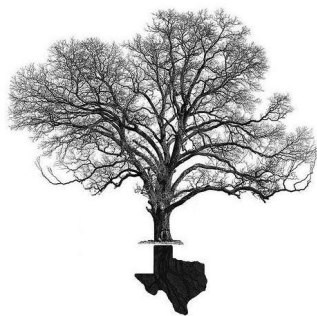


Screenwriters vs. Zombies

The Screenwriter's Social Club

ALAN NAFZGER



Pecan Street Press

LUBBOCK • AUSTIN • FORT WORTH

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SCREENWRITER vs. ZOMBIES
The Screenwriters Social Club
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The Screenwriters Social Club

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

Writer self-worth training. Over on La Peer.

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?

FRANCES

Turtle?

HERE TODAY

He looks familiar.

FRANCES

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

HERE TODAY

So now he writes?

FRANCES

He has what I think is a good surfing movie.

HERE TODAY

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

FRANCES

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

HERE TODAY

And her?

FRANCES

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

HERE TODAY

And her movie?

FRANCES

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

HERE TODAY

By oppressors, you mean like the government?

FRANCES

I think it's Texas Rangers but yes.

HERE TODAY

I liked Billy Jack.

FRANCES

Doesn't everyone?

HERE TODAY

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.

TURTLE

Why?

FRANCES

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.

TURTLE

What?

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

What? No agent? You sold your script.

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?

(Eric 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

They don't make surfing movies but once every ten years. The Endless Summer (1960s). Big Wednesday (1970s). North Shore (1980s). Point Break (1990s). Blue Crush (2000s). Soul Surfer (2010s).

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.

(Flashing 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.)

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.

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...

GERMAN

Third rule of screenwriting... Don't have too many writers.

ERIC

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

FRANCES

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

ERIC

(euphoric about his prospects)

The party's on.

GERMAN

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

ERIC

We're simply havin' a wonderful Christmastime.

FRANCES

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

ERIC

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

GERMAN

So lift a cup.

MYRA

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 espresso 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.

EXECUTIVE #1

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 an 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."

