

1 EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT 1
This opens up with a MASTER shot of a house. A car pulls up in the driveway.

2 EXT. CAR - NIGHT 2
MICHAEL, male in his late 20's to early 30's, EXITS the car holding a folder. Michael looks in the sky and then walks up to the front door. Michael is about sit the folder on the front doormat but hears thunder. He looks into the sky again and decides to ring the doorbell.

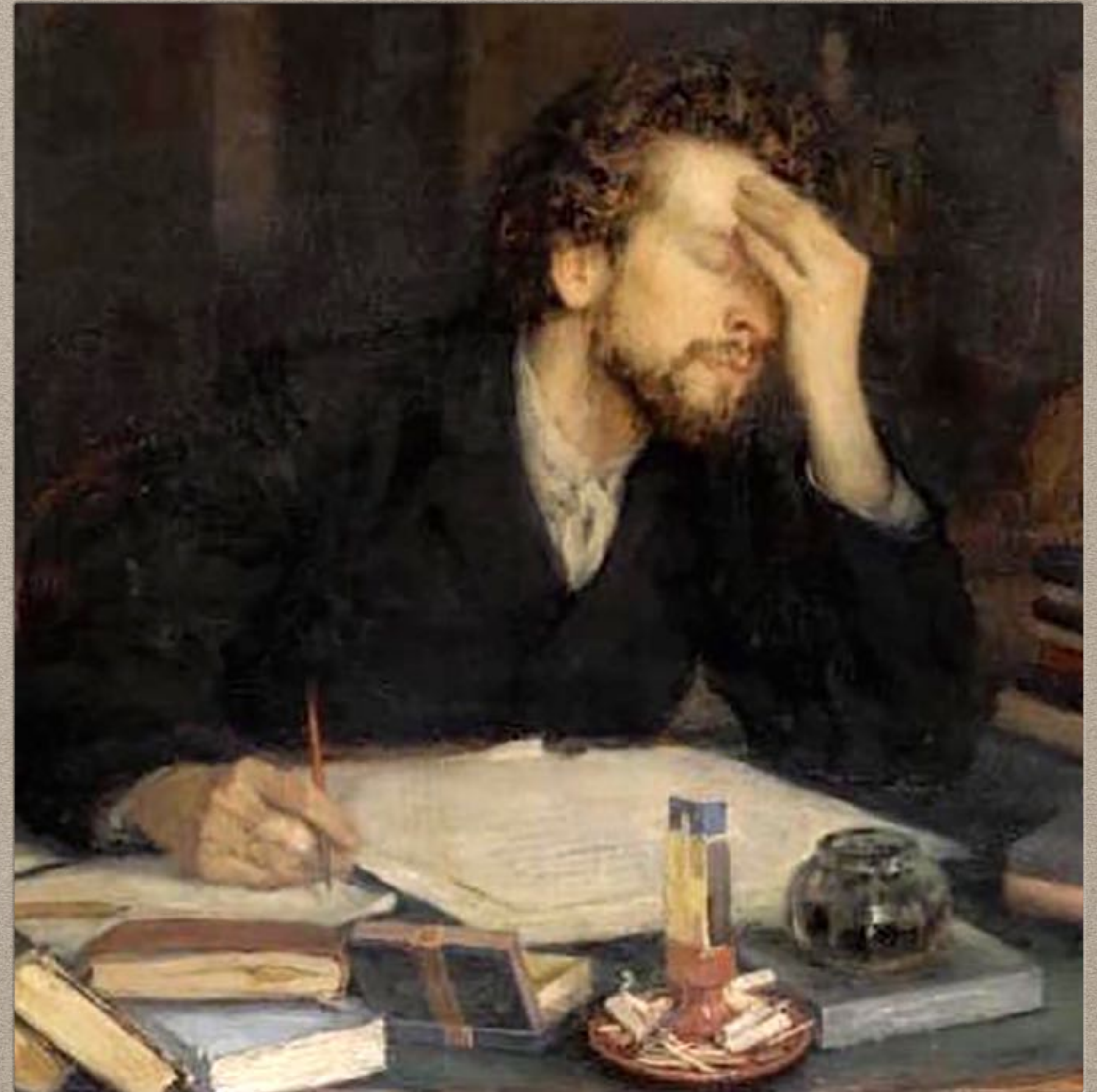
3 INT. HOUSE - NIGHT 3
DIANA, female in her late 20's to early 30's, is sitting on the sofa reading when she hears the door bell ring. She

JUMP-START YOUR SCREENPLAY

BY KAREEM MCMICHAEL

WHERE TO START?

**THERE ARE A FEW WAYS
TO GET THE IDEAS
FLOWING.**



WHAT WILL YOUR MOVIE BE ABOUT?

