonstrates extremes.

However, a “high concept” idea is not a logline. “A lawyer that cannot tell a lie” does not offer much in the way of the three (sometimes four) story elements. A proper logline for LIAR, LIAR could go:

*When his son wishes he will only tell the truth, an attorney, and pathological liar, is magically compelled to be honest for one day and struggles to win the biggest case of his career - without telling a lie.*



Also, do not confuse a movie poster tagline with a logline. A tagline is a catch phrase used in advertising. One of the most famous was created for JAWS II: “Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water....” This is amusing and gimmicky and great for a one-sheet. However, **a tagline does not demonstrate the necessary story elements to allow the reader to see the dramatic narrative.** A tagline fails to educate the reader on the story essentials.

## DIAGNOSIS AND PROGNOSIS

Skilled story executives can read a logline like a doctor reads a CAT scan. Based on one sentence, they can predict strengths and weaknesses in the screenplay. Often executives hear the writer say, “I’m not good at loglines, but my script is great.” A logline is merely a byproduct of the screenplay. **If the screenplay has systemic flaws, these flaws can appear as symptoms within the logline.** For instance, if a logline presents a passive protagonist, it seems certain that the screenplay will be slow and uneventful due to an inactive hero. If the logline fails to present a clear cut goal for the protagonist, the screenplay will often ramble with tedium. One reason writers grapple with loglines is because their stories are not well constructed. A writer who clearly understands his character, the goal, and the antagonist should be able to craft a logline with ease.

However, aspiring pros are often unclear of these basic dramatic elements; they do not include them in their narrative and, as a result, struggle with constructing the logline after the screenplay is finished. To avoid this problem, **a writer can craft his logline before he writes his screenplay.** A logline is a good place to start when brainstorming story ideas and it provides a simplistic map, insuring that the scribe has all the basic elements in place before he begins his journey.

## REAL LOGLINES, REAL CRITIQUES

### DR. P - Comedy

*A struggling advice columnist turns it around when an empty Dr. Pepper can begins giving him advice.*

This logline is sparse and lacks the necessary dramatic elements to allow one to see the real conflict and the arc/scope of the movie. Drama is about conflict, and this logline doesn’t depict conflict. Actually, it depicts the opposite. The advice columnist has been struggling (with something) but solves his problems thanks to a talking can of DR. PEPPER. But a logline should depict the PROBLEM the character must solve. And that is lacking here.



The logline needs to show how the soda can's advice causes CONFLICT in the life of the columnist – not how it makes life easier. How does the can of talking soda turn the columnist's life upside down?

### **GANSER SYNDROME - Psychological Thriller**

*A story about a psychiatrist with a brilliant mind who is intrigued by the minds of killers. He considers it a game to evaluate inmates for competency to stand trial. Until one inmate befriends him and the tables are turned in this chilling suspenseful thriller, when the killer finds his next victim.*

This logline is awkwardly written. It feels choppy – lacking a smooth flow. It features a SILENCE OF THE LAMBS concept but fails to present a dramatic through line. (A logline for SILENCE OF THE LAMBS could look like this: *In her struggle to save the kidnapped daughter of a senator from an elusive serial murderer, an FBI agent must consult with a brilliant forensic psychiatrist – who happens to be a convicted cannibal killer.*) In THE SILENCE... logline, we understand the protagonist's struggle, and we understand what is at stake. The "brilliant forensic psychiatrist" is the hook – the frosting on the cake. The logline for GANSER SYNDROME fails to show us the protagonist's struggle. It is this struggle that creates the throughline of a dramatic story. The log line gets into enigmatic territory with "and the tables are turned." What does this mean? The logline gets into hype by telling us that the thriller is "chilling" and "suspenseful" despite the fact that there is absolutely nothing chilling or suspenseful in the logline itself (other than the presence of those two words). Finally, "when the killer finds his next victim" makes little sense here. What killer? The inmate? This is all very confusing.

### **LAPUA - Thriller**

*Sharp-shooting FBI agent Taylor Ramsey tracks an elusive vigilante who is using an obscure, long-range rifle to pick off child killers. Her growing obsession with the "Sentinel Hill Sniper" compels her to match his shooting skills when a copycat killer is snared by the police and she ends up picking off one of the vigilante's potential targets to re-open the case.*

This is too wordy and could have been written more concisely for easier comprehension.



For instance, is the “elusive vigilante” the “Sentinel Hill Sniper?” If so, why not combine these elements in the first line: “Sharp-shooting FBI agent Taylor Ramsey tracks the Sentinel Hill Sniper, an elusive vigilante who uses an obscure long range rifle in his hunt for child killers.” However, both names (Taylor Ramsey and the Sentinel Hill Sniper) should be eliminated. Names mean nothing to a reader and weigh down the flow of the logline – as is definitely the case here. The second half of the log line is murky. (It actually took me a few minutes to understand all this – which does not bode well for the script.) This needs to be presented in a much more lucid fashion. There are simply too many details that are unnecessary for the comprehension of the logline. (The details may be important for the screenplay – the bigger picture – but one must use discretion in what info should be supplied in the logline.) For instance, are the details regarding specific guns necessary for the logline? A possible way to rewrite the logline and maintain its dramatic integrity is: *When the wrong man is apprehended for vigilante deaths, a frustrated FBI agent, refusing to give up her pursuit, commits a murder in the vein of the real shooter to re-open the case.* Brevity and clarity are the name of the game. This sets-up the situation of a vigilante killer and “the wrong man” (which is easier than going into the details of the copycat killer). The first sentence also presents the antagonist without too much detail. We also meet the protagonist (an anti-hero) and present her struggle (to catch the killer) and then introduce the “hook” – the moral dilemma. Please note the careful placement of words like “shooter” which allow us to understand the modus operandi of the killer without going into all the detail from the original logline. The use of the word “vigilante” alone is enough to allow the audience to understand the nature of the crimes – without milking it even more with the addition of “child killer.” (Save that for the screenplay.) On a separate note, the title is meaningless to me.

