SCREENWRITERS vs. ZOMBIES

The Screenwriters Social Club

A Los Angeles stage farce by Alan Nafzger
Blind Barista: Young. Not a screenwriter, yet. Blind from birth but chooses to work across the street from the epicentre of Hollywood power. He serves Hollywood’s second most sought after commodity, coffee, and he listens. He’s the most perceptive of the group.

German Poacher: A screenwriter in his early 40s. Writer of Tobit, an adaptation of the bible’s Book of Tobit. His selling strategy is to appear as religious or non-religious as possible, depending on who he’s speaking to. Sometimes he confuses who he’s speaking with. He’s a member of an L.A. parish, a church, a synagogue, AND a mosque.

Myra Breckinridge: A lesbian in her early 20s. Writer of Wichita. It’s a script about a lesbian Native woman, who learns to turn plains animals into zombies as a weapon against the Texas Rangers who betrayed her father and butchered her village. She’s all about revenge. Works in a CPA’s office and in her spare time she completes bogus documents for the IRS that show just the correct pattern to trigger an audit for the oppressive filmmaker.

Frances Houseman: A less than an elegant woman in her late 20s. She’s the writer of the only Christmas Rom-Com set in Minneapolis. She’s the antithesis of the #metoo movement and has always used her body and sexuality to get what she wanted. She might be the only one in the group that is politically correct. She is the most sensitive of the insensitive disgruntled rabble.

Turtle: A surfer in his late 30s. Writer of Verity’s Surfing Movie, which is about a woman with Alzheimer’s and is hanging out with a young tribe of surfers as a way of coping with and fighting the disease. Perhaps Turtle was a professional surfer if there is such a thing. But drugs and age pretty much ended any subsidized travel he had. Routinely, pitches nails in industry parking lots. Basically, he is Jeff Spicoli.

Eric Cartwright: Black writer in his 30s. He has a right-wing and western gait. He is huge, wears boots and carries a .38 in his right boot. He’s the writer of the 10th Cavalry. He only became interested in writing when some “genius,” the morning after the Oscars, remarked on GMA that black actors weren’t winning because “they are being
forced to act out roles written as white characters,” roles written by white writers. Once, burned an agent’s luxury car and called five cops and an insurance investigator and told them it was insurance fraud.

William Adama: Hispanic. A former soldier, failed screenwriter, and handy man with surveillance. He’s written a script called The Deuce Four, where a platoon allows themselves to be transformed into vampires rather than lose a battle in Iraq. They keep the position and unleash vampiric hell on the terrorists, who have their own vampires. He could have gone into one of the intelligence services, but he spent his educational allotment on a community college film arts degree. He eavesdrops on the big player’s phone calls. Hacker and movie pirate.

The Professor: A screenwriter in his late 70s. Retired professor and writer of Lenin’s Body, a script that was dramatically (miraculously) bought by the Russians. He’s gained a bit of acceptance with the establishment for accomplishing such an impossible feat. But, he’s being (informally) ostracized by the less fortunate writers who have formed a fraternity of ignored writers.

Joe: A writer who is there only a moment but has a reputation for suing anyone who makes a baseball movie.

Prologist: Just another messed up writer.

Here Today: Here and then you never see him again.

Undead Talent Agents:

- Sam Rothstein
- Max Cohen
- Les Grossman

Premise: A blind barista and six screenwriters witness a zombie event from a coffee shop, which is directly across the street from the dominant Hollywood talent agency.

Setting: Los Angeles coffee shop.

Time: The present.
PROLOGUE

BEFORE RISE: The PROLOGIST stands in front of the curtain and sets the tone of the play that will follow.

PROLOGIST

How do “theatre people” start a stage play? I take it’s not FADE IN? SETTING? Well, we’re here.

I have to admit I’m a little nervous. You’re the only audience I’ll probably ever see. You see I always saw myself as a filmmaker… that’s never made a film.

If you’re on drugs, this is a theatre, and you are about to see a stage play. They wouldn’t waste disk space filming this; so I staged it. It’s not how I dreamed of Hollywood, but what the hell; here we are, about to be pissed off together.

I wrote this stage play in screenplay format… not to mess with the director and actors… but because that’s the only way I know how to write and I don’t have time to learn anything else.

So help me with the math… if 400,000 scripts are written and only 4,000 are actually produced each year, I guess I need to write 100 scripts a year? If that’s not the correct math, well muddle that; it’s my math. I’m about 40 short of my needed 100… so maybe I’ll just write my story for the stage.

So this stage play thing is working out as I planned… I didn’t leave the producers any space to say this theatre is too expensive, cause it’s not. So, here goes. What you are about to see is how I wrote it and just the way I saw it that day and well… we’ll see what happens.

About the F-word at Christmastime; I’ve had a few complaints. We did a reading and this little girl… the girl playing the slut and then backing her up predictably was the holy roller, self-righteous Catholic or non-Catholic, depending on who he’s talking to. You might hear it tonight; maybe not. Well, the characters are as complicated as the actors; it’s Hollywood.

However, I’m gonna say the F-word when I want because I’m pissed and I’m tired of eating Los Angelino shit. I’m going
to keep saying and writing what I want until some S.O.B. of importance reads my damn script!

How many of you out there are as pissed as I am?

So if you’re a theatre geek... and you passed on action or participating tonight and wanna look down on me because of the screenplay format issue... THE WAY I WRITE... You should have a lot of company in this town.

I hate that. The poodle readers will critique the hell out of the margins and typos... the exposition is too much or not enough. They seem aware of the subject but there isn’t enough exposition, or they aren’t aware of the topic (totally ignorant of it) but there is too much exposition. What?

So I say, what about the story? And they say, “Oh, that’s fine... great... wonderful.” So you’ll produce it? “Well, that’s a bit of a stretch...” Fine. What the...?

About the actors behind the curtain, I like ‘em, and they might perform the entire play tonight... I guess since all they want is the exposure, they’ve gotten over all the exposition. Or they haven’t and might walk out after the second act. In that case, you can read in the establishment trades about how smart they were to cancel this performance.

The industry is NOT going to like this... it’s like if you satirize Hollywood you better... well they have rules... I like to think that broke the rules tastefully... Well, they aren’t gonna like this, not like you’re gonna like it.

Listen, if I told you I had cancer, would you stick around for the end of the play? The problem with cancer is, in this town, an audience hears that a screenwriter has it and they automatically think he’s lowered himself to the “sympathy read” and that’s messed up.

I don’t have cancer, but if it makes you sit five minutes longer than you normally would, well that’s messed up too.

I don’t have cancer, yet. Not yet anyway. I’m only a little desperate. I’ll let you know when my bank account is empty.

People ask me how I wrote this and I tell them I write better when I'm a little tired. So, I don't sleep for two or four days, drink a lot of coffee; you know so you're
sort of messed up. And this is a farce, right? So it's all good.

Speaking of farces, you stay up three or four days and anything you write (action-adventure, rom-com, drama) it doesn't matter what you're going for, it's going to turn out to be a farce. So maybe that's what happened here.

Another thing people ask me about is, is the story true? It’s true or nearly true or it potentially could be true if I stay in this town long enough.

Fuck, if this doesn’t work I’m going back to Nebraska.

I mean if I stopped saying the f-word and started saying “true” in the places I genuinely feel pissed, will you stay in your seat the entire 90 mins? Because that’s a deal I’m not willing to make.

I may have just managed to make myself agentless for life, but that’s probably less than a year so I’ll get over it. Not the cancer, but I’ll get over the pricks in this town. You’re probably not a prick. There is a sign out front warning you people.

Well, you might have realized I’m a bit bitter... or maybe just jaded. But, I don’t know what that has to do with how you consume this story. There aren’t any margins or typos... tonight, not for you. And if you’re an agent, GET THE FUCK OUT!!!

If you weren’t willing to read it on paper... this isn’t Amazon audio books, you wanker.

I have to go myself. That’s part of the deal I have with the actors, that I won’t lord over their portrayal of six failed screenwriters in a coffee shop.

I’m sure you saw that Avenue of the Starts thing on the news?

Are you happy in L.A.? No? I’m not either. But we better begin, before it gets any worse.
ACT ONE

SETTING: Café Du Coffee facing Ave of the Stars.

AT RISE: HERE TODAY sits at a table with his laptop.

SCENE: Larry McMurtry and Dalton Trumbo

HERE TODAY
First thing’s first, the TITLE of your screenplay! Courier and all CAPS. What would happen if I used something like veteran typewriter? Sure. It would remind the readers of the veterans, like Larry McMurtry or Dalton Trumbo. Oh, fuck no. They don’t know who McMurtry was, and they only know Trumbo was a film that came out before they were born.

FRANCES
We can hear you.

(In the zone, the writer at a laptop ignores everything.)

HERE TODAY
There aren’t any notes to be HAD on a stream of consciousness piece. If I listen to those fucking morons, I’ll get steered off my natural course.

FRANCES
Really? Your natural course?

(The writer pops out of the zone.)

HERE TODAY
Was that out loud?

FRANCES
It’s not so much that... but unless your natural course is conformity your experience in L.A. is going to be a water haul.

HERE TODAY
I want to say I don’t give a fuck...

FRANCES
Yes, I hear that a lot...

HERE TODAY
...but, I’m just not ready to do that, not yet.
FRANCES
So, what’s with all the ranting?
HERE TODAY
That’s just my way of maintaining... some dignity.
FRANCES
Oh?
HERE TODAY
FRANCES
I heard that’s expensive.
HERE TODAY
I was about to write.
FRANCES
Oh, I’m sorry. I interrupted you.
HERE TODAY
No problem. You’re pretty and *Jingle bell time is a swell time.*
FRANCES
*When they pass around the coffee and the pumpkin pie.*
HERE TODAY
(Sarcastic.)
*Through the streets covered white with snow.*
FRANCES
Cute. What do they teach over there? Hopefully more than Christmas songs.
HERE TODAY
Cute. But they teach dignity.
FRANCES
That should be fairly lucrative.
HERE TODAY
Dignity is often understood as an abstract principle, but they teach you how to turn it on and off.
FRANCES
Not to sell, naturally, but you need dignity to write I’m guessing? Finding that pretty easy?
HERE TODAY
Sure. They are conformists and the lowest of bureaucrat school dropouts; I’m creative.

(Something snaps.)
I’m sorry. Are you a writer?

FRANCES
Frances Houseman, nice to meet you. I write, sure. But I’m also the manager here, but that just means I clean the tables. My barista does most of the work.

HERE TODAY
So, they said this is where the writers’ hangout.

FRANCES
Everyone in here now... pretty much.

HERE TODAY
The guy in fatigues?

FRANCES
William, ex-Marine and of course he writes violent-military slash vampire stories. Breaks things but blends those two genres well. Can’t sell them even to the people that make no-budget horror. You know that crowd?

HERE TODAY
Go figure.

FRANCES
One is set in Iraq and one is set in Afghanistan. He’s heavy-duty into surveillance. He thinks technology is gonna sell his script.

HERE TODAY
Let me ask you what you think about eight musicians trapped in Afghanistan after the withdrawal? Music is illegal with the Taliban.

FRANCES
I’d say they should have gotten out.

HERE TODAY
No, I mean a TV series about illegal music.

FRANCES
...and they never manage to escape to the West?

HERE TODAY
I was thinking.
FRANCES
Maybe. Nice, relevant, and certainly in the news. I would generally tell you NOT to share your ideas with anyone in this town, you never know who has connections and can get the stolen idea made into a film. But this group is really very safe in that respect, if you get my drift.

HERE TODAY
So you have a little club here?