COME UP WITH THE STORY



OUTLINE
VS.
TREATMENT

OUTLINE

- Generally used solely by the screenwriter during their development and writing process.
- Meant to be read only by the writer or their collaborators.
- Outlines (which can vary in size, shape, or form) serves as a blueprint for the movie concepts pertaining to the characters, scenes, plot points, and story acts.
- Write a detailed synopsis. (Think short story)



ACT ONE

"On The Day He Was Born...."

Opening Titles: Will grows, Edward annoys

France: Will gets the call (J)

Airplane: Fly to Alabama (J)

The Snowstorm (M,F,E)

Arrive at house: Meet the mother, Dr. Bennett (S, B,J , W)

First Will/Edward talk (W&E)

The Giant (Karl)

Will wants one real conversation: "A stranger I know very well" (W&J)

Sandra asks Will to go through papers (S, W)

The Girl In The River (Girl)

The Day He Left Ashland (M, F, E, K)

The Town On The Road (E)

ACT TWO

Edward tells Josephine (E, J)

The Old Lady and the Eye: meet Don (Don)

Meet Sandra (S)

Woo Sandra (K, S, D)

Fight Don (Don)

Second Will/Edward Conversation (W, E)

He Goes to War (Don, Karl, China the 2-headed woman)

Josephine in labor (W, J, B)

The Day Will was born (B, S, W)

Will argues with Edward (E, W)

Edward into coma (S, B, E)

ACT THREE

Will finds deed; mistress; she loved Edward's stories (W)

Mistress tells: He Traveled the World (E)

Mistress tells: In which He Buys a House (E)

Will confronts Sandra about the affair; of course she knew. Assume I'm Stupid? (W, S)

Edward awakes, peace making, not understanding (W, E)

Edward dies (W, E)

Funeral, guest (Don, Karl, 2-headed Woman)

At the grave with son (W, J, Kid)

Big Fish (Everyone)

"That's Funny" (W, J, Kid)

W = Will, E = Edward, S = Sandra, J = Josephine, K = Karl

M = Edward's Mother, F = Edward's Father

EXAMPLE OUTLINE

FROM TIM BURTON'S BIG FISH

TREATMENT

- A film treatment (or story treatment) is a detailed summary of your film, show, or project.
- It communicates all important scenes, sequences, and story points style that evokes the tone of your film.





TREATMENT (CONT.)

WHAT SHOULD BE IN A TREATMENT?

- * Working Title
- * The writer's name and contact information
- * WGA (Writer's Guild of America) Registration number
- * A short login
- * Introduction of key characters
- * Who, what, when, why and where.

TREATMENT (CONT.)

WHAT SHOULD BE IN A TREATMENT?

- * Act 1 in one to three paragraphs. Set the scene, dramatize the main conflicts.
- * Act 2 in two to six paragraphs. Set the scene, dramatize how the conflicts introduced in Act 1 lead to a crisis.
- * Act 3 in one to three paragraphs. Dramatize the final conflict and resolution.

MR. AND MRS. SMITH

By Simon Kinberg

TREATMENT JANUARY 2001

OVERVIEW:

"MR AND MRS. SMITH" is a sexy, stylized action-comedy that's a duel-to-the-death between the world's top two assassins... who happen to be husband and wife, hired to kill each other. In hunting each other, their dying marriage turns into a passionate love affair, as they go toe-to-toe, playing cat and mouse... and slowly falling back in love in the process -- seeing, understanding, appreciating each other for the very first time—in the midst of battle.

Their process is really like the process of marriage therapy, which is intended to help a couple: initiate, interact, communicate, compromise, adapt, and ultimately fall in love. Through their hunt, they have to do these same things—because these are also the primary skills an assassin uses with a mark: initiating, interacting, compromising, and adapting to the target.

Tonally, the film should be a collision of different genres—action, romance, comedy, even social (suburban) satire. The world of the Smiths is slightly hyperreal, mischievous, and always dangerous.

CHARACTER SET-UP:

We meet our main characters JOHN and JANE SMITH in marriage therapy. They say they don't want to be here. But we see they need to be here—little conflicts roiling under the surface. Their therapist asks them how they met, and we see a spark in their eyes, as we cut back to—

BOGOTA, COLUMBIA. Five years ago. John and Jane meet in the midst of upheaval and chaos. A drug baron was killed in town, and police are rounding up single tourists as suspects. Rather than spend a night in a Colombian jail, John and Jane pretend to be together. That pretense turns real, as a spark catches. They fall in lust fast, flirting, dancing, sleeping together. As they return to their lives in New York, their lust quickly turns into love. In montage, we see them falling fast. The perfect couple. Despite misgivings from their friends, John and Jane get married. And they settle into...

The cozy, comfortable suburbs of Westchester County, New York. We pick them up years later. And the spark is gone. They're essentially sleepwalking through their marriage, totally devoid of any intimacy or intensity. They are bland, boring suburbanites. But they are living a massive lie, because in their reallives...