### **WORLD WAR - Drama**

*In 2162, China manipulates America and Russia into war as part of their plan to take over the world.*

This is text book - as to how NOT to write a logline. Firstly, who is the hero here? China? The logline is presented from the POV of China, so I must assume that the screenplay deals with our rooting for China in its manipulation for world power. If that is incorrect, then the logline must present its story from the POV of the hero. If we’re to take an Americentric POV here (which an American audience would prefer), the logline might read: *“America struggles for freedom as the Chinese plot to take over the world.”* Now, we can clearly see the good guy and the bad guy. Always give the good guy the struggle. (The bad guy struggles too, but his struggle is secondary to the story because the audience is emotionally attached to the struggle of the good guy.) Russia merely sullies the logline. Eliminate it. My next question: Which part will Tom Cruise play? Will he play “America” or will he



play “China”? A logline must present its storyline using characters – not places. Always present a logline in human terms. Find the personification of these countries and use them within the logline. (Russell Crowe can play an American general but he cannot play America itself.) We want to feel the human aspect of the story – which is sorely missing here. It is unclear as to why this must take place 150 years into the future. Is the world different than it is today? If it is, then the logline must suggest that. If the world is not different, then set it presently or in the very near future (like next year).

### **VEX - Comedy**

*When the host of a children’s show at a failing local TV station captures the gremlin who has been wrecking their equipment, she hatches a scheme to save the station and her career – by making the reluctant gremlin her new star.*

This would be the perfect logline for TV GUIDE. But a TV GUIDE logline is a little less thorough than a logline developed to pitch your story. This suffers from the “half a log line syndrome.” We see the initial problem (gremlin wrecking station) and we see a solution to the problem (make the gremlin the star of a TV show). The solution here is definitely amusing. But a solution is the antithesis of a dilemma – and one must present the dilemma that will provide the throughline to the story. That dilemma is expressed through the character’s “goal.” In DIE HARD, Bruce Willis’s dilemma is that terrorists have taken his wife hostage. In a logline (and drama itself), this translates into a goal: Bruce Willis struggles to save his wife from terrorists. What is the protagonist’s goal in VEX? She makes the gremlin the star of the show – and then what? One assumes that she makes the gremlin the star of the show by the end of the first act (approximately page 30), so what transpires over the final 90-pages? Without this goal, it is impossible to see the movie. We can clearly envision the first act, but the logline doesn’t provide the drama that will carry us through the final two acts.

### **PINATUBO - Adventure/Comedy**

*An unheralded black WW-II hero-turned U.S. bases negotiator crashes into Mt. Pinatubo before its 1991 eruption, a near-death experience that transports him to the post-Spanish, bloody U.S. conquest of the Philippines. Risking return to 1991, he confronts his "future" father, an ambitious Negro U.S. cavalry officer who's to lead the annihilation of Pinatubo's aboriginal Negritos -- the precursor to volcanic terror.*



It is safe to say there is way too much going on here. Firstly, there are the preternatural elements. Secondly, there is the war theme. Thirdly, there is the “disaster” element – featuring the volcano. All of this is accompanied by a father and son storyline - mixed with racial elements of blacks in the military, and a moral storyline dealing with the annihilation of indigenous people. Wow! Juggling all of this would be tough for the likes of Shakespeare. A log line that features all of these story elements is a red flag, because the (accompanying) screenplay is about so many things – that, in the end, it isn’t really about anything. It is very difficult for any writer (not using a mini-series format) to successfully develop all these elements. As a result, he gets lost in his own narrative, and the script ends up wandering and meandering - never devoting sufficient time to each of the storylines, resulting in flaccid storytelling. This log line offers up empirical evidence of this “red flag.” Note that it is never clear exactly what this story is about. The former soldier goes back in time and meets up with his father – who is to lead a “search and destroy” mission. But how does this involve our protagonist? What is his role in all of this? Is he even the protagonist? Or is it the father? What is the throughline of the dramatic narrative? This would be the most crucial element to the log line (and the screenplay) but it is overlooked, because the writer pays too much attention to all the other elements. These sorts of stories are often a house of cards. Furthermore, it is unclear as to how old the “unheralded black WW-II hero” is at the start of the story and his age when he is transported back in time. In theory, he would be close to seventy in 1991. But when he ends up in the “post-Spanish, bloody U.S. conquest of the Philippines,” is he twenty-years-old (or so) or is he the same age at the start of the story? And how is the “annihilation of Pinatubo’s aboriginal Negritos” a precursor to volcanic terror? Does this involve a superstitious motif that will ALSO have to be introduced into the story? This feels too scattered and “all over the place.”

### **SHAMBALLAH: THE CITY OF DREAMS - Action adventure**

*In 1936, just prior to World War II, an agent of the United States intelligence enlists the help of an expert archaeologist, to secure and transport a young future Dalai Lama and a treasure of gold from the remote city of Gzanadu [Xanadu] high in the mountains of Tibet, out of reach of Stalin's agents and Hitler's agents who also want to get their hands on the boy and on this gold, all three teams in a race against each other that is ferociously competitive and deadly.*

The logline is wordy and could be condensed. For instance, “an agent of the United States intelligence” could read as “a US intelligence agent” or “out of reach of Stalin's agents and Hitler's agents” could read as “out of reach from Hitler and Stalin” or “the agents of Hitler and Stalin” or “enemy forces.” Don’t get too hung up on the details in a logline and really



choose which details must be presented fully and which elements could be presented in a “vague” (reader friendly) way. Personally, the logline feels diluted with both the boy and the gold. The idea of the boy as the “prize” is dramatic (and different) enough. The gold is a plot element that can work effectively in the story (though it should probably be layered in – introduce the boy early on and the gold later on), but, in the logline, it makes the boy seem less important. The use of the word “competitive” makes it sound like sport and diffuses the overall tension here. The logline offers up a few too many characters and should probably focus itself around the protagonist. (Is it the agent or the archaeologist?) Although we understand the good guys have to keep the boy away from the bad guys, the logline puts the protagonists on the defensive and doesn’t give them a specific goal. (They are simply running with the boy, but we don’t know what they want with him or where they are taking him.) The logline gives the antagonists a more specific goal – they want the boy and the gold. Although we know the boy is a future Dali Lama, it isn’t clear what that means in the context of the story and why an American agent would care about this boy instead of – let’s say – the millions of boys and girls that are being gassed in Nazi death camps.

### **GUILTY – Legal thriller**

A “guilty until proven innocent” D.A. comes to believe that many of the murders his department has prosecuted people for were all committed by one person – a “serial framer” who gets off not only by killing, but by making others go to jail for his crimes. When people close to him start to die and his girlfriend becomes the next target, the DA finally gets the police to accept his theory – but only when they discover evidence linking HIM to ALL of the crimes.