FRANCES
Hangout a week or two and you are in. You can run a tab. Once you’re in for say $20 then it’s pretty much official.

HERE TODAY
You let people run a tab? These days? You do that?

FRANCES
Well, struggling writers only. I’ve been burned before… excuse the pun… but it keeps the place fresh. If you’re for real, you are welcome to pay whenever you can.

HERE TODAY
I’ll remember that. Thanks. The black guy?

FRANCES
That’s Eric; he only looks black. He’s actually about as right-wing as they come.

HERE TODAY
Odd.

FRANCES
He says, not where he comes from.

HERE TODAY
Where is that?

FRANCES
Nowhere. In the middle somewhere. Anyway, he writes black westerns. Wrote two so far, but he won’t move on.

HERE TODAY
You can’t sell westerns; everybody knows that.

FRANCES
Don’t tell him that. We try to stay positive.

HERE TODAY
I won’t say a word. Who’s the surfer guy?
Turtle?

He looks familiar.

He had a few gigs on *Baywatch*. Before the drugs and ageing.

So now he writes?

He has what I think is a good surfing movie.

The problem is they only make a surfing movie once every ten years.

He says the same thing and he likes to say he’s been pitching his for nine years.

And her?

Myra works for a CPA, knows a lot about taxes (not that we pay any), accounting, anthropology and Native American lesbianism.

And her movie?

About a “two-spirited” girl who unleashes a zombie plague on a group of oppressors.

By oppressors, you mean like the government?

I think it’s Texas Rangers but yes.

I liked *Billy Jack*.

Doesn’t everyone?

A lesbian *Billy Jack*; cool. It’s 2023, right! Who’s the guy with the three bibles?
FRANCES

German.

HERE TODAY

What’s his story?

FRANCES

Something from the bible... an adaptation. I’m not sure, but he really wants to talk to Mel Gibson.

HERE TODAY

Mel Gibson? He’s Catholic.

HERE TODAY

So that German guy he’s Catholic?

FRANCES

I don’t think so.

HERE TODAY

Any progress with Gibson?

FRANCES

They tell me it’s actually a nice story but he can’t get in the door. Well, it’s not easy.

HERE TODAY

Maybe that’s why he needs three bibles.

FRANCES

All I know is the main character is supposedly a very likeable character. They say; Mel Gibson with a Hasidic beard. An old man, but a pious Jew.

HERE TODAY

Seems like Gibson would want to play a devout Jew. Sort of... shut everyone’s pie hole. Wouldn’t it?

FRANCES

I know but. Gibson is in that castle, and you know about the moat.

HERE TODAY

Moat?

FRANCES

The agents dig a moat around the star and... frighten the hell out of them that they’ll be sued and lose their house in Malibu if they read an unvetted script.
HERE TODAY
So every good idea that reaches them appears to come from
the agent, making him...

FRANCES
Or her.

HERE TODAY
...indispensable.

FRANCES
I’m not saying agents are bad; they keep the nut jobs away.

HERE TODAY
Okay. I’ve been here in L.A. less than an hour and I’m
walking down the street and this bum is pitching me a story
about Chupacabra just being shy nocturnal extra-terrestrial
creatures and... he has archaeological and DNA evidence...

FRANCES
He even had that cute like Chupacabra walk?

HERE TODAY
I thought he was dancing.

FRANCES
I know that guy. He says Chupacabra really walk that way.
Bless his heart; he’s trying.

HERE TODAY
I’m thinking there are a few of those fellows in this town,
so yes agents are a necessary evil. I agree.

FRANCES
You understand a lot it seems. You might have a chance.
Just don’t become a nut job. And don’t hang out with them...
it WILL rub off.

HERE TODAY
Anybody produced in here?

FRANCES
That guy over there; the professor is what we call him. A
year or two ago.

HERE TODAY
Really? He’s old.

FRANCES
Sometimes that happens. Might even happen to you someday.
HERE TODAY
No, it’s just that they say, “it only takes one.” Better one early than one late.

FRANCES
I don’t think it bothers him. He’s had other stuff going on. Teaching.

HERE TODAY
What other careers are going on in here?

FRANCES
With these guys? Nothing.

HERE TODAY
But they said… this was THE place...

FRANCES
We’re the failed screenwriters social club. We hangout in here because… well, look across the street. Location, location, location.

HERE TODAY
But...

FRANCES
If they told you to hangout in here and write it’s not because of these clowns. It’s because every once in a while a heavy hitter comes in.

HERE TODAY
I see.

FRANCES
They are a blank sheet of paper without us; but for most writers, this is as close to real power as they’ll ever come.

HERE TODAY
I don’t see any big wigs in here now.

FRANCES
They’ll be across the street for the Christmas party later.

HERE TODAY
But not in here, you say?

FRANCES
Not tonight. Not likely.

HERE TODAY
Well, it’s been nice talking to you but I have to run.
(Here Today folds his laptop and begins to leave the coffee shop. He sits with the professor for five seconds and they whisper. In ten seconds Here Today is out the door.)

FRANCES
You just got here. We haven’t gotten a chance to... well, good luck.

SCENE: Why is Everything Unsolicited Material?

PROFESSOR
Nails again?

TURTLE
This is not good.

PROFESSOR
You pitch nails out there?

TURTLE
Late every Sunday night; no security. If I’d known they were having their Christmas party...

FRANCES
Last Monday? Too late now. I can see at least six cops.

TURTLE
And there are always lurkers?

FRANCES
Lurkers?

TURTLE
My rule is if you see six cops, there are eight.

FRANCES
Well, you ought to know.

TURTLE
It works better for me at 3 am. I’ve just got to be more alert about these parties.

FRANCES
Well, no one told you. It’s okay. Give them a break tonight. For most of ‘em, Christmas only comes one night each year, usually the second Saturday of December.
PROFESSOR
Well, nice to know you’re still heading up the celebrity walk-to-work movement?

TURTLE
Ever since that wipeout I had with them.

PROFESSOR
You mean they didn’t read your surf movie.

TURTLE
Didn’t even read the query letter. And had the nerve to threaten me.

PROFESSOR
Unsolicited material.

TURTLE
But the ocean and the world best surfers are a few miles that way…

(Turtle is confused but finally points West.)

TURTLE
I am from here. I surf. How is that unsolicited?

PROFESSOR
You know, I don’t know why the agents don’t just go to the state legislature and get statutory immunity.

TURTLE
What’s that?

FRANCES
A law that says you can’t sue ‘em.

PROFESSOR
Other professions have it… farmers, doctors, lawyers, pharmaceuticals, and baseball.

TURTLE
You can sue drug companies.

PROFESSOR
Depends on what state you’re in. Federalism. Each state does their own thing.

FRANCES
Cops.
PROFESSOR
So long as they are acting under the colour of law.

ERIC
You can sue them if they shoot you.

PROFESSOR
Sometimes. It depends if they are doing their job when they shoot you.

TURTLE
What if they just beat you up...

ERIC
Then they’re just doing their job.

FRANCES
So. I don’t get it. They have the sway in Sacramento; they ought to just get that law.

GERMAN
They’re never gonna do that.

Why?

TURTLE
The reason we’re making the same movies over and over is because...

ERIC
We aren’t making shit but recycled paper.

FRANCES
You know, you are witty... you just might make it in this town.

ERIC
I appreciate ya. I’d leave a tip but...

PROFESSOR
The reason we’re making the same movies over and over is that they all have a list...

FRANCES
That’s what they call it... “their list...” “I’m not looking at adding to my list...” ever hear that?

TURTLE
All the time.

PROFESSOR
Something like what writers faced in the Soviet Union.
PROFESSOR
The State Committee for Cinematography... you had to have someone’s permission to make a movie or write one. In the USSR, you had to have the government’s permission. Here you have to see “the man” across the street.

FRANCES
It’s not entirely a true analogy.

PROFESSOR
You’re right, but just the word “list” ought to give everyone the creeps.

FRANCES
They need a different phrase.

PROFESSOR
Maybe just NOT have lists, maybe? Ya think?

MYRA
The lists are white.

FRANCES
Or change the lists...

TURTLE
Make them more...

ERIC
Black

WILLIAM
Brown

MYRA
Queer

GERMAN
Catholic.

FRANCES
BBQ... See?

TURTLE
The new Hollywood blacklist... B-B-Q-C.

PROFESSOR
Ironic huh?
SCENE: There Are Only 47 Stories.

TURTLE
You just said we’re making the same movies over and over... I noticed that.

FRANCES
Well, you know there are only 47 stories... they are all just rehashed, changed a bit and repeated.

ERIC
Doesn’t having lists limit that? How will we ever get to 48 if they only read from their safe list of writers?

(William begins to count on his fingers.)

PROFESSOR
When I was in school... fifty years ago... the professor said there were only 42 stories...

ERIC
Wait a minute... I’m thinking... so in 50 years all the planet has come up with only five original stories?

MYRA
Well, if you believe those numbers.

PROFESSOR
It works like a monopoly. Same argument.

FRANCES
Now monopoly is illegal.

WILLIAM
And this town only uses eight of the 47.

MYRA
Limits opportunity.

ERIC
But it does drive the price up.

GERMAN
Which they are willing to pay... but why would they be willing to pay more for scripts?

WILLIAM
... so they don’t have to deal with people like us.

FRANCES
B-B-Q-C.
PROFESSOR
Discrimination works like a monopoly. Same arguments.

FRANCES
Discrimination is illegal too.

ERIC
Because they only read the writers on their list. And we’re not on anyone’s list.

FRANCES
But professor you are…

PROFESSOR
Actually, I’m not.

FRANCES

WILLIAM
You’d think every one of them would want some of your pie.

PROFESSOR
I’m not looking to share my pie.

TURTLE
You could have an agent though?

PROFESSOR
I’m too old and I’m done.

FRANCES
So you wrote one movie, made in Russia, pirated everywhere… and you’re done?

ERIC
How long did it take?

PROFESSOR
Had to wait the last eight years for Obama to leave office. The producer that wanted it was on the sanctions list…

TURTLE
So it was illegal…

PROFESSOR
For a time…

TURTLE
I didn’t know that. An illegal script. Wow.
PROFESSOR
Illegal for me to sell it to anyone on the list... or their companies or anyone associated with the sanctions list.

FRANCES
Some international criminal? Smuggling nuclear parts? Laundering money?

PROFESSOR
He is the president of a television network. A personal friend of Putin. I had to wait for a capitalist to be elected here and end the sanctions.

TURTLE
Funny thing about Russia... why can’t our Democrats get along with them?

FRANCES
The Russian’s betrayed our ideas. Ideas we fought for. My mother fought in Brazil in the 1970s.

TURTLE
I did have a coach, crew cut, old school... football but swimming too. He said one day the Russians would be free and we would be slaves of the government. He also said, one day everything will be against the law. We laughed at the time, but...

ERIC
Now how did he know that?

TURTLE
Read the newspapers a lot.

FRANCES
In class?

TURTLE
Back then they all did.

FRANCES
It’s true.

TURTLE
Back then the teachers were smart but rather than teach they read the newspaper and told us a little. Now they stopped reading but they talk a lot but don’t have that much to teach...

FRANCES
...because they don’t read the newspaper?
TURTLE
I have a daughter in high school. And well, that’s the way I see it.

FRANCES
God bless Hermosa Beach High School.

PROFESSOR
So, I had to wait; you’re waiting. Everyone is waiting. Big deal.

FRANCES
Pretty genius.

PROFESSOR
Just politics. It’s like a wave in the ocean… up and down… you just have to wait.

TURTLE
I can wait. I’m used to it.

FRANCES
Not the politics… that’s not what I meant. I mean the movie… I saw it… ballsy, something like Weekend at Bernie's.