More concise version might read like:

*A "guilty until proven innocent" DA comes to believe that many homicides he has prosecuted were committed by a "serial framer," one man who frames others for his murders. Alone in his struggle to stop the killer, the DA's investigation hits a snag when his loved ones begin to die and he becomes the prime suspect.*

### **MORE THAN 6000 WORDS DEVOTED TO A SENTENCE OR TWO.**

It seems farcical that so many words can be devoted to crafting a logline. This isn’t nuclear physics or the deconstruction of John Donne or Shakespeare, all of which could inspire



volumes. However, in the scheme of things, loglines play a vital role in the life of a screenplay. A logline can be used to form the dramatic narrative before the words “fade in” are written. It can be used to keep the scribe on track during the writing process. When the script is finished, the logline will be a tool used to market the screenplay. It will be used in query letters, release forms, applications for screenwriting contests. An agent or manager will use the logline to pitch the story to others in the agency. Story analysts will read the script and create a logline. After the screenplay is acquired, the logline will be used in e-mails, casting minutes, cover letters to investors and financiers. Loglines will be used to lure talent. Upon release of the film, loglines will be used in press packages, and will eventually be seen on DVD boxes and in the TV Guide.

A writer needs to conquer the unnecessary intimidation involved with loglines. Writers must practice crafting loglines for recent films and should write them after reading screenplays. Until Hollywood comes up with another alternative, loglines will remain an integral part of the process, and the screenwriter must learn to successfully construct loglines that will represent his screenplay in the most accurate and effective way possible.

Christopher Lockhart



# LOGLINE LIBRARY

Below is an assortment of approximately 300 loglines from films produced in the last ten years.

Use these loglines as templates for one you're writing. Analyze them to see if you would have written them in an alternate (stronger) way.

These were derived from screenplays – not films – so they may not reflect the movie that was eventually produced.

## **ABOUT A BOY**

A single man looks for love with a single mom and finds himself growing attached to her son.

## **ABOUT SCHMIDT**

A retired widower takes a road trip to attend his daughter's wedding.

## **ADAPTATION**

A writer struggles to adapt a book into a screenplay as he copes with the inadequacies of his life.

## **ADJUSTMENT BUREAU**

A congressman falls in love with a woman and struggles against a supernatural organization determined to keep them apart.

## **AKEELA AND THE BEE**

A girl from South Central Los Angeles struggles to make it to the National Spelling Bee competition.



## **ALEXANDER**

The rise and fall of Alexander the Great.

## **AMAZING GRACE**

After learning of the atrocities against black slaves, a politician struggles to convince the British Parliament to abolish slavery.

## **AMERICAN GANGSTER**

A determined detective struggles to stop the local drug trade but must contend with an elusive Harlem kingpin.

## **ANTWONE FISHER STORY**

A violent sailor struggles to make amends with his past.

## **ARBITRAGE**

A successful businessman tries to shepherd a merge of his company while simultaneously concealing fraud and a homicide.

## **ARMORED**

A security guard locks himself in an armored car, warding off a band of desperate men who want to get at the five million dollars he protects.

## **AUSTRALIA**

A British widow struggles to make a new life for herself on an Australian cattle station.

## **AUTUMN IN NEW YORK**

A womanizing restaurateur finally finds love in a young woman, only to discover she is terminally ill.



### **BABY MAMA**

A single businesswoman uses a surrogate to have a baby, but her plans go awry when the mother tries to con her.

### **BAD SANTA**

A burglar and his little person sidekick pose as a shopping mall Santa and elf, with the plan to rob the complex after hours on Christmas Eve.

### **THE BANGER SISTERS**

Two best friends reunite after many years to learn their lives have taken very different paths.

### **BASIC INSTINCT II**

A psychiatrist finds himself dangerously manipulated by a sex-starved, sociopathic patient.

### **BATMAN BEGINS**

Struggling to win back the city streets from criminals, a millionaire becomes a vigilante fighting crime in the guise of a bat man.

### **BEDTIME STORIES**

After discovering the magical power of the bedtime tales that he spins for his nieces and nephew, a self-absorbed architect tries to manipulate this enchanted energy to his own advantage.

### **BIG FISH**

A son who has come to resent his father's tall tales journeys to discern the truth in them as the old man lies dying.

### **THE BIG YEAR**

Three men struggle to count the most species of birds during a year-long contest



### **THE BLACK DAHLIA**

A pair of detectives struggles to solve a brutal murder – the Black Dahlia case.

### **BLACK HAWK DOWN**

The U.S. Military attempts a vicious strike against a Somali warlord with disastrous results.

### **BLESS THE CHILD**

A woman fights the powers of evil to protect her autistic niece from a cult of devil worshippers who believe the girl is the “Child of God”.

### **BLINDNESS**

When sudden blindness overwhelms the population, the afflicted are sent away to concentration camps where a blind eye doctor and his wife struggle to stay alive.

### **BLOOD DIAMOND**

In the midst of civil war and a dangerous diamond cartel, a diamond smuggler sets out with an African native to find a precious gem buried in the jungle.

### **THE BOOK OF ELI**

In a post apocalyptic USA, a lone warrior – on a mission from God – struggles to deliver a book to San Francisco – a book that a despot will stop at nothing to take from him.

### **THE BOURNE IDENTITY**

A man with amnesia discovers he is a governmental assassin who has been targeted for death by the organization that employs him.

### **BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN**

Two young cowboys must deny their homosexual love in the rural west.



### **THE BROTHERS GRIMM**

A pair of storytelling brothers investigates a series of kidnappings that leads to a fearsome supernatural creature.

### **BROOKLYN'S FINEST**

Three New York City police officers struggle with the rigors of their duties in one of the most dangerous precincts in the country.

### **CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN**

A young Greek woman finds forbidden love with an Italian soldier during World War II.

### **THE CASTLE**

A general is incarcerated in a military prison and leads a revolt to win his freedom and rid the penitentiary of its cruel warden.

### **CELLULAR**

A college student struggles to save the life of a kidnapped stranger after she inadvertently calls him on his cell phone.

### **CHANGING LANES**

When a cut-throat lawyer and a sober father have a car accident, a simple request of insurance information escalates into a full-scale revenge-fest.

### **CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR**

A Congressman struggles to fund the Afghanis in their war against Communist Russia.

### **CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN**

A married couple struggles to balance a relationship, a new home, careers, and twelve children.



## **CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN 2**

As the kids grow, Tom Baker plans one last vacation at the lake, where he squares off with his old rival – putting his family in the middle of the feud.

## **CHERI**

After a six-year relationship with an older woman, a young man struggles to adapt to married life and his younger wife.

## **CINDERELLA MAN**

The story of Depression era boxer Jim Braddock - who resurrects his career through a series of miraculous fights.

## **CLASH OF THE TITANS**

In order to save the woman he loves from being sacrificed to the Gods, the bastard son of Zeus sets out on a journey to learn how to defeat a giant monster that plans to destroy the city of Argos.

## **COACH CARTER**

A high school basketball coach gets into trouble when he puts the players' personal achievements above the sport.

## **COLD MOUNTAIN**

A disillusioned Confederate soldier abandons the war to trek home to North Carolina, where a woman awaits him.

## **COLD CREEK MANOR**

After a family buys a rural foreclosure, the husband struggles to protect them from the previous owner - a popular but dangerous local who could be a murderer.



## **COLLATERAL**

An LA cab driver struggles to survive as he is forced to chauffeur a ruthless hit man to complete a series of jobs.

## **THE COLLECTOR**

A thief gets more than he bargained for when he breaks into a house already under siege by a madman and struggles to save the family while avoiding deadly booby traps at every turn.

## **CONTAGION**

As the world buckles under a potential pandemic from a mysterious virus, a group of experts struggles to bring it under control.

## **THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO**

A sailor is wrongfully imprisoned for treason and escapes with plans to avenge those who accused him.

Christopher Lockhart

## **COWBOYS AND ALIENS**

A group of gunslingers, cowboys, and Indians bands together to fight an invading force of outer space aliens in 19<sup>th</sup> century Arizona.

## **CRASH**

A chain of racist events leads to flaring tempers and murder within one-day in Los Angeles.

## **CROSSING OVER**

The immigration woes of various Los Angeles residents.

## **THE COMPANY MEN**

The downsizing of a company lands several men unemployed, sending their lives into a tailspin.



### **CHARLOTTE'S WEB**

A kindly spider helps a lone pig from being sent to the slaughter by turning him into a celebrity.

### **CAPOTE**

While writing "In Cold Blood," author Truman Capote becomes too involved with the murderers of a Kansas farm family.

### **CHRISTMAS WITH THE KRANKS**

A family man decides to skip the Christmas holiday, setting off a series of unexpected and disastrous events.

### **CHUMSCRUBER**

Turmoil ensues in small town America when some teenage drug dealers kidnap the wrong kid in an attempt to retrieve a stolen stash.

### **CONFESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND**

Wacky TV personality and producer Chuck Barris occupies his time by creating television classics and working as an assassin for the CIA.

### **COUNTRY OF MY SKULL**

An African American journalist travels to South Africa to cover the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's investigation of human rights abuses under the former Apartheid regime.

### **THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW**

A scientist battles a global "super storm" that spells doomsday for planet Earth.



### **DEAR JOHN**

A soldier stationed overseas and a stateside teacher struggle to maintain a relationship through the letters they write.

### **DEATH OF A SALESMAN**

An unsuccessful salesman struggles between the truths and lies that have made up his life.

### **DEATH TO SMOOCHIE**

A children's TV host battles a crazed rival, a slew of nefarious entertainment executives, and a fickle viewing public, to rise to the top.

### **DEFINITELY, MAYBE**

A father recounts his various romantic endeavors when his young daughter inquires about how he and her mom met.

### **DEJA VU**

A federal agent uses a time machine to stop a terrorist from blowing up a passenger ferry.

### **DE-LOVELY**

Cole Porter looks back on his life with song and dance.

### **THE DEPARTED**

A cop who's a mole, and a mole who's a cop battle to decide the fate of a legendary Boston mobster.

### **THE DESCENDANTS**

A descendant of Hawaiian royalty struggles to raise his daughters after a motor boat accident leaves their mother in a coma.



### **DOLAN'S CADILLAC**

A school teacher becomes obsessed with avenging his wife's murder and hatches a plan to execute the killer by burying him alive in his Cadillac.

### **DOWNLOADING NANCY**

A mentally disturbed woman hires her cyber-lover to torture and kill her.

### **DRAGONFLY**

A widower believes his dead wife is trying to contact him through the near-death experiences of terminally ill children.

### **DREAMCATCHER**

Four lifelong friends use their psychic talents to destroy an alien race determined to infect the human population.

### **DREAMGIRLS**

A trio of female singers suffers the trials and tribulations of the music industry, as they rise to the top of the charts.

### **DUPLICITY**

Two corporate spies-turned-lovers execute a plot to steal a top secret formula from their employers.

### **EDGE OF DARKNESS**

After the murder of his daughter, a Boston cop struggles to find the culprit but uncovers secrets about the girl and a government conspiracy.

### **ELF**

When a thirty-year-old elf learns he is human, he leaves the North Pole to live with his birth father.



### **ERIN BROCKOVICH**

Working as a law firm secretary, a foul-mouthed single mom stumbles upon an environmental cover-up by a public utility and sets out to hold them accountable.

### **EVENING**

On her deathbed, an older woman reflects on a weekend in 1953 where she had a brief fling with the love of her life.

### **THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE**

A lawyer struggles to win an acquittal for a priest who is accused of negligent homicide after a girl dies during an exorcism ritual.

### **THE EXTRA MAN**

After losing his job for cross-dressing, a young man moves to Manhattan and rents a room from an older eccentric esthete who escorts rich, elderly women around town.

### **FAILURE TO LAUNCH**

A charming slacker dates a woman, who – unbeknownst to him – has been hired by his frustrated folks to get him to move out of the house.

### **THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS II**

An ex-cop and a childhood friend go undercover as drivers to infiltrate the operations of a drug czar.

### **FINDING NEVERLAND**

Playwright J.M. Barrie befriends a grieving family and is inspired to write his children's classic Peter Pan.



## **FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS**

The true story behind the raising of the American flag atop Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima.

## **THE FLOCK**

A distraught officer for the Department of Public Safety struggles to find a missing girl who he believes has been kidnapped by one of the registered sex offenders he is assigned to look after.

## **FLYBOYS**

A group of American boys joins the French Foreign Legion to fly fighter planes in the war against the Germans.

## **THE FORGOTTEN**

A grieving mother struggles against a bizarre conspiracy after learning the twelve-year-old son she lost in a plane crash actually died as a baby, and her decade of memories has been nothing but a false creation.

## **FREAKY FRIDAY**

A warring mother and daughter unwittingly switch bodies and struggle to live in the other's shoes.

## **FURRY VENGEANCE**

A real estate developer finds himself under attack from the animal kingdom when his new building site infringes on their territory.

## **FRED CLAUS**

The story of Santa Claus' wayward brother, Fred.



### **FREEDOM WRITERS**

A new teacher finds herself in a tough school district and struggles to make a difference in the lives of her marginalized students.