TURTLE
That movie about a dead person?

PROFESSOR
Weekend at Bernie's made 25 million profit… that’s something like $100 million in today’s money.

FRANCES
Lenin’s body stolen and led on a chase through Moscow the night before it’s supposed to be buried… all this symbolic stuff… I’m guessing Russians get it. It WAS funny.

PROFESSOR
I hope.

TURTLE
How’d you think of that?

PROFESSOR
I was talking to a Russian book publisher about Lenin and all the Soviets as being vampires… from Peter the Great on… He was the first vampire hunter and Sakharov was the last… she said it’s been done… not Sakharov but Lenin was a vampire in a novel back at the time… but she said why don’t you write something about Lenin’s body… and she sent me a
newspaper article... the Minister of Culture said his body should be buried. So I wrote it as it would be. They called it a fantasy; only in Russia is it a fantasy to bury a body.

ERIC
He’s still not buried?

PROFESSOR
I paid $5 to cut in line to see it. Putin said the issue would be answered in 2024, the 100th anniversary of Lenin’s death.

ERIC
Well, I’ll be... you were in the right place at the right time.

FRANCES
How much shit they give you?

PROFESSOR
Well, at first they said it was too controversial... I said to me that’s a good thing... and that I would personally pay the $5 per protester to stand out in front of the theater... waving a red flag. They were doing that...

ERIC
The filmmakers...

PROFESSOR
No, the communists were paying the equivalent of $5 to protest Putin. I was just walking in Red Square and that’s what I was offered. And then they said the youth, movie-going age, didn’t even know who Lenin was.

ERIC
Do they?

PROFESSOR
Every generation thinks the next generation are morons. Just look at the movies we make for them.

FRANCES
I have a theory about that... films must have someone to exploit and young people are easier to exploit than actors. Maybe by a bit, but just enough.

ERIC
Have you even heard the phrase blaxploitation?
PROFESSOR
Well, I was told it was educational... so who knows in Russia? They like to pull your chain.

ERIC
Why Russia?

PROFESSOR
School, I guess. Remember, I’m an old man. I was actually IN the Soviet Union and it’s what we studied back then.

ERIC
School, huh.

PROFESSOR
Lots of school.

FRANCES
(loudly)
Anyone, other than the professor, pay attention in school?

WILLIAM
Not me.

(Everyone chuckles.)

FRANCES
And had your education influenced your writing?

(Long beat. Nothing. Everyone chuckles again.)

PROFESSOR
School and Google maps.

FRANCES
You did set the locations well... every scene is set at a specific location.

ERIC
You read you’re credited with inventing the geo-comedy?

PROFESSOR
No. Really? Is that good?

FRANCES
I think they mean the situations are only funny (or important) because it’s on a certain street or in a certain building. Any other location, let’s say on the other side of Moscow, and it fails.
PROFESSOR
I don’t know… geo-comedy… why not location-comedy?

ERIC
Maybe it’s the translation?

FRANCES
Well, you did well.

PROFESSOR
So does that mean I can have my tab back? And maybe I’m not ostracized anymore?

FRANCES
No, you sold a script and they made the film. You are out of here, but you might be right about the immunity from lawsuits.

(Francis moves to clean another table.)

SCENE: Immunity from Lawsuits
(William might be interested in Francis; when she’s near, he stops listening to his police scanners… or phone calls.)

ERIC
They will never do that because if they do they’ll have to read scripts.

WILLIAM
I calculated one of my targets only read eight scripts last year.

ERIC
Must be nice.

MYRA
Target…

WILLIAM
That’s what I call them. Sorry… I was in the military and you have no idea what that experience will do to a person.

MYRA
No. Don’t apologize; this is war.

ERIC
Civil war.
FRANCES
There’s an agent that reads eight scripts a year?

ERIC
And how do you know that?

WILLIAM
I’m listening.

ERIC
Isn’t that a crime?

FRANCES
No. We don’t use that word in here. Not in here.

ERIC
Come on. You’re serious?

FRANCES
What you call crime is just a social control construct created by the elite to protect their own privilege, prerogatives and property from redistribution.

GERMAN
Shoplifting, looting and street thuggery? They burned the Citadel Outlets Christmas tree!

ERIC
They emptied the Gucci shop.

FRANCES
I’m sure they were hungry.

GERMAN
So they stole a purse and started a fire so that they could cook it?

MYRA
Social justice warriors, if you ask me.

FRANCES
It’s all symbolic. Don’t you get it? Gucci, Christmas? But don’t call it crime. I don’t wanna hear that.

ERIC
Anything else we can’t say?

FRANCES
Bail, incarceration, mandatory jail time, stop-and-frisk.
MYRA
And you can’t say, “broken-windows deterrent policies”; they violate the First Amendment.

ERIC
Free speech? We’re in the USSR here.
(He looks at the professor, but the professor shrugs like he doesn’t want to be involved in the debate.)

FRANCES
I don’t give a fuck. Stop with the bull shit or you’ll be drinking coffee with the old-timers at the Hacienda Heights McDonald's.

ERIC
You wouldn’t dare ban me for a measly little word!

FRANCES
If you say the C word again you are out of here.
(Turtle looks up puzzled. Myra explains.)

MYRA
He said, “crime.”

FRANCES
I’ll do it. It’s a fast rule and if you insist, I’ll have to ask that you pay your tab.

ERIC
I don’t think you even keep a tab...

FRANCES
Try me!
(Long beat. Eric backs down.)

ERIC
It’s an “injustice” then.

FRANCES
Thank you.

GERMAN
The most extreme injustices in this town are perpetrated by the agents, so...

WILLIAM
... what’s a little cri... I mean injustice in return?
MYRA
Well said, friend.

WILLIAM
(Speaking to the professor.)
The reason they don’t read scripts is because they don’t want to get sued...

PROFESSOR
Allegedly.

MYRA
I think it’s just an excuse to sit on their ass.

GERMAN
If I get off my ass and read a strange script, I’ll get sued.

ERIC
God, I love what we’ve become!

(Joe enters the coffee shop and walks up to the counter to place an order with the barista.)

FRANCES
Joe sues every baseball movie and especially baseball rom-coms.

TURTLE
There can’t be that many baseball movies.

FRANCES
Joe’s the reason there aren’t that many.

WILLIAM
I thought it was the licensing.

FRANCES
Nope, there aren’t any baseball movies because no one wants sued.

TURTLE
Is that true?

FRANCES
Win any Joe?

JOE
Nope, but one of these days...
PROFESSOR
Hum, it only takes one.

(Joe pays and takes his coffee and leaves.)

MYRA
Why does he come back in here?

FRANCES
We’re the only ones nice to him.

SCENE: That’s Why I Use a Pseudonym.

FRANCES
Look everyone has their little thing...

WILLIAM
(Smiling at Turtle.)
The nails...

TURTLE
(Smiling back at William.)
Piracy. Surveillance.

ERIC
You still trading movies with that guy?

WILLIAM
Which one? The Chinese guy?

ERIC
You have other partners in... injustice?

WILLIAM
The Russians. They’re 100 per cent reliable.

FRANCES
Aren’t you afraid you’ll get caught?

WILLIAM
That’s why I use the pseudonym.

GERMAN
So, if you go to prison for movie piracy, you’ll still have a script to sell?

FRANCES
So, you can sell it from prison?

WILLIAM
Has anyone ever done that?
ERIC
That’s a stupid fucking question... We’re out and free and without a record and we can’t sell a script. Why would a felon be allowed to sell one?

MYRA
No, I think it is possible.

TURTLE
It’s probably happened.

SCENE: Why Don’t We Make Westerns Anymore?

WILLIAM
Well, when they pay me for my work, I’ll start buying movies.

GERMAN
But you’re exporting it; aren’t you?

WILLIAM
I call it overseas marketing. Seeing one American film makes them want to buy ten.

GERMAN
But they don’t buy ten.

WILLIAM
That has nothing to do with me.

ERIC
I have an observation. Seventy per cent of our income comes from foreign film sales.

WILLIAM
That’s the idea.

ERIC
I appreciate what you’re doing. Westerns aren’t worth a shit anymore because people won’t invest in them.

WILLIAM
Foreigners don’t like our westerns. Put them out there for free and they still won’t watch them.

ERIC
So we stop making them? I thought we were America! Top dog, the big enchilada, head honcho, el gordo de naciones! Feliz Navidad. Próspero año y Felicidad.
GERMAN
He’s right and he should be pissed. Everyone in this town wants the global sales and they don’t care about domestic sales...

WILLIAM
But thirty per cent?

FRANCES
You’re mad. We all understand that.

MYRA
Everyone needs someone to be mad with.

WILLIAM
So, you have a western movie...

FRANCES
Worse. His western is based on the buffalo soldiers.

GERMAN
The black cavalry?

MYRA
Killing Indians?

ERIC
And getting killed by them.

GERMAN
Blacks vs. Indians?

TURTLE
Oh, that’s not good either way.

ERIC
Well, I thought that was the ultimate aggression, the worse insult of all, persuading Blacks to kill brown people. I guess that’s not a part of American history?

MYRA
Black characters shouldn’t conduct screen genocide on brown characters and the filmmaker expect a profit. It’s the solidarity rule in this town.

FRANCES
Rewrite it, maybe?

ERIC
Rewrite history?
MYRA
We do it all the time. Believe me, no one will even notice. You’ll get an award.

WILLIAM
It’s moot. Listen... no one is gonna make a western. Not black or white or brown, because they have it in their head they want the global 100% and not a mere 30%.

PROFESSOR
It’s not an art anymore. It’s business.

TURTLE
It’s a variety of whoring. That’s why one of the trades is named that.

MYRA
What would you have us do? You can’t kill brown people or black people on screen.

ERIC
Forget the foreigners and make movies for Americans.

FRANCES
That’s crazy.

MYRA
That’s banking.

ERIC
Not as crazy as fourteen people of colour receiving nominations and not even one actually winning.

MYRA
Tokenism. So?

ERIC
Well, excuses if you ask me. The next morning, this jackass was on GMA, “people of colour aren’t winning Oscars because there aren’t black writers,” and the ...

MYRA
Leave it to this town to come up with an excuse. I’m surprised it took overnight to come up with that one.

ERIC
#OscarsSoWhite. Remember that? I wrote it the week after that... ten big dogs read it and they all passed.
MYRA
Will all the news coverage of the snub and you have an all-black cast?

WILLIAM
Maybe there was another black movie they used to pacify everyone that year?

FRANCIS
Which one?

(Extremely long beat.)

MYRA
There has to be something...

ERIC
Well, they had a white lieutenant; he got them lost out in West Texas.

MYRA
But that’s good. A white lieutenant.

ERIC
Lost... no water or food... killed a few of them... worse military adventure ever.

TURTLE
So, it's true?

GERMAN
Well, I don’t know why they would pass. How is the formatting? Cause if anyone little thing...

FRANCES
It’s done correctly.

ERIC
Some ex-confederates out there hunting buffalo, they gave them bad directions... and the soldiers (coloured soldiers) believed them.

GERMAN
Bad directions?

ERIC
Told them there was water to the West. They were thirsty.

MYRA
Do you think it might make people of colour look dumb?
ERIC
Well, I can’t help that. I’m not just making it up, you know. But about the piracy…

WILLIAM
Did you ever wonder why Netflix files are so easy to download? They’re putting a unique individual subscriber’s code inside the streaming.

FRANCES
Don’t fuck with Hollywood. They aren’t as dumb as they look in those sports cars.

TURTLE
Aren’t we Hollywood?

ENTIRE CAST
No.