### **FROST/NIXON**

An intrepid British talk-show host struggles to get a tell-all interview with recently disgraced American President Richard M. Nixon.

### **GANGS OF NEW YORK**

A young man struggles to avenge the death of his father at the hands of a brutal gang leader in the mean streets of 19<sup>th</sup> century New York City.

### **GHOST WORLD**

A teenage girl struggles with the realities of growing up.

### **GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST**

While attending his brother's wedding, a playboy must make amends for his callous and sexist ways through the visits of three ghosts.

### **GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING**

A teenage girl comes of age after being hired as the housemaid to the wealthy family of a renowned artist in 17<sup>th</sup> century Delft.

### **GODS AND GENERALS**

A depiction of the Civil War through the eyes of Northern and Southern generals.

### **GLORY ROAD**

The inspirational true story of how the virtually unknown Texas Western Miners executed the biggest upset in the history of the NCAA.



## **A GOOD YEAR**

A ruthless bond trader struggles with the toughest deal of his life as he tries to sell an old winery – which he recently inherited.

## **GOTHIKA**

A brilliant shrink working in a facility for the criminally insane awakes from a coma to find that she's now a patient charged with her husband's brutal slaying.

## **GRAN TORINO**

A grizzled Korean War veteran struggles to protect a wayward Asian American teen from a local gang.

## **GREENBERG**

A New York slacker house-sits in Los Angeles and must take inventory of how little his life has evolved ten years after college.

## **HAIRSPRAY**

When a portly teenager lands a regular gig on a popular TV dance show, she stirs the pot hoping to integrate the cast.

## **HACHI**

An Akita pup shows extreme loyalty to his master – even after the man's death, as the dog waits daily at the local train station for his owner to arrive.

## **THE HAUNTING**

During a psychological experiment, a young woman finds herself being summoned by the ghosts that haunt Hill House.

## **HIGH CRIMES**

An attorney, whose deceitful husband is accused of a horrific military crime, represents him at his court-martial.



## **HILDAGO**

An American cowboy, circa 1890, travels to the Middle East to compete in the world's most prestigious long distance horse race.

## **A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE**

When a mild-mannered man comes to national attention, he struggles to elude a mobster, who believes he is a hood on the lam.

## **HOLLYWOODLAND**

A private detective struggles against Hollywood powerbrokers as he investigates the alleged suicide of Superman sensation George Reeves.

## **HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG**

After being evicted from her home, a woman faces-off with an Iranian immigrant who purchased the house and plans to resell it.

## **THE HOURS**

Three generations of women interconnect with the common theme of Virginia Woolf's novel "Mrs. Dalloway."

## **HOW TO MAKE IT IN AMERICA (TV PILOT)**

Two friends struggle to achieve the American dream on the mean streets of New York City.

## **HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS AND ALIENATE PEOPLE**

An acerbic British journalist takes a job at a NY magazine and struggles to find his way into society life.



### **HOW TO LOSE A GUY IN TEN DAYS**

A female journalist must drive her advertising exec boyfriend away within ten days to drum up material for a magazine article – while he must get her to proclaim her love in order to win an account.

### **HOWL**

A poem by Allen Ginsberg is put on trial for obscenity.

### **HUGO**

A young orphan, living inside the walls of a Paris train station, struggles to resolve the mystery of an automaton – a mystery that will uncover the past of an old man and reveal the boy's future.

### **I AM SAM**

A developmentally disabled man battles the state for custody of his young daughter.

### **IN GOOD COMPANY**

An aging sales executive grapples with being demoted and having to work with the younger man who takes his place.

### **INSIDE MAN**

A detective investigates the aftermath of a bank hostage situation in which the culprits managed to disappear.

### **I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU CHUCK AND LARRY**

To ensure a pension for his motherless children, in case of his demise, a fireman and a macho co-worker pose as a gay couple - and marry - in order to save the benefits for the kids.



### **INGLORIOUS BASTERDS**

A kill squad that butchers Nazi soldiers, along with a young Jewish girl who plots to murder the SS officers that shot her family, converges on a French movie theater (premiering a German propaganda film for Nazi brass) with a plan to end WWII.

### **THE JACKET**

A straitjacket transports a psychiatric patient 26 years in the future. When he learns he was murdered just a few days after commitment, he uses the jacket to help him uncover his killer - before he meets his fate.

### **JONAH HEX**

After the Civil War, an uber-violent bounty hunter sets out to find a man who's determined to exact revenge on the North.

### **JOHN Q**

A desperate dad takes a hospital ER hostage to secure a heart transplant for his uninsured son.

### **JUMPER**

When a young man discovers he has the ability to transport himself from location to location, his gift brings on more trouble than he could have imagined.

### **K-19: THE WIDOWMAKER**

A Cold War Soviet nuclear submarine experiences fatal complications during a test mission.

### **KEEPING THE FAITH**

A priest, a rabbi and a successful business woman – friends since grade school -- find themselves in a love triangle.



### **KINGS (TV PILOT)**

After a show of heroism on the battlefield, a young soldier wins the favor of the king, but his popularity takes him dangerously close to the throne.

### **KINSEY**

The story of Alfred Kinsey and his earth-shattering survey of the sexual habits of Americans.

### **KISS KISS BANG BANG**

A thief-turned-wannabe-actor prepares for a screen test by riding along with a private investigator – and gets involved in a dual homicide.

### **LADDER 49**

A firefighter – trapped in a burning building – reflects on his thirteen year career.

### **LAKEVIEW TERRACE**

A bi-racial couple finds trouble in their new neighborhood when an African American neighbor, who happens to be a cop, takes offense to their mixed marriage.

### **THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND**

A Scottish doctor, practicing medicine in Uganda, befriends President Idi Amin - becoming his personal physician - as a reign of power and murder overwhelms the country.

### **THE LAST SAMURAI**

A fallen Civil War hero is recruited by the Emperor of Japan to lead an assault against a group of renegade samurai.

### **LAW ABIDING CITIZEN**

A dedicated district attorney struggles to outwit a deadly former government operative bent on destroying those responsible for allowing the killer of his family to go free.



### **LAWS OF ATTRACTION**

Two competing divorce attorneys make their big case more difficult by falling in love with each other.

### **THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE**

A down-and-out war veteran raises the spirits of a Georgia community when he gallantly faces the two best golfers in the world.

### **EQUILIBRIUM**

In a society made emotionless through a drug, a cop breaks the law when he stops taking his daily dose and sets out to bring down the Fascist regime.

### **LICENCE TO WED**

In order to be married at a special church, a young couple struggles to pass a series of rigorous tests by a militant clergyman.

### **LIFE AS A HOUSE**

A terminally ill man attempts to rebuild his house while he rebuilds his life.

### **THE LIFE OF DAVID GALE**

A reporter interviews a condemned prisoner and suspects he was the victim of a bizarre frame-up.

### **THE LINCOLN LAWYER**

A defense attorney – who conducts business from the backseat of his Lincoln - takes on a guilty client who blackmails him into representing him.



### **LIONS FOR LAMBS**

As a professor struggles to inspire a slacker college kid, two of his former students fall into battle in the hills of Afghanistan.

### **LIVE FROM BAGHDAD**

A producer with the fledgling CNN arrives in Baghdad on the brink of Desert Storm and helps to make the network a powerhouse of television news.

### **LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE**

An eccentric family drives down the east coast to enter the youngest member in a beauty pageant.

### **LONELY HEARTS**

A distraught cop struggles to solve a series of murders in 1951 New York.

### **THE LONGEST YARD**

A former pro quarterback-turned-convict struggles to lead the prison team in a football victory against a squad of ruthless guards.

### **THE LOOKOUT**

A young man, hampered by a head trauma, falls in with the wrong crowd that involves him in robbing a bank.

### **LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION**

A former Warner Bros. security guard sets out (with Daffy Duck) to find a menacing diamond and keep it out of the hands of the evil Mr. Chairman of the ACME CORPORATION.

### **LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA**

A woman marries for security – in spite of the undying and obsessive love of a telegraph worker.



### **LOVELY BONES**

After her rape and murder, a teenage girl observes (from heaven) the aftermath of her demise and the continuation of life on earth.

### **LUCKY YOU**

A wildly inconsistent gambler takes on everything from a serious case of bad luck to the planet's pre-eminent card player (who just happens to be his own father) to win the World Series of Poker.

### **THE MACHINEGUN PREACHER**

After years of bad living and drug use, a Pennsylvania redneck becomes a Born Again Christian and travels to Sudan to save young victims from the LVA, a sectarian guerilla army responsible for the murder of 400,000.

### **MADEA GOES TO JAIL**

A young lawyer struggles to keep an old friend – now a drug addled hooker – off the streets.

### **MAN ON A LEDGE**

A wrongfully convicted ex-con allows his crew to rob a jeweler while he creates a diversion by threatening to jump off the ledge of a hotel.

### **MAN ON FIRE**

A former mercenary in Mexico sets out on a vendetta when the girl he's hired to protect is kidnapped and killed.

### **THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE**

A distraught Desert Storm vet struggles to stop a diabolical terrorist plot that is connected to his recurring nightmare and a Vice-Presidential candidate.



### **MARCI X**

A Jewish America Princess has to befriend a tough gangsta rapper whose controversial songs are giving her father's media empire a bad name.

### **MARGARET**

A Manhattan teenager grapples with coming-of-age after witnessing a fatal bus accident.

### **MEET DAVE**

Tiny aliens land on earth in a spaceship that resembles a human man.

### **MEMENTO**

An insurance investigator, suffering from a disorder that erases all short-term memory, struggles to find his wife's killer.

### **MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA**

The daughter of a fisherman struggles to become a geisha in 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan with the hope of winning the heart of a man she loves.

### **MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS**

A journalist learns of a military unit trained in psychic warfare and follows one of its key soldiers on a secret mission through the Middle East.

### **MICHAEL CLAYTON**

A law firm spin doctor struggles to keep control when a friend and colleague plans to go public and sell out a high-profile client.

### **THE MIST**

A group of townspeople barricade themselves in a supermarket, fending off giant insects that have evolved in the course of a mysterious mist.



### **MONEYBALL**

After a disastrous season, the desperate General Manager of the Oakland A's uses a new-fangled statistical method to recruit three players to replace Jason Giambi.

### **MORNING GLORY**

A TV news producer struggles to make her morning show #1 in the ratings.

### **MR. MAGORIUM'S WONDER EMPORIUM**

The fate of a magic toy store is in question when the owner prepares to die, and the responsibility shifts to his young female clerk.

### **MR. POPPER'S PENGUIN**

A successful NYC realtor inherits a penguin, turning his life upside down.

### **MR. AND MRS. SMITH**

After two opposing assassins dispose of the same mark, each is ordered to kill the other. The catch: the assassins are husband and wife.

### **MY ONE AND ONLY**

An eccentric woman leaves her adulterous husband, taking her two sons on a cross-country search for a new spouse.

### **MY SUPER EX-GIRLFRIEND**

A man struggles to escape the wrath of his vengeful ex girlfriend – who happens to be a superhero with extraordinary powers.

### **NANNY MCPHEE**

A magical nanny struggles to keep a widower and his nine children happy.



## **NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM II**

Larry, a former night watchman, struggles to save his friends (museum exhibits come-to-life) when an evil pharaoh threatens to destroy them all and take over the universe.

## **NIGHTS IN RODANTHE**

Over the course of three days, two strangers find romance that will forever change their lives.

## **NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN**

A man out hunting stumbles upon a drug deal-gone-bad and snatches up the cash for himself – which puts a vicious killer on his trail.

## **NOEL**

Random New Yorkers confront their troubled lives on Christmas Eve.

## **NOTORIOUS**

The life and death of Notorious B.I.G., who many consider the greatest rapper to ever live.

## **1 HOUR PHOTO**

The local drug store's one hour photo developer harbors a dangerous attraction for a family he has created a mock relationship with via their snapshots.

## **3:10 TO YUMA**

A quiet rancher leads a posse on a dangerous mission to transport an outlaw to a town where a train will take him to prison.

## **28 DAYS LATER**

A sniper, a scientist and two children struggle to stay alive and avoid infection when an outbreak of a deadly virus wreaks havoc on the survivors.



## **2012**

As the earth's core begins to melt, a group of people struggles to reach a mountain in China – where a fleet of arcs await.

## **30 DAYS OF NIGHT**

A sheriff and his deputy-wife struggle against a band of marauding vampires that have converged on their isolated Alaskan town – where the winter season has brought thirty days of darkness.

## **ONE NIGHT AT MCCOOL'S**

A young woman destroys lives, as she attempts to fulfill a dream of owning a house.

## **PANDORUM**

After many years of hyper-sleep, an astronaut awakens to find himself on a disabled spaceship being pursued by a primitive tribe of cannibals.

## **PAPARAZZI**

A famous actor takes murderous revenge against a quartet of sleazy paparazzi photographers.