WILLIAM
Don’t worry. The Russians are onto it. In fact… no I can’t say.

ERIC
Sure you can, we’re all friends. You aren’t stealing anything from us, if you get my drift. We don’t make anything.

WILLIAM
The Russians are looking for the code inside the file so they can superimpose executive’s Netflix codes into the pirated files.

PROFESSOR
Now that’s what I call a turn.

TURTLE
Superimpose?

GERMAN
So it looks like the source is the exec.

FRANCES
Brilliant!

MYRA
I’ll be laughing my ass off. Perfect.
WILLIAM
It wasn’t my idea. But those Russians wow. Screw Hollywood; don’t mess with the Fancy Bear. If the Russian’s know who you are, you’re fucked.

ERIC
Professor? Do you think the 70 years of socialism made them that way or have they always been sneaks?

PROFESSOR
Hard to say why they’re so aggressive... but I’m leaning toward the Mongol hordes as the true root cause.

ERIC
They’ve been angry for a while now, huh?

FRANCES
Professor, are you sure it wasn’t the advent of nuclear weapons?

PROFESSOR
Maybe.

SCENE: Even a Blind Person Can See What’s Going on Here.
(Francis walks behind the counter and German orders a refill.)

BARISTA
I might write a script.

FRANCES
Good for you. You should.

GERMAN
Why? Something happen that I don’t know about?

BARISTA
No, but if you guys can do it... why can’t I?

(Gertrude arrives for a refill.)

GERMAN
It takes years of training.

FRANCES
No one is going to tell you no.

GERMAN
But look everyone has a script in this town...
FRANCES
So, what he’s saying is… you might as well.

GERMAN
Supply and demand… all these writers only push the price down.

FRANCES
He should write…

ERIC
Why?

FRANCES
Well, he’s blind for Christ’s sake, he knows about hardship. We don’t know hardship.

GERMAN
What?

(William arrives for a refill.)

ERIC
I’ve been working on this script for seven years…

FRANCES
You should have put it down six years ago…

GERMAN
She’s right… write it and send ten letters and get back to work on the next script.

(Myra arrives at the counter.)

MYRA
Are you a screenwriter or not?

ERIC
Ten letters and then write a new one? Ten letters?

WILLIAM
I have a database of 7,000. Phones, emails, addresses… if you think that will help.

MYRA
Every time you write a script, you spam 7,000 people?

WILLIAM
They aren’t people; they’re targets.

MYRA
This is a big town. Do you think 7,000 is enough?
FRANCES
How long does that take?

WILLIAM
To send 7,000 query letters? Once it’s set up? About two minutes.

GERMAN
Is that legal?

(Francis glares at German in disapproval.)

GERMAN
Sorry. Just needed a refill.

(German receives his refill and returns to his seat.)

WILLIAM
Well, I take them off the list if they read the letter.

MYRA
So how many read them?

WILLIAM
About 78% aren’t even opened.

GERMAN
I think they set up email boxes and just ignore them to fuck with us. Drain our resources. Professor?

PROFESSOR
A typical tactic in any conflict. Make dispute expensive and that includes the time-consuming.

TURTLE
Is that in books?

WILLIAM
Sounds like it; so what the hell are you busting my balls for?

FRANCES
We’re not busting your balls. We’re just curious.

TURTLE
So how many computers would you need to bankrupt them?

WILLIAM
That’s not even possible.
PROFESSOR
We are definitely the insurgents, here.

WILLIAM
Underfunded and we are about as organized as dogs at a garbage dump.

MYRA
True what you were telling me? They have machines that “unsolicited material” you and then “database” you?

WILLIAM
A computer program yep...

MYRA
And you jammed it up?

WILLIAM
Maybe I did. Maybe I didn’t.

FRANCES
With random names and emails, random loglines ganked from IMDB?

MYRA
The newspaper said they received 130,000 query letters in a 24-hour period.

(The professor arrives for his refill.)

FRANCES
(to William)
Just a light criticism. The reason you can’t sell a script is because people hate spam.

WILLIAM
What about I can’t get along with anyone, because that was what it was last week from you.

MYRA
No, it’s because THEY are the establishment.

PROFESSOR
Everybody playing nice? Sometimes it’s hard to tell.

FRANCES
We’re getting along fine.

MYRA
(It’s become a joke since the professor sold a script.)
The professor is the only one we don’t like.
PROFESSOR
The lucky or the educated can’t be in your club?

FRANCES
We’re a bunch of fucked up people and you aren’t.

MYRA
Speak for yourself.

FRANCES
Not that I’m aware of, yet.

ERIC
And you want your barista to join our fucked up little club? He’s not fucked up enough to write.

FRANCES
You are!

ERIC
Speaking of fucked up... we’re all fucked but some of us are fucking more than others...

FRANCES
If that’s slut-shaming, I’m not ashamed... You’re a bunch of saboteurs... Shameatours!

WILLIAM
Pirates, professors, limousine chasers, beach bums and losers...

ERIC
So just out of curiosity, how many producers have you bedded...

FRANCES
Bedded? What is this the 18th-century?

ERIC
Just out of curiosity. I might write a script.

FRANCES
Seven.

GERMAN
Who even asks that?

MYRA
If you are writing a script, you don’t ask... you just make up a number.

ERIC
Only seven?
FRANCES
Well, it’s sure getting harder in the current atmosphere; I can tell you that. They won’t even look at me anymore...

GERMAN
Like middle school all over again?

WILLIAM
It’s not because you’re getting older.

FRANCES
I know that. But do you know how hard it is to seduce a suit that won’t even look at you? I mean not even in the tits, much less look you in the eye. They stopped looking!

WILLIAM
You’ve got more going for you than your tits.

FRANCES
Thanks.

WILLIAM
I mean... well... I mean your script.

FRANCES
Everybody has a script.

ERIC
But not everyone has a nice rack.

GERMAN
I should have been a cosmetic surgeon.

THE PROFESSOR
Not since Harvey Weinstein?

ERIC
But before that, how many agents?

FRANCES
Fuck, I lost count. But I didn’t bed ‘em unless they remembered my name, so that cuts into the number of candidates.

PROFESSOR
Good for you.

FRANCES
Didn’t sell anything.
ERIC
Well, they’re only gonna make 80 Christmas movies this year and Minneapolis isn’t the centre of cold.

WILLIAM
Why don’t you go public? These days you can really make...

FRANCES
No, that would be suicide.

ERIC
You found that you get more fleas with honey?

(Turtle arrives for sugar. Everyone arrives at the counter.)

FRANCES
Don’t you men have any dignity... I mean there’s honour in making a deal... what’s not honourable are nails, rat fink tricks and sending movies to China and Russia...

WILLIAM
I have no idea what you’re talking about.

TURTLE
I use the ReelMovie app. It works; even on your big screen.

FRANCES
And what I do... did...

WILLIAM
Yes, before the current environment...

FRANCES
... isn’t any worse than filing bogus IRS income.

MYRA
What did I do to you?

FRANCES
Or burning Aston Martins and then reporting them for insurance fraud.

ERIC
The guy told people he was upside down; he was sitting right over there when he said it... ...and he looked financially stressed.

FRANCES
You think I’m just a slut?
ERIC
Wait a minute; this is nothing personal. I understand quid-pro-quo. And who you sleep with isn’t my business at all; and I certainly don’t want to interfere in the marketplace of ideas. So, I’m sorry. No offence.

FRANCES
None taken.

SCENE: All I Want for Christmas is a Violent Viking Raider
(The professor glances at Frances’ phone. He’s intrigued by a mystery.)

PROFESSOR
What’s that? Your phone says negative nine.

FRANCES
Oh, I did some Google searches on Minnesota and now my phone… now apple thinks I’m in Minneapolis.

PROFESSOR
Turn your location on and you’ll get the L.A. weather.

FRANCES
That’s okay. I see how cold it is there and it reminds me how lucky I am to be here.

PROFESSOR
I see. You know I read your script… I liked seeing Santa Claus with a black Ms. Claus… but I don’t like multi-century marriages… he’s 10th-century and a Viking; do you know how much havoc they caused? And she’s a 21st-century Minnesota farm girl. They are sweet as molasses.

FRANCES
Minnesota farm girls ARE just lady Vikings. Good partners; not followers, not leaders, but partners. Both are Nordic cultures.

PROFESSOR
Language, culture, borders? Is that what makes a good marriage?

FRANCES
Imagine Chewbacca in the Millenium Falcon and you’re Han Solo.
PROFESSOR
That’s not a very pretty comparison…

FRANCES
It’s time-travel… and she changes him… he comes into the movie a violent Viking raider.

PROFESSOR
I like the Christmas thing… the female demographic likes that… For me maybe it’s the time travel thing…

FRANCES
Look you have to have barriers. A TV couple has to have hurdles to jump…

PROFESSOR
What better than a dozen or so centuries?

FRANCES
It’s like it’s their fate.

PROFESSOR
And he winds up a soldier in Afghanistan? Why not make him a farmer, feeding the soldiers in Afghanistan? Something non-violent at the end?

FRANCES
Well, men don’t change.

PROFESSOR
I thought women’s television was all about empowering women to change their partners.

FRANCES
No. The Hallmark Channel is all about channelling fate.

PROFESSOR
When you say fate and I think, if it’s their fate, wouldn’t it be more seamless?

FRANCES
No hurdles? Hum… I see the conflict with fate and hurdles. Maybe it’s their fate to smash a few hurdles and then sprint to the alter.

PROFESSOR
Who said fate has to be easy?

FRANCES
Right! I’m gonna use William’s database next week... and include that phrase in my letter. Mind?
PROFESSOR
No. Of course not. Listen, for me, the movie should be made.

FRANCES
Thank you.

PROFESSOR
And I like the idea of targeting a geographic area.

FRANCES
Appreciate that.

PROFESSOR
How many people live in Minnesota?

FRANCES
Oh, fuck that; there are 80 of IMDB’s top 1000 born there.

SCENE: Seven Jewish Weddings and Seven Demonic Murders

ERIC
What’s your script about again?

GERMAN
Seven Jewish weddings and seven demonic murders. This chick... she’s been married seven times and every time this demon comes and kills the new husband before the marriage can even be consummated.

ERIC
Sucks for her, I guess.

GERMAN
You guess?

ERIC
Well, she might be getting something out of it. Money? Land?

GERMAN
Not back then. I don’t think. I don’t know. Her dad might be getting rich... I don’t know.

ERIC
When is it set?

GERMAN
Well the old testament, but I have my version set in 1930s Amsterdam.
ERIC

Why?

GERMAN
They’re Jewish and the Nazi’s will be there soon.

ERIC
Before the end of the movie?

GERMAN
That’s the twist... Adolph is coming to town. The audience should know that.

ERIC
So what happens?

GERMAN
The woman prays to die but God sends Brad Pitt to deal with it. Pitt kills....

FRANCES
Raphael. He means the angel, not Brad Pitt.

ERIC
So, someone said you want Mel Gibson to read it?

GERMAN
Mel Gibson has read it...

ERIC
That’s great.

GERMAN
The Bible version; probably when he was a kid.

ERIC
You want him to play the girl’s dad?

GERMAN
No. Tobit is the girl’s eighth father-in-law... blind... oh uh... sorry. But he’s pious... his kid’s not been murdered yet, but maybe his son marries the girl and he’s next. Same as in the Catholic bible.

ERIC
That’s Catholic?

GERMAN
Actually, more of a Jewish movie but... yes there are about 1.3 billion Catholics. Orthodox Christians believe in it too and that’s another 280 million.
ERIC
I’m surprised that hasn’t been done. I mean the seven Jewish weddings ought to get a movie made.

GERMAN
It was a silent in the ‘20s.

ERIC
You shouldn’t name actors.

GERMAN
You know I don’t really give a fuck.

FRANCES
You read his resume? He was excommunicated.

GERMAN
Yep.

ERIC
What did you do? They think the script is blasphemy?

GERMAN
No, the script is really very faithful to the scripture. It’s a short book and basically each verse is a scene.

ERIC
But, you have to do something really serious to be excommunicated.

FRANCES
(almost whispering)
He’s not really excommunicated.

ERIC
He’s not?

FRANCES
He just tells everyone he’s been excommunicated.

GERMAN
It’s a godless town. And they won’t like my script unless they think it’s controversial. That’s all I’m saying.

FRANCES
(very light whispering)
See? That’s what I mean we’re all a little fucked up.
SCENE: I’m More Lesbian than Native

WILLIAM
So, I think you can enlighten me about this IRS thing?

MYRA
You have an enemy?

WILLIAM
In this business? Doesn’t everyone?

MYRA
I mean it’s serious business wishing an audit on someone?

WILLIAM
But you can do that?

MYRA
Well, technically it’s the government doing it.

WILLIAM
So throw me a bone here. How do you do it?

MYRA
I wouldn’t recommend it. It’s a skillset most people don’t have... actually it’s a formula.

WILLIAM
And you have the formula?

MYRA
Well, it’s proprietary. I mean my company... There are certain things you can do to avoid an audit. Right?

WILLIAM
Okay.

MYRA
You just turn that.

WILLIAM
How do you know about the Wichita Indians?

MYRA
Swear to God you won’t tell anyone.

WILLIAM
Loose lips sink scripts.

MYRA
I grew up in Wichita Falls.

WILLIAM
I won’t tell a soul, but I don’t think anyone cares.
MYRA
I care.

WILLIAM
Okay. I grew up in Oklahoma.

MYRA
Maybe we should respect each other?

WILLIAM
I can respect that. So, I’ve been to the Native American museum at Fort Sill.

MYRA
Me too.

WILLIAM
How fucked up is that?

MYRA
Huh?

WILLIAM
Well, they have a museum that pretty much advertises what they did to your people.

MYRA
Listen, I have to tell you; I’m more lesbian than Native.

WILLIAM
Well, I just wanted you to be aware that I’m aware that LGBTQ Natives back in the day...

MYRA
Two spirited peoples...

WILLIAM
Interesting phrase. I know you were well regarded and considered healers, visionaries, shamans, nannies of orphans, and caregivers. And there wasn’t any bull shit like there is today?

MYRA
That’s right.

WILLIAM
What happened?

MYRA
Christianity happened.
WILLIAM
Well... well... you’re trying to say that in your movie?

MYRA
No, fuck that. I just thought it would be cool if a lesbian chick... fucked up some soldiers.

WILLIAM
It’s like Alita: Battle Angel only she’s a native?

MYRA
And she likes cats.

WILLIAM
She have normal-looking eyes?

SCENE: Turtle is Almost Eaten by a Shark

TURTLE
What if this lady gets Alzheimer’s? She doesn’t have anyone because her husband is dead. But especially, her son died... in a surfing accident. So, she hangs out at the beach... she’s fucked up but...

MYRA

TURTLE
I don’t give a fuck about that... listen. My movie is for THIS decade.

MYRA
I’m sorry. Tell me the whole story.

TURTLE
This little dude in the tribe... he gets hit in the head by this thermos while surfing. He’s in the hospital and everyone is freaked out... And this older surfer, a drug addict. He’s so depressed he surfs alone... which can be a form of suicide. He ALMOST gets eaten by a shark.

MYRA
They’re all drug addicts?

TURTLE
No, just the one dude.
MYRA
What happens to the old lady?

TURTLE
Well, she remembers her son or she’s trying to. That’s why she’s hanging out at the beach. And she’s been there at the hospital before, man. Her son was killed so she can counsel them through the trauma.

MYRA
So she’s a psychologist or something?

TURTLE
No, she’s a literature professor trying to write a surfing movie.

MYRA
Cool. But are you the kid that hit his head, or the drug addict attacked by the shark, or are you the old lady?

TURTLE
I can’t act for shit, I’m the writer.

SCENE: The Real Vampires of Mosul

PROFESSOR
Vampires? In Iraq?

WILLIAM
Or Afghanistan. Take your pick.

PROFESSOR
Why vampires?

WILLIAM
Because the unit would be overrun unless they join up.

PROFESSOR
Vampires let you join up?

WILLIAM
Sure they do.

PROFESSOR
How did you come up with that?

WILLIAM
I was there; I lived that thing. We weren’t supposed to but when we killed one of those fuckers we had a stencil of a skull and crossbones with the 24th and we spray painted the
side of the nearest building. Couldn’t do that when we were in Afghanistan.

PROFESSOR
Why is that?

WILLIAM
Those fucking European allies could see it in Afghanistan. We weren’t showing off for anyone in Iraq.

PROFESSOR
How did you get vampires out of that?

WILLIAM
Well, that’s all I got for you. It just happened, man. Those fuckers had vampires; so we figured we needed some too. We fucking drank blood and we won.

PROFESSOR
You’re not joking?

WILLIAM
The next day we were sunburned bad, red as fuck, but we won.

PROFESSOR
And you had a chance to work in intelligence when you got out?

WILLIAM
Fuck those guys, look at me now. I’m a screenwriter.

SCENE: The Christmas Party from Hell

MYRA
Sort of slow, Fran.

FRANCES
It’s the Christmas party. Attendance is mandatory, I hear.

GERMAN
Where they having it?

FRANCES
Across the street.

MYRA
Not in a hotel?

GERMAN
Yea, why not in a hotel?
WILLIAM
The pandemic... is what they’re telling each other.

GERMAN
Sounds to me it’s more about money.

TURTLE
They’re going broke?

MYRA
They spend money like crazy.

FRANCES
They spend money like they have it.

MYRA
Well, with this pandemic, you never know.

GERMAN
Why in a pandemic would it be mandatory?

ERIC
Whatever happened to, “My body, my choice”?

FRANCES
That has NOTHING to do with COVID or Christmas parties?

TURTLE
But COVID’s still going on?

ERIC
As long as there are elections, I imagine.

FRANCES
I’m not saying that comment’s ignorant, but I’ll ignore it anyway.

ERIC
Mandatory... seems a bit ironic, to me.

GERMAN
Why? Even agents have to have some moral compass. A line in the sand...

MYRA
And that’s a worship of Christmas?

FRANCES
Supposed to be EVERYBODY... for in-person, hybrid, and virtual teams. Starts at 6:45 p.m.

ERIC
Who starts a party at 6:45 and not 7:00?
TURTLE
That’s a long line of Porsches, Ferraris, Jaguars.

FRANCES
Nothing is going to happen until the silver BMW 750 arrives.

MYRA
They can’t walk from the parking lot?

WILLIAM
Of course not; who would notice their cars, if they did that.

FRANCES
And the ladies’ dresses...

GERMAN
They walk from the garage every day.

FRANCES
The ladies will have shoes on tonight. Heels.

TURTLE
It’s the entire company? Over there now, getting drunk?

GERMAN
What do you think they’re drinking?

FRANCES
Whiskey, vodka... peppermint cocktails.

WILLIAM
They’re planning dirty tricks and drawing up enemy lists.

PROFESSOR
But surely not tonight?

WILLIAM
No, you are right, these social functions are totally boring to me.

ERIC
Gives me an idea or two though...

FRANCES
Please don’t call and report drunk drivers.

TURTLE
That won’t work. I’ve tried it.

ERIC
Why would you think I’d do that?
GERMAN
Teach them a lesson, though.

ERIC
Don’t drink and drive.

MYRA
No, read the damn scripts. And stop shitting on everyone NOT on your list.

TURTLE
How does not having it in a hotel help with transmission?

MYRA
When the entire idea of letting people work from home is to cut back on the transmission opportunities…

FRANCES
It’s not about the COVID?

ERIC
What COVID?

FRANCES
What do you mean?

ERIC
I mean if the virus was real, they would have cancelled tonight’s party.

TURTLE
So it’s not real today?

GERMAN
It WAS real.

ERIC
Yea, when they needed it.

MYRA
What about all the dead bodies… people dying so fast we couldn’t even bury them.

ERIC
They would have died anyway. And the government put a moratorium on burials.

TURTLE
I saw it on television. They had refrigerator trucks storing the bodies.
ERIC
Because the government wouldn’t permit the burial until they studied it. Once it was on television they said they’d studied it enough.

FRANCES
I’m not sure that’s true.

(She looks at the professor, but the professor shrugs; he doesn’t want to be involved.)

ERIC
And all this hype so they can get mail-in ballots?

MYRA
(Myra smirks about 2020.)
It worked, didn’t it? The Tangerine Warlock is history.

SCENE: Can We Really Count on Red Dawn To Save Us?

ERIC
You know why the foreigners will never come over here?

MYRA
The same reason no one invades Haiti? They don’t want to deal with the social problems?

ERIC
No, cause everybody’s armed.

WILLIAM
Red Dawn. The first one. I don’t watch remakes.

ERIC
That’s the perfect example.

MYRA
You watch a lot of movies?

WILLIAM
Nope. Used to.

MYRA
You seem to know a lot of them...

WILLIAM
I don’t watch movies anymore.

MYRA
How do you know what’s going on in town?
WILLIAM
Now don’t get me wrong. I watch trailers.

MYRA
No movies?

ERIC
How long’s this been going on?

WILLIAM
Seven years.

ERIC
Why?

WILLIAM
It makes me sick.

MYRA
Sick?

WILLIAM
Ever since I wrote one... found it ignored...

FRANCES
You know your movie is better than the new one’s you might watch?

ERIC
That’s fucked up.

WILLIAM
I know it is.

CHORUS – Walking in a Winter Wonderland (public domain)
This is unsolicited, are you listening?
On Rodeo, the jags are glistening
Another ugly slight
We're miserable tonight
Bitching in winter Hollywoodland
Gone away is the old way
Here to stay is a new way
He sings a farcical song
As we go along bitching in winter Hollywoodland
On Sunset we can pitch a tent
We'll pretend it’s a Hilton Cleanstay
The cops'll say, Are you reped? We'll say, No man
But you can do the job while you're in town
Later on, we'll expire
As we write by the fire no power for devices
The mistakes that we've made
Bitching in winter Hollywoodland
Ah yay, winter Hollywoodland
Oh yeah, winter Hollywoodland
Over on Wilshire, we can get a meal (on Sunset we can pitch a tent)
And our neighbour was a career clown (and now he’s still a clown)
We'll have fun at the café.
Until we’re full of coffee and we’re let down
Creditors calling (creditors calling), is anyone answerin’?
Across the street, Beamers are glistening
Another slight
We're happy tonight bitching in winter Hollywoodland
Bitching in winter Hollywoodland
We're bitching in winter Hollywoodland, Hollywoodland

TURTLE
(Singing a different Christmas song.)
Do reindeer really know how to fly?
ACT TWO

SETTING: Café Du Coffee facing Ave of the Stars

AT RISE: The CAST is looking out the fourth wall, out through the café’s front window at the Christmas party across the street.

SCENE: Drunk and Undead, but Creative Zombies

ERIC
That must be one hell of a party.

PROFESSOR
Who is that?

ERIC
He’s stumbling out into the street.

WILLIAM
I have no idea, but he’s so drunk he can’t walk.

MYRA
I don’t think I’ve ever seen a celebrity this drunk in public.

PROFESSOR
Mel Gibson maybe?