## **THE PATRIOT**

A former soldier - who has put his dark, bloody past behind him - joins the American Revolution when his son is brutally murdered by a British officer.

## **PAY IT FORWARD**

An LA reporter traces a chain reaction of good will to a Tucson boy who has made altruism a school project.



### **PAYCHECK**

An engineer has his memory wiped clean after working on a top-secret project and suddenly finds himself the target of a manhunt.

### **A PERFECT GETAWAY**

Honeymooning on a Hawaiian trail, a bride and groom fear they are being stalked by a pair of sadistic killers.

### **PHONE BOOTH**

A ruthless publicist finds himself trapped in a phone booth talking to a sniper who will shoot him dead if he hangs up the phone.

### **PRIEST**

In a future where vampires are imprisoned to keep the world safe, a warrior priest sets out to find his niece after the undead escape captivity and kidnap her.

### **THE PROPOSAL**

In order to avoid deportation, a nasty boss insists upon marrying her abused assistant before she's sent back to Canada.

### **THE PUNISHER**

A former federal agent adopts the personality of a lethal vigilante - declaring the ultimate war on crime – after a mob boss massacres his entire family.

### **RACING STRIPS**

A zebra, raised on a Kentucky farm, struggles to become a prizewinning race horse.

### **RAMBO**

Rambo struggles against the vicious Burmese army that has kidnapped a group of missionaries.



### **RAT RACE**

Six people race from Las Vegas to a train station in New Mexico - where 2 million dollars awaits in a locker for whoever gets there first.

### **REAL STEEL**

An estranged father and son struggle to bond while striving for success in the world of competitive robot boxing.

### **RED**

A retired black ops agent finds himself on a federal “hit list” and recruits some old friends to learn why he has been targeted.

### **RED TAILS**

The Tuskegee Airmen – a group of African American pilots – show their aerial prowess over the Italian battlefield.

### **REMEMBER THE TITANS**

In a racially divided Southern town, a high school football team is integrated and helmed by a black coach, causing friction for the players, the school and the community.

### **RESIDENT EVIL**

Survivors of a science-experiment-gone-bad find themselves trapped in a subterranean laboratory fighting off the living dead.

### **RIDING IN CARS WITH BOYS**

A woman contemplates her problematic life as she travels to find her ex-husband.

### **RUNAWAY BRIDE**

A newspaper reporter does a story about a woman who has left four men at the altar and finds he is falling for her.



### **SAFEHOUSE**

A CIA field officer struggles to take his prisoner, a former CIA agent-gone-rogue, four miles to a safehouse with an assortment of bad guys out to get them.

### **SAHARA**

A NUMA agent faces-off with a powerful industrialist who is creating a plague by poisoning the ocean with toxic waste.

### **THE SALTON SEA**

An FBI agent poses as a drug addict to find his wife's killers.

### **A SCANNER DARKLY**

An undercover cop addicted to a drug that creates an alternate personality struggles to capture the drug dealer – who is his alter ego.

### **SEABISCUIT**

An intuitive horse trainer, a diehard jockey, and a wealthy horse lover struggle to prepare an ungainly thoroughbred for a record-breaking world championship.

### **THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES**

A girl runs away from her abusive father, settling down in a quaint town – which harbors a small but important piece of her dead mother's past.

### **SECRETARIAT**

A Denver housewife inherits her father's ranch and turns an unlikely horse into the record breaking, Triple Crown winning Secretariat.



## **SERAPHIM FALLS**

A former Union soldier struggles to survive in the wilds of Nevada, as he is pursued by a vengeful Confederate corporal.

## **SESSION 9**

An asbestos abatement team experiences strange phenomena as they gut an abandoned mental institution.

## **SEX AND DEATH 101**

A bachelor finds a mysterious list of women's names - a list of his incomplete sexual conquests – and sets out to settle his unfinished business.

## **SHALL WE DANCE**

To get closer to a beautiful dance instructor, a married man signs up for dance lessons.

## **SHANGHAI NOON**

In the old west, a Chinese imperial guardsman teams with an American cowboy to rescue a kidnapped Chinese Princess.

## **SHERLOCK HOLMES**

The famous detective struggles to stop an occultist from killing the Queen and destroying London.

## **SHOOT 'EM UP**

A gunman struggles to protect an infant against a nefarious plot that involves harvesting babies for their bone marrow.

## **SHOOTER**

Framed for the assassination of a foreign diplomat, a sniper goes on a bloody offensive to clear his name.



### **SHOPGIRL**

A Neiman Marcus counter girl falls for an older man and learns about self-esteem as the doomed relationship takes its course.

### **SHUTTER ISLAND**

A federal marshal investigates the bizarre disappearance of an inmate from a prison for the criminally insane located on an isolated island.

### **SIGNS**

A widower and his family ward off an alien invasion on their modest little farm.

### **SLEEPY HOLLOW**

An 18th century NYC constable is sent to investigate a series of murders upstate and stumbles upon the legend of the Headless Horseman.

### **SMART PEOPLE**

A stuffy English professor juggles child-rearing and romance while vying for the position of department chair.

### **SMOKIN' ACES**

Hit men galore converge on Lake Tahoe to collect a million dollar reward by killing a mobster-turned-informant.

### **THE SOLOIST**

A journalist crusades to get a homeless violinist off the streets.

### **SONNY**

A former gigolo returns to his hometown intent on starting a new life but struggles with the old one.



### **THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE**

An NYU student learns he is a sorcerer and must protect the world from evil.

### **THE SQUID AND THE WHALE**

An impressionable teen grapples with the divorce of his parents.

### **STANDER**

A South African cop - disturbed by his violent participation in Apartheid – becomes a notorious bank robber.

### **STARDUST**

In a magical world, a hapless young man finds a fallen star and is pursued by a bevy of evil creatures.

### **STAY**

Christopher Lockhart

As a psychiatrist races against time to prevent the suicide of a patient, he finds himself thrown into a surreal world filled with strange occurrences.

### **STEALTH**

A Navy pilot struggles to stop an out of control experimental fighter jet, with a mind of its own, from starting World War III.

### **STOP LOSS**

After finishing his tour of duty in Iraq, a soldier takes it on the lam when he learns the military is enacting the “stop loss” clause in his contract, which legally compels him to return to the front.

### **STRANGER THAN FICTION**

An IRS auditor is plagued by a voice that narrates his life and sets out to find its source after his imminent death is revealed.



### **THE STRANGERS**

A troubled couple struggles to survive the night when three masked strangers invade their secluded summerhouse.

### **STREET FIGHTER: THE LEGEND OF CHUN-LI**

A beautiful street fighter struggles to rescue her father from the clutches of an evil crime lord.

### **THE SUM OF ALL FEARS**

A CIA agent stumbles upon a fascist plot to start a nuclear war between the United States and Russia.

### **SWEENEY TODD**

A vengeful barber murders unsuspecting men when they come in for a shave, using their ground-up bodies as the prime ingredient in popular meat pies.

### **SWIMMING UPSTREAM**

A young swimmer must cope with his embittered father who tries to turn brother against brother.

### **TAKEN**

An overprotective dad reveals his true colors – a black ops background - when his daughter is kidnapped in France, and he wreaks mayhem and murder to save her life.

### **TALK TO ME**

An ex-con struggles to make it in the world of radio and TV.



### **THANK YOU FOR SMOKING**

A cigarette lobbyist spins P.R. for the tobacco industry until things start to spin out of control.

### **THINGS WE LOST IN THE FIRE**

After her husband's murder, a woman and her family reach out to his best friend - a heroin junkie struggling to get clean.

### **TIGERLAND**

In boot camp preparing for Vietnam, a private breaks all the rules with the hopes of being discharged.

### **THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE**

An artist struggles to maintain the love of a man who suffers from a bizarre affliction – the uncontrollable ability to leap through the timeline of his life.

### **TIMELINE**

After a college professor is lost in the past, a group of scientists travel in time to locate him and find themselves caught in a battle between France and England in 1357.

### **TIPTOES**

A tall man struggles to confront the dwarfism in his family when he learns his girlfriend is pregnant.

### **TOWELHEAD**

A thirteen-year-old girl struggles to understand her burgeoning sexuality amidst a community of sexual dysfunction.

### **TRAINING DAY**

An idealistic rookie trains for the narcotics division with a rogue cop (in trouble with the Russian mob) and learns how to navigate the tough streets of Los Angeles.



### **TRAITOR**

An FBI agent struggles to find a terrorist who plans an attack on American soil, but unbeknownst to the fed, the terrorist is undercover for the CIA.

### **TRAUMA (TV PILOT)**

An EMT team deals with trauma patients all over the city of San Francisco, as each struggles with their own personal trauma.

### **TROPIC THUNDER**

A group of spoiled actors filming a war movie in Southeast Asia suddenly find themselves in the middle of real combat.

### **TROY**

A Trojan prince battles the Greeks, fighting to free the kidnapped woman he loves.

### **UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN**

A heart-broken American college professor moves to Italy and buys a villa that she restores.

### **UNSTOPPABLE**

A newly hired train conductor and a veteran engineer struggle to stop an unmanned runaway train with toxic cargo that's on a collision course with a hairpin turn.

### **UP IN THE AIR**

An executive that specializes in firing other people faces a crisis of conscience while training a replacement.

### **UPRISING**

A faction of Polish Jews strikes back against the Nazis, plotting an escape from the Warsaw ghetto.



### **VALENTINE'S DAY**

An ensemble of Angelenos experiences the ups and downs of love on Valentine's Day.

### **VALKYRIE**

A group of Nazi party members - led by a patriotic colonel - plots to kill Hitler and take back Berlin.

### **THE VOW**

A whirlwind romance and marriage is tragically altered after a car accident results in the bride losing all memory of her new husband, who struggles to win her heart all over again.

### **W.E.**

An unhappily married woman seeks refuge in an auction of the estate of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, while the famous love story plays out concurrently.

### **WALKING TALL**

An ex-Special Ops soldier - looking to settle down and spend quality time with his family - gets embroiled in a one-man battle against the criminal element that has assaulted him and his hometown.

### **WATCHMEN**

A retired superhero investigates mysterious deaths and stumbles upon a plot to destroy the world – in order to save it.

### **WE WERE SOLDIERS**

A recreation of the 1965 battle of Ia Drang – in the Central highlands of South Vietnam – where 400 U.S. soldiers face-off with 3000 of the enemy.



### **THE WEATHER MAN**

A TV weather man struggles with the storm clouds of his life.

### **THE WEDDING PLANNER**

A wedding planner gets the job of a lifetime but complicates matters when she falls in love with the groom.

### **WIN A DATE WITH TAD HAMILTON**

A hometown girl wins a date with a movie star and trouble ensues when the boy that secretly loves her sets out to win her heart.

### **WINDTALKERS**

A WWII soldier is assigned bodyguard duty to a Navajo Indian whose native language is used as an indecipherable secret code.

### **THE WOODSMAN**

A paroled child molester struggles with his past as he faces his future.

### **XXX: STATE OF THE UNION**

After being sprung from jail, an ex-Navy SEAL and street thug sets out to bring down a high-ranking general intent on taking over the country.

### **WITHOUT A PADDLE**

When their childhood friend dies, three men take a trip into the wilderness to find the missing \$200,000 stolen by the elusive D.B. Cooper.

### **WHAT WOMEN WANT**

A sexist advertising executive gains the ability to read women's minds and uses it to get ahead of his new competition, a smarter female exec with whom he falls in love.



### **THE WOLFMAN**

A man estranged from his father returns home to learn that a werewolf is on the loose and it may be a member of his family.

### **YOU, ME AND DUPREE**

A loveable loser imposes upon his best friend's new marriage, threatening to ruin the nuptials and sabotage the friend's job with his new father-in-law.

### **YOURS, MINE AND OURS**

Bedlam ensues after an uptight Coast Guard Admiral father of eight marries a more laid back, scatterbrained handbag designer / mother of ten.

### **THE YOUNG VICTORIA**

A young and willful Queen Victoria constantly struggles to stave off her controlling relatives while battling for the allegiance of her people and the love of her German cousin.

Christopher Lockhart

### **ZATHURA**

Two bickering brothers play a board game that sends them on a death-defying mission through outer space and in the process, they learn the importance of being friends.

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Christopher Lockhart is a film executive, producer, and educator. He is the Story Editor at WME, the world's largest diversified talent agency, where he curates projects for "A" list clients such as Denzel Washington. He previously spent nine years at ICM, where he ran the Story Department. He co-produced the cult horror movie "The Collector" (2009) and its sequel "The Collection" (2012). He wrote and produced the award-winning documentary "Most Valuable Players" (2010), which was acquired by Oprah Winfrey for her network. He has an MFA in dramatic writing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and has lectured around the world on the craft and business of screenwriting. His writing workshop "The Inside Pitch" was produced for television and earned him an LA Area Emmy nomination. He lives in Beverly Hills, CA and has a twelve-year-old son.