GERMAN
He wasn’t as drunk as this guy.

ERIC
This guy’s not a celebrity. That’s someone from the party.

WILLIAM
Clients can’t go to the Christmas party, employees only. I have the internal email if you wanna see it.

MYRA
He’s older. That might be an actual agent?

(Six phone cameras are whipped out and trained on the imaginary drunken figure stumbling out into the street.)
ERIC
Judging from his age, maybe upper tier.

GERMAN
The question is which agent.

(Flash red and blue lights.)

WILLIAM
Oh, busted. The cops are here. That didn’t take long. Five 9-1-1 calls all from inside the agency. Three were coded “disturbing the peace” and two “drunk and disorderly.” One call for an ambulance.

GERMAN
He must have punched someone.

WILLIAM
And someone just pulled the third-floor fire alarm.

ERIC
I’m loving it.

MYRA
They’ll just put him in a cab. S.O.P.

(Shots fired... centre back of the audience.)

FRANCES
Call 9-1-1.

ERIC
Why? The cops are already here. They shot whoever that was. They shot a white talent agent? What the fuck?

FRANCES
It looks like...

WILLIAM
Hard to say; it was about three headshots.

FRANCES
It was Sam Rothstein.

MYRA
You’re sure?
ERIC
What’s he drive?

WILLIAM
(After consulting one of the laptops.)
Jaguar XJ. 2023. License plate: I EAT WOOD.

ERIC
Go out there and get his keys?

TURTLE
The cops.

ERIC
Tell them you’re his brother and you need to get his keys.

TURTLE
They won’t.

WILLIAM
They must be feeling really guilty about right now. They might.

(Turtle considers doing it but then shakes his head.)

TURTLE
You guys are just fucking with me.

BARISTA
The police just shot… Sam Rothstein?

PROFESSOR
He came in here?

FRANCES
Sure. They all do, that’s why you all hang out here.

TURTLE
Aren’t there coffee rooms over there?

FRANCES
How should I know? I’ve never been inside the fortress.

TURTLE
Well, I just thought… maybe once?

FRANCES
Maybe never.

MYRA
They have them I’m told, but you know people…
ERIC
I hope we do...

FRANCES
If an agent... on the ins or the outs is there....

MYRA
Come on just say it.

FRANCES
Okay, what I was told is you don’t want to be seen drinking coffee with someone moving down.

MYRA
That makes them sound like...

GERMAN
Who told you that?

FRANCES
I really shouldn’t say.

MYRA
They cut each other's throats, you know.

GERMAN
That may be the only reason you remain in business.

FRANCES
Maybe. But coffee is this town’s second most sought after commodity.

MYRA
What’s the first?

FRANCES
Momentum.

ERIC
So they come here for momentum?

FRANCES
No, they come here to get away from the friction. To get away from those moving down. That and sometimes people like to get out.

GERMAN
Out of the lion’s den...

BARISTA
And into the sun is what she means.
ERIC
Are you really blind?

FRANCES
That’s insensitive.

ERIC
Well, if you’re involved I’m sure it is, but I meant totally blind.

GERMAN
So what are you doing working? Won’t the government take care of you?

ERIC
That’s just an urban legend started by politicians so people will vote for them. If something shitty happens to you; we got your back. Vote for me.

GERMAN
No, I really think you could get some benefits.

BARISTA
I gotta get out there if I want discovered.

GERMAN
Discovered?

ERIC
You are looking to get into the business.

FRANCES
That’s just as insensitive as can be.

ERIC
What?

FRANCES
You said “looking” and had a surprised look on your face.

ERIC
He wouldn’t know about any look on my face...

FRANCES
Well, you just told him, moron.

BARISTA
I don’t take offence... I’m just out here like you are.

ERIC
And you want to act?
BARISTA
Actually, direct.

(There is a very long beat.)

ERIC
Direct?!

BARISTA
Got you; didn’t I?

ERIC
Now that’s insensitive...

FRANCES
How?

ERIC
He knows I’m nervous around people with disabilities and he makes jokes.

MYRA
You mean he makes jokes at your expense.

GERMAN
Insensitive about people’s insensitivities...

WILLIAM
Is that possible?

PROFESSOR
No, it’s not.

MYRA
I think he’s got something there... Maybe we should explore this.

ERIC
You’re wasting everyone’s time.

FRANCES
But, you have to be more sensitive if you want to work in this town.

ERIC
You’re hypersensitive and... look how far that’s gotten you.

FRANCES
It’s not something that will propel you up, but insensitivity will certainly sink you.

WILLIAM
So we shouldn’t be so loud...
MYRA  
I think it’s long been established what is said in here  
doesn’t leave.  

FRANCES  
Artists need a safe refuge where they can throw their ideas  
on the fridge and see if they stick.  

ERIC  
We’re not cooking spaghetti.  

MYRA  
In this town?  

FRANCES  
It doesn’t matter, but this is our small little cone of  
silence.  

MYRA  
It always HAS been.  

WILLIAM  
There isn’t any such thing as a cone of silence.  

TURTLE  
Where was Get Smart taped?  

FRANCES  
What we say here stays in here.  

BARISTA  
I thought you guys didn’t know each other.  

FRANCES  
We don’t.  

MYRA  
If someone thought I knew you guys, I’d never sell a  
script.  

WILLIAM  
I have so many pseudonyms… maybe I’ve been using one in  
here.  

FRANCES  
Credit card receipts.  

ERIC  
Who has any credit left?  

GERMAN  
You wouldn’t expose us.
FRANCES
No. I wouldn’t, but you really never know.

(She gestures to the professor.)

FRANCES
He sold his script… Now he’s part of the establishment. He just might sell us all out.

MYRA
Hey, look!

(Again, six phone cameras are whipped out and trained on an imaginary drunken figure stumbling to the right of the audience.)

GERMAN
Another one?

(Shots fired right of audience.)

MYRA
That was Max Cohen.

(Long beat and the six phone cameras pan to the left of the audience… from the audience’s right. They are following imaginary police as they rush to confront the third drunk/zombie.)

FRANCIS
Where are the cops going?

MYRA
What are they doing?

GERMAN
They just shot two talent agents. I’d be leaving if I were them.

ERIC
They are about to bag a third.

(Shots fired left of the audience.)

ERIC
Whoa… Les Grossman is down. He’s crawling.
(One last shot fired left of the audience.)

MYRA
He’s not crawling anymore.

TURTLE
Gives an entirely new meaning to the phrase, “head-shot.”

WILLIAM
Another fire alarm.

FRANCES
(To Eric.)
Permission granted.

ERIC
What?

FRANCES
Go ahead you can take it out. I know you wanna.

ERIC
What?

FRANCES
Everybody in here knows you’re armed.

ERIC
You don’t care? I’ve heard you last week go off on how we need “ten times” more gun control.

FRANCES
There are dead z... people in the street. There might be 350 drunk zombies pouring out of there at any moment.

TURTLE
Zombies usually eat brains, ergo you are all probably safe.

(Eric, takes a .38 from his boot and lays it on the table. Everyone suddenly looks safer. Eric even gets a few smiles, something that has never happened before.)

WILLIAM
I don’t want to alarm anyone... but... these WERE zombies.

PROFESSOR
I think I can confirm that, conscious deficit hypoactivity disorder.
GERMAN
We all saw it.

MYRA
We all taped it, I think.

FRANCES
And we agree that’s what happened?

TURTLE
Why are zombies never arrested? Cause they can never be taken alive!

ERIC
The blind guy?

FRANCES
Who, my barista?

MYRA
It’s not fair if he’s kept in the dark.

GERMAN
Good one.

MYRA
It wasn’t intended.

ERIC
Barista dude, could you ever see?

BARISTA
I’ve been blind since birth.

MYRA
So you never saw a zombie movie?

ERIC
You have no idea... because what we are seeing is a lot like one of those... the pace is a bit slow... but...

BARISTA
Thanks for letting me know. I’ve read zombie books.

ERIC
Braille?

BARISTA
Braille is out, man... it’s Amazon books on tape nowadays for the visually impaired.
FRANCES
He’s right.

BARISTA
Are you sure?

GERMAN
Amazon rules the world.

BARISTA
No, I mean are we sure they were zombies?

(William has three laptops set up.
William is quietly listening to the police scanner, but he has three scanners as well and they are all run through one of his computers.)

FRANCES
They looked it to me.

WILLIAM
The cops are talking about it.

PROFESSOR
They used the Z word?

WILLIAM
Yep.

POLICE PA VOICE
Attention... There is an ongoing public safety hazard and you are being instructed to shelter in place. Attention...

TV VOICE #1
This is a special report from the News 10 Team... Individuals in the area just north of Rancho Park should be aware the police are asking people to stay off the streets. There is a disturbance at, believe it or not, the city’s largest talent agency.

TV VOICE #2
Doesn’t this happen every year at their Christmas party?

TV VOICE #1
All kidding aside, I understand this is a true emergency.

FRANCES
Hey, guys we can get out the back.

(At that the stagehands rapidly enter stage left and exit back centre.)
However, the writers turn and contemplate the option but they aren’t looking to move an inch.)

WILLIAM
They said, shelter in place.

FRANCES
The back door is open and it’s clear.

GERMAN
No thanks.

MYRA
My car is out front, if I left out the back...

PROFESSOR
But you might lock this front door.

FRANCES
You can... just twist the little thingy.

ERIC
What? Here comes the cop bus.

GERMAN
The mobile command centre.

WILLIAM
No. No, don’t park there.

ERIC
I should go out there and tell them?

GERMAN
They’ll shoot you for sure.

PROFESSOR
I’d like to see the autopsy if that happens?

GERMAN
You’ll be a zombie on paper before you hit the ground.

MYRA
Well, we can’t even see or film the left part of the building.

FRANCES
It doesn’t matter.

WILLIAM
No, I want to see the entire story play out.
FRANCES
You aren’t a journalist, why?

PROFESSOR
Their cameras are at least three blocks down. See?
(He gestures to the television news.)

MYRA
I’m a screenwriter… I have a right to see what’s happening…

GERMAN
Well, if something happens call me… I’m gonna make some notes…

MYRA
A screenwriter isn’t any different than the journalists, but we can embellish and they can’t.

ERIC
They do.

WILLIAM
You guys want to hear what’s being said inside the bus?

ERIC
You can do that?

WILLIAM
Sure.

FRANCES
Okay… that would be a good trade-off don’t you think?

(German withdraws with his bible and rapidly uses the online concordance to find the relevant verses.)

FRANCES
What’s it say?

GERMAN
Zechariah 14:12 is pretty clear if you ask me. “And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.”
ERIC
He’s right. The word plague, translated from the Hebrew word maggephah, literally means "sickness."

MYRA
How does a black cowboy from Oklahoma know Hebrew?

(Eric shows her his laptop or tablet screen.)

GERMAN
And come on... their flesh will rot.

PROFESSOR
It could be just an act of terrorism.

GERMAN
It’s IN the bible, professor.

FRANCES
(Sarcastically.)
Well, that clears it up. Thank you.

ERIC
The bible also says those who know Christ will be raised from the dead.

FRANCES
I doubt Rothstein, Cohen, and Grossman knew Christ. I’m just saying.

GERMAN
You don’t know that.

PROFESSOR
It’s entirely plausible that your bible verse describes biological warfare.

ERIC
China again?

MYRA
Why talent agents? Why not a studio or something?

WILLIAM
ISIS? The Taliban? Iran?

PROFESSOR
I’m not sure Iran has that capability. If they designed a biological, I can see them infecting themselves first.
GERMAN
Or it could be a special plague designed by God just for this Christmas party.

FRANCES
Whatever the case, I think we have an opportunity.

GERMAN
Living flesh that’s rotting and falling off the bones and the fluid from the eyeballs.

PROFESSOR
But it might not indicate a zombie apocalypse. Some sort of gas or biological weapon.

(If the director and crew are crafty they can use fishing line and coffee cups to simulate an earthquake.)

ERIC
An earthquake!

GERMAN
This IS the apocalypse!

TURTLE
Shouldn’t we run out into the street...

FRANCES
Out the back.

WILLIAM
The cops just... It’s a minor one.

MYRA
But it just cut the internet.

FRANCES
It might come back.

PROFESSOR
The television news... maybe... turn it up.

WILLIAM
Internet killed... major Zombie event, the police command vehicle not twenty feet away and I don’t have the internet.

TURTLE
I was reading The Zombie Survival Guide, complete protection from the...
MYRA
That’s your biggest problem?

ERIC
Well, I can’t back my stuff up on the cloud.

FRANCES
I have a flash stick if anyone…

(They all look at her like she’s crazy.)

FRANCES
Why? I won’t steal it.

(Everyone is feverishly typing or taking notes with various devices from phones to high-end laptops.)

FRANCES
No. wait… we ARE crazy. We shouldn’t be writing six scripts… we should be writing one. This is a historic event and there will be competition… why compete with each other? We are THE screenwriters social club.

MYRA
We are… but it’s just a name.

TURTLE
No, it could work… everyone writes a bit… and we put it together.

GEORGE
If the screenplay is created as a collaborative effort by 2 or more screenwriters, separate writer names with an ampersand (&).

MYRA
We use multiperspectivity.

ERIC
Polyperspectivity; don’t you think we already have enough multis?

WILLIAM
Citizen Kane for multiple POVs.

GEORGE
I didn’t see that one.

WILLIAM
Pulp Fiction? You saw that one.
ERIC
I loved that. Fear, language, violence.

TURTLE
Tarantino is god.

GERMAN
Not quite but almost.

WILLIAM
Rashomon is better at that…

TURTLE
The violence?

WILLIAM
No. The multiperspectivity.

ERIC
Polyperspectivity.

FRANCES
Multiple points of view…

TURTLE
I know what it is. I’m a surfer, not a moron.

WILLIAM
Kurosawa trumps Orsen Wells.

ERIC
Not a chance in hell.

WILLIAM
Have you ever seen The Making of The Other Side of the Wind? Wells was a moron!

ERIC
I don’t give a fuck! Kurosawa sounds foreign to me.

FRANCES
What’s that got to do with anything?

ERIC
This event… it’s an American phenomenon. An American should influence this film.

GERMAN
It’s a Hollywood phenomenon.

WILLIAM
George A. Romero.
ERIC
Now you are talking! No foreign influences.

TURTLE
We watch their zombie movies? I liked #Alive.

BARISTA
Who says it has to be a zombie movie, per se?

PROFESSOR
(Raises his voice.)
Dumbasses! There is a zombie event, supported by an earthquake and it’s all playing out right through that glass and you are debating films that you never saw; and if you did accidentally see them, it’s doubtful you understand them.

(It refocuses everyone to the events outside the coffee shop.)

MYRA
Here comes the police tape, do they always use white sheets...
seems like with all that blood...

(The cast looks out the fourth wall, at the audience where the street would be. The barista is ignored.)

TURTLE
All I see are a bunch of cops standing around nervously looking at a building.

FRANCES
Should I take them some coffee?

GERMAN
They’d have to put down their weapons for that.

FRANCES
Cops? Too scared to drink coffee?

MYRA
Look, not a cop’s pistol is holstered.

WILLIAM
Maybe some more agents will come out of the party?

FRANCES
What about some muffins?
ERIC
Now you may have something here.

TURTLE
(Whispers.)
#Alive.

ERIC
Leave the Japanese out of this...

GERMAN
It wasn’t a Japanese movie.

WILLIAM
Rashomon was.

MYRA
See, how are we ever going to write a script together and put it out as one voice...

FRANCES
Multiple voices...

BARISTA
I thought you guys didn’t know each other now.

PROFESSOR
We might... since we all have ringside seats to the biggest... I don’t know what it is...

FRANCES
Not yet... But I think... unless I’m wrong... we will be able to walk into any office in town and say, we were the writers in the coffee shop directly across the street the night it happened.

PROFESSOR
Who better to write it than the screenwriters in the coffee shop directly across the street?

FRANCES
All the other screenwriters are probably home in their 400 square foot apartments watching it on their 99-inch televisions.

MYRA
Good point.

FRANCES
So we write one script with multiple points of view...
PROFESSOR
Make sure you have good reason to be writing multiple points of view ...

FRANCES
We’re here.

PROFESSOR
I wouldn’t write more than three points of view. Keep it simple.

FRANCES
Sam Rothstein, Max Cohen, Les Grossman.

WILLIAM
POV? I have the cops in the RV. Well, I have been listening to them. Lots of hesitation. They don’t wanna go in there.

FRANCES
Well, they ARE agents.

MYRA
Were.

GERMAN
I have God’s point of view...

FRANCES
What?

GERMAN
It’s a supernatural event and if 70% of America attend church then they might want to attend a movie centred on God action fulfilling the bible prophecy.

ERIC
What makes you think we can put such a diverse story together.

FRANCES
Well, it's always a gamble... who knows that better than we do?

MYRA
Sure that’s what will sell it. Our diverse points of view...

FRANCES
So we are agreed?

MYRA
Sure that’s a good idea... and we pitch it with a unified voice.
FRANCES
No one leaves until we get some reporters in here.

(She dials a number. Waits. Apparently, no one at the newspaper is picking up.)

PROFESSOR
I’ll put it together if you’ll send your contributions to me.

FRANCES
Equal credits?

BARISTA
Don’t you need to sign a contract or something?

FRANCES
We’re really not that kind of social club.

GERMAN
We haven’t been contract signers, if you know what I mean.

FRANCES
But we don’t hate each other.

MYRA
Guys, we may have a problem. Cohn, Rothstein, and Grossman. How do they sound to you?

ERIC
Sounds like we’ll get reped to me.

BARISTA
Can I get in on this?

ERIC
And what point of view would you represent?

BARISTA
I’m the blind barista that survives. You gotta have a survivor.

FRANCES
That’s true.

ERIC
I think we’ll pass on that.

GERMAN
No offence.

FRANCES
I think it might be nice to hear what he has to say...
Third rule of screenwriting... Don’t have too many writers.

First rule of fractions. One-seventh of a pie is less than a sixth.

So realistically... at Christmas, you’re gonna stab him in the back?

(euphoric about his prospects)

The party's on.

The feelin's here. That only comes this time of year.

We're simply havin' a wonderful Christmastime.

Havin' a wonderful Christmastime? You’re kidding me?

I’m finally in the right place at the right time.

So lift a cup.

Ahh, don't look out.

(Something happens in the street. The cast, curious, moves to the front of the stage. Curtains close. Song allows for set change.)

CHORUS: Baby, It’s Cold Outside  (public domain)

I really can't be here
Baby, it's zombies outside
I really gotta go
Baby, it's zombies outside
This evening has been
Been hoping I’d be safe
So very deceased
My friend has a gun and double taps are nice
My agent will start to worry
Beautiful what's your hurry?
My publicist will be pacing the floor
Listen to the gunfire roar
So really we'd better scurry
Beautiful please hurry
Well maybe just a half cup more
Let's record it and while I pour
The trades might think
Baby, it's bad out there
Say what's in this coffee?
No contracts to be had out there
I wish I knew how
Your eyes are fearful now
Break a leg? Break this siege!
I'll get you a comb, your hair looks on end
Please help me
This town is faux so just say no, no sir
Mind if move in closer?
At least I'm gonna say that I tried
What's the sense of eating my brain?
I really can't stay
Baby don't go out
Baby, it's zombies outside
Ah, you're very afraid you know?
This town will think of it as opportunistic
I simply must go
Baby, it's zombies outside
The script is unsolicited
But baby it's zombies outside
The party has been
How lucky it's them
So dicey and now an art form
Look out the window at that mess
The guild will go on strike
Gosh, the grips look delicious!
The zombies will be here at the door
Waves upon a tropical shore
The literary agents are so vicious
Gosh your brains are delicious!
Well maybe just an expresso more
Never such murder before
And I don't even drink
I've got to get home
Baby you'll be eaten out there
Say lend me your .38
Have any extra clips in there!
You've really been banned?
It feels like Deutschland out there
But don't you see?
How can you write a script without me?
There's bound to be talk tomorrow
Think of the clients sorrow!
At least there would be plenty of insurance
If you caught a bullet and died!
I really can't stay
We just need to hold out
Baby, it's zombies
Baby, it's zombies outside
Okay fine, just another coffee then
That took a lot of convincing!

(Maybe a duet with William and Francis?)
ACT THREE

SETTING: Studio meeting room, a month after the Christmas party events.

AT RISE: Three executives sit in a conference room. Six cast members are waiting outside in the hallway. They will be called in individually to pitch their zombie movie.

SCENE: Waiting but Waiting on Executives is Different

MYRA
Remarkable, it didn’t spread. Only three zombies.

ERIC
We live in Los Angeles. The LAPD is well-armed and not hesitant.

WILLIAM
Might make our job a little easier if there had been more.

(The lower level executive enters.)

EXECUTIVE #3
Are all seven writers here?

THE CAST
Yes.

(The lower level executive leaves.)

MYRA
There are only six of us?

ERIC
That’s fucked up.

FRANCES
What? They invited someone who wasn’t even there in the cafe?

GERMAN
I have a mind to raise hell about that.

(The professor arrives and is given several dirty looks.)

PROFESSOR
Hey.
WILLIAM
What are you doing here?

PROFESSOR
I thought you were going to send me your script ideas; you never did, so I assumed you were all doing your own thing. And I heard about this...

ERIC
You don’t have a script, do you?

PROFESSOR
I don’t but I thought I would show up and lend you my support.

FRANCES
So you aren’t pitching anything.

PROFESSOR
Zombie movies are sea-sick crocodiles.

GERMAN
What exactly does that mean?

PROFESSOR
It means I don’t have anything. I mean I have a Corvette but I don’t have a script. No. I just wanted to wish you luck.

SCENE: Are We Making Movies, or What?

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, the first pitch, German. Come in.

GERMAN
(Too delusional.)
Agents vs Angels – Look at almost every reference in the bible and the people who encounter angels are always said to be in fear. It happened a dozen times and everyone… Lot, Daniel, Mary the mother of Jesus… Peter, John… and why do Angels always say right off the bat “fear not” when they show up?

EXECUTIVE #2
And you think the zombies were angels?

GERMAN
Well, this is Hollywood and we ARE making movies.
SCENE: Maintain the Perimeter, or Not.

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, the next pitch, William. Come in. Welcome.

WILLIAM
(Too stupid.)

All Agents Die – The police detective in charge is a disgruntled screenwriter and just lets things happen. He maintains the perimeter and lets nature take its course. Rightfully.

EXECUTIVE #2
And this detective is a real person? And we have the release for this detective?

WILLIAM
No. But can’t we just put at the front... “All the characters are fictional and any similarity to persons real or imagined are only a figment of their coincidence?” Uh... Or something like that?

SCENE: It’s a Zombie-Agent Romance!

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, the next pitch, Francis. Do I know you from somewhere?

FRANCIS
(Far too nervous to sell a script.)

Coffee.

EXECUTIVE #3
Oh, I remember. Sure. Don’t be nervous. Just be yourself.

FRANCIS
Zombie Christmas Romance – This is a zombie/agent romance. A rom-com. The story isn’t laying in the street... it’s about the romance before, during and after the party, I mean infection. They say if you really love someone, you’ll let them go; well this is the story of an agent that just can’t let go of the zombie they love.

EXECUTIVE #2
We read your script and we don’t know how to distribute it. Who would be your audience?
FRANCIS
Midwestern housewives and college-age coeds who have sexual fantasies about zombies.

EXECUTIVE #2
They’re out there?

FRANCIS
Zombies they can control. Zombies they can change. Hallmark channel will be knocking the wreath off the door for this one. Zombie cats toppling the trees. Santa goes zombie over Fresno and still delivers.

SCENE: But I’m a Cheerleader, Remake!

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, the next pitch, Myra. How are you today?

MYRA
Great.

EXECUTIVE #3
Wonderful. I’m glad you came in.

MYRA
(Too confused.)
Dead Agent (aka Braindead) - I have to be honest; I was debating writing a comedy or a drama or maybe not even a zombie movie at all. And think I’m going to leave it up to the director; it doesn’t matter to me. It’s just a dark, funny, and violent take on what happened that night. It’s no But I’m a Cheerleader, but it’s not zombie-lite either. It’s about a not-very-successful lesbian agent who gets accidentally infected by the “mailroom zombies…” only to return from the winter break as a very hungry, very cruel, and suddenly very successful agent. How beautiful, right?

EXECUTIVE #2
Can you help us get around something? And it’s just a small little thing...

MYRA
If I can; sure.

EXECUTIVE #2
None of the zombies was lesbian… they were men… males… cisgender males, and as far as I know, none of the men have lesbian daughters.
MYRA
Let’s be honest; in the current environment, I’m not sure that even matters. Fund it. Make it dark and it’ll work out.

SCENE: The Turtle vs the Hare

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, the next pitch, Mr. Turtle? Your script, it just says Turtle. That’s you’re last name?

TURTLE
No. But everyone knows the Turtle. So, I just go by Turtle.

EXECUTIVE #3
And how long have you been doing that.

TURTLE
Aloha, suits. Agents Flea to the Beach - Thanks for reading it.

EXECUTIVE #3
We were happy to do that. I mean you were there, right?

TURTLE
Awesome. Totally awesome.

EXECUTIVE #2
What do you have for us today?

TURTLE
Well, I did something a little weird but hey. I’m here when I could be somewhere surfing some waves, aren’t I? I wrote the sequel, before the original. Can you feel the vibes on that? I’m forecasting.

EXECUTIVE #3
Foreshadowing?

TURTLE
What’s that?

EXECUTIVE #3
It doesn’t matter. Any other issues?

EXECUTIVE #2
About this flea in the title? F-L-E-A is that a pun or something... because sometimes writers misspell words on purpose... you know to make a point.
TURTLE
Really? I didn’t know that. I ran the spell checker over it.

EXECUTIVE #2
Okay, let’s forget that. It must have been a typo. But you want us to “move the Agent-Z franchise to the beach”? You wrote that?

EXECUTIVE #3
Interesting pun. Agent-Z. Agency.

TURTLE
Thanks.

EXECUTIVE #2
Seriously? Why Hermosa Beach?

TURTLE
Sure; why not? Hey, what bread do zombies usually eat? Whole-brain!

SCENE: My, What Nice Shoulders You Have.

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, Eric. Are you ready? We’re ready... My, what nice shoulders you have. You do stunt work? We’re making a black western.

ERIC
Really?

EXECUTIVE #3
Would you be interested in the stunt work?

ERIC
Might, if this doesn’t work.

EXECUTIVE #3
You’re a match for the lead.

ERIC
28 Months Later - All of a sudden, for no discernible reason, every rapper in the world suddenly and simultaneously drops into a coma. Everywhere. White supremacists are delighted. Cut to two years later, and all those rappers just as suddenly wake up. But they’re not the same. They travel in mass down Santa Monica Boulevard and they’re attracted to the Christmas music. They manage to
find the now famous Christmas party; they infect three Jews and escape in limousines.

EXECUTIVE #2
I have to be honest, the idea about the black cavalry soldiers that were tricked by the ex-confederates... I like that one better than this.

ERIC
I see. Any chance...

EXECUTIVE #2
No.

SCENE: The Blind Barista

EXECUTIVE #3
Okay, the last pitch... No? The last pitch?

(The blind barista arrives only five seconds late. The cast is in awe. They didn’t expect this.)

EXECUTIVE #3
There you are... I was hoping to see you. Let me show you in... have a seat... right here.

BARISTA
Screenwriters vs. Zombies - but we don’t show a single zombie. We spare the campiness and save money on the blood and makeup. And we turn the cameras around and look inside the coffee shop; we make it a mockery, a farce. And we look into the fucked-up gaggle of screenwriters, who botch the only chance they’re ever gonna get in this town.

EXECUTIVE #3
Satirize the writers that hangout in coffee shops.

EXECUTIVE #2
A little satire never killed anyone.

BARISTA
Exactly, sir.

EXECUTIVE #2
Sort of a theatre of the grotesques?
BARISTA

Well, since they’re writers… maybe theatre of the less perceptive? They can’t see much.

EXECUTIVE #2

Warped people.

BARISTA

One character pitches nails. One reports bogus income to the IRS. One burns agent’s cars and then reports insurance fraud. One carries three bibles around but brags that he was excommunicated. One is a major film pirate and never met a Russian hacker he didn’t like. And one’s a slut, or was a slut until that recently became impossible.

EXECUTIVE #2

Refreshing. It’s rare to see a zombie movie that’s character-driven.

BARISTA

Thank you.

EXECUTIVE #2

So do you know any of these characters?

BARISTA

No sir. It’s entirely made up. The writers that come into Café du Coffee are totally normal, actually they’re boring.

EXECUTIVE #3

You’ve worked in the coffee shop how long?

BARISTA

Three years.

EXECUTIVE #2

So why do you think all these characters would be in the same place at the same time.

BARISTA

Misery loves company?

EXECUTIVE #3

Thank you. Is that all? If you’ll kindly wait in the hall while we discuss this. Here, let me walk you out there. Don’t leave.

(The blind barista is walked into the hall. He sits and waits with the others as instructed. The others all turn to make eye contact with him. He’s happy
as a lark and doesn’t even realize they are in a state of shock over his appearance.)

SCENE: Three Film Executives on a Spending Spree.

EXECUTIVE #1
I like it.

EXECUTIVE #2
He may be the first blind writer nominated. Just think of the press, hungry for a feel-good story.

EXECUTIVE #3
It’s not just the novelty of a blind writer… This is actually genius.

EXECUTIVE #2
I agree; this is marvellous.

EXECUTIVE #1
We’re cash strapped at the time… and it’s a matter of affording it.

EXECUTIVE #3
No, sir. We can’t afford not to. This is a progressive and modern left-leaning company but it’s still a market, buyers and sellers, and there will be competition for this script. We’ll lose it to one of the other studios if we’re not gung-ho. I guess you disagree, but…

EXECUTIVE #2
Why would you think…

EXECUTIVE #3
I heard you tell that actress… I forgot her name, the woman from Bull Durham…

EXECUTIVE #2
Jenny Robertson?

EXECUTIVE #3
I guess… you wished we made movies like they do in Europe.

EXECUTIVE #2
What?

EXECUTIVE #1
I wouldn’t rather be funded by the government.
EXECUTIVE #2
We’d have to make a new set of friends... and that’s not an easy thing to do.

EXECUTIVE #1
And office space in D.C. is more expensive than it is here.

EXECUTIVE #3
I thought we... you wouldn’t rather?

EXECUTIVE #1
Not me.

EXECUTIVE #2
I told her that so she’d do the picture. All that left-wing shit from THIS office is only for the talent.

EXECUTIVE #1
It’s not real.

EXECUTIVE #2
How long have you been here?

EXECUTIVE #3
Three years?

EXECUTIVE #1
Harvard business school?

EXECUTIVE #2
And you’ve expressed this “market thing” here before?

EXECUTIVE #3
Never came up. Nothing I’ve been worried would be snatched up by the other studios.

EXECUTIVE #2
Not in three years?

EXECUTIVE #1
This company makes 300 movies a year.

EXECUTIVE #3
Well, it’s the same scripts over and over...

EXECUTIVE #1
Okay. I see, but we all know we still have capitalism here...

EXECUTIVE #2
But we don’t talk about it, markets or anything that might enflame the labor situation.
EXECUTIVE #3
The labor situation being the talent.

EXECUTIVE #1
Really, we need to get you out to the sets so you realize who and what we’re dealing with.

EXECUTIVE #2
We need them. But they, not a one of them I personally know... but there are rumours... they are all left-wingers. And they won’t work for someone who espouses the status quo.

EXECUTIVE #1
When you started here, did you sign a NDA?

EXECUTIVE #3
Of course.

EXECUTIVE #1
Good; then I’ll speak frankly. Of course, we believe in the market system this is a business. Films, roles, opportunities, ideas (good and bad) are bought and sold and the decisions are made by buyers and sellers. This isn’t Europe... not yet.

EXECUTIVE #3
We’re just as fake as they are?

EXECUTIVE #1
I’d like to see the expression on some of their faces when they figure that’s the way the industry really works.

EXECUTIVE #2
But we don’t advertise that. It’s not the studio system anymore; we need the talent and they won’t sign if they don’t like us.

EXECUTIVE #3
Well, we don't need name actors for this; in fact, you should go with talented but yes unrecognized actors.

I agree.

EXECUTIVE #2
Just don't go around telling people we're a bunch of capitalists. This is Hollywood for god’s sake.

EXECUTIVE #3
I understand.
EXECUTIVE #1
Bring the blind barista back in... What’s his name?

(Executive #3 picks up the script and looks at the script’s title page. He goes cross-eyed trying to process it.)

EXECUTIVE #3
I don’t know how to pronounce it.

EXECUTIVE #2
Don’t ask me.

EXECUTIVE #1
Well, get him back in here; don’t you think we should find out how to say it?

LIGHTS TO BLACK
CURTAIN
FADEOUT
WHATEVER!
The Reader’s Comments Thus Far...

“Interesting; the screenwriters have an attention deficit disorder. The writers in the audience should get a charge out of that. It rings true to me anyway.”

“Whether planned or accidental, this is patently offensive. This town will NEVER sit through it. Expect to be cancelled immediately.”

“I like that the characters are unworthy but there certainly is the anticipation that someone is going to sell a script. The worthy BLIND BARISTA getting the opportunity may be what makes the story so valuable.”

“Having the writers botch the only opportunity they will ever have is entirely in line with the farce.”

“It’s really not being in the right place at the time.”

“Best farce since A Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

“Nice rhyming with the two songs and they seem to fit the story well. Add I’ll be dead by Christmas – by Bing Crosby?”

“You’re gonna put William in a Los Vegas Raiders jersey and Francis in short-shorts?”

“There’s no place like Avenue of the Stars for Christmas.”

“I don’t know why this is staged; just film it in a coffee shop after hours. It’s low budget or NO BUDGET worthy.”

“There aren’t many stage directions. You’ll need a competent director to stage this.”

“It reminds me of one of the many scenes in Friends, where they meet at the coffee shop, only there are zombies outside. Hey, this is a weird idea, but if you could persuade Jennifer Aniston to play FRANCES... it would be a coup. Matt LeBlanc as TURTLE?”

“This is far from my age demographic. Needs more exposition. This seems written for senior living centers?”

“Nice dialogue. Most of this town can identify.”

“This isn’t a farce as advertised. A farce is... ‘a comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterization and ludicrously improbable situations.”