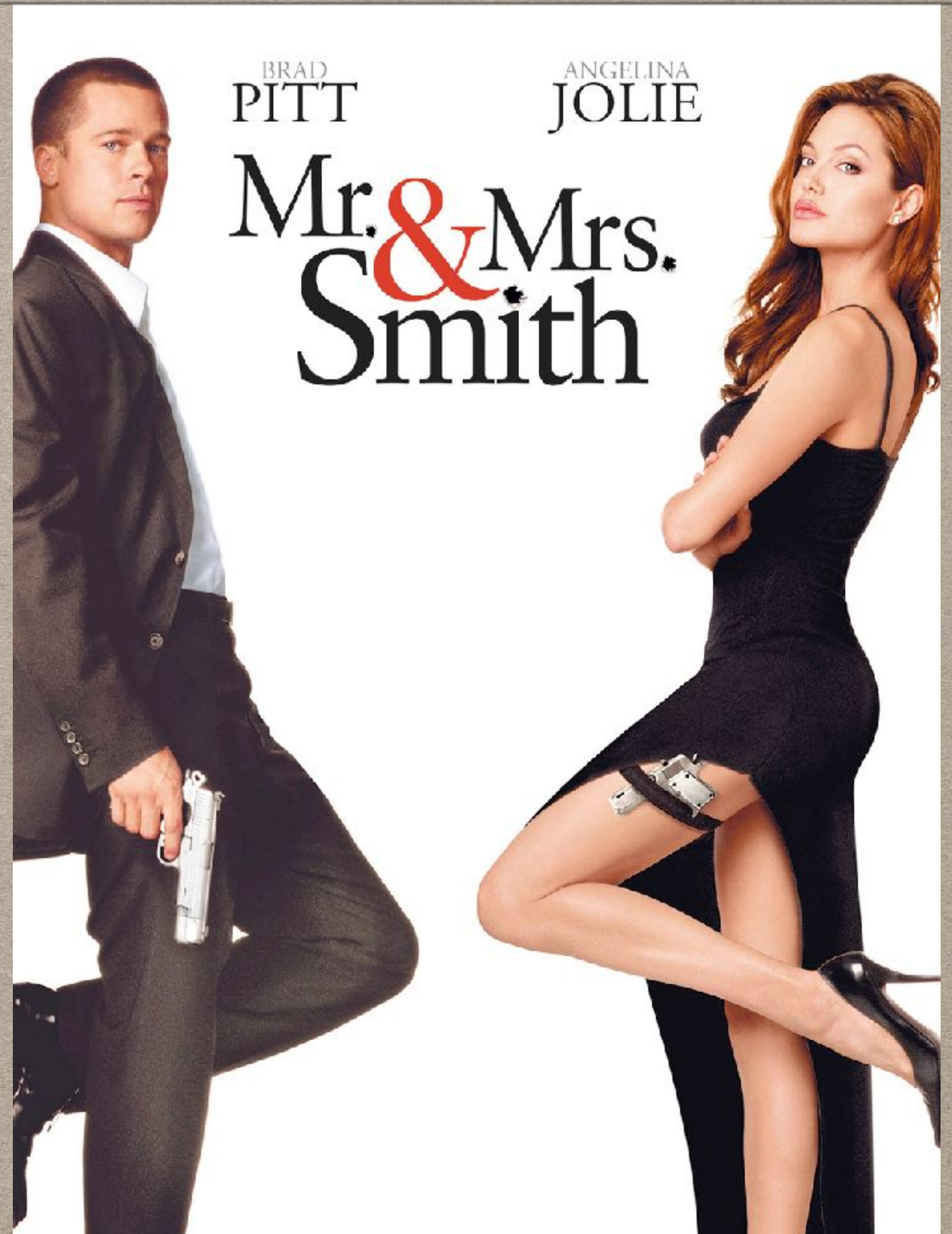
They are the top assassins on the East Coast. Neither of them knows their spouse's real identity. Their marriage is cold, functional, passionless. It has become a cover life. But this cover is starting to fray at the seams—little conflicts are building, playing out quietly in the battlegrounds of the dinner table, bedroom, bathroom. Now, after five years of secrets and lies and tension, their "real lives" are about to collide...

STORY:

The plot starts with a bang. Literally. An assassin, JIMMY JACKSON, raids an FBI witness hideout. He blasts in, taking out Feds, wending his way straight to the target. Jimmy kills him, and heads out, but more Agents flood in—they chase and catch Jimmy red-handed, surrounded by bodies. And we cut from this fairly grisly scene to:

The totally clean, pristine kitchen in a suburban dream—the house in the glass bubble (the one god shakes to watch it snow). It's the Smith house. They're sitting down to dinner together, and it's clear this is a marriage without any life. They sit silent—don't even look at each other. You can hear the forks scrape the plates. A lot of tension. Then the phone rings. They go to separate rooms to take their calls. It's their offices—they both have to go into the city for emergencies at work. John says he needs to check inventory (at the plant), and Jane says she needs to fix a downed mainframe (at the office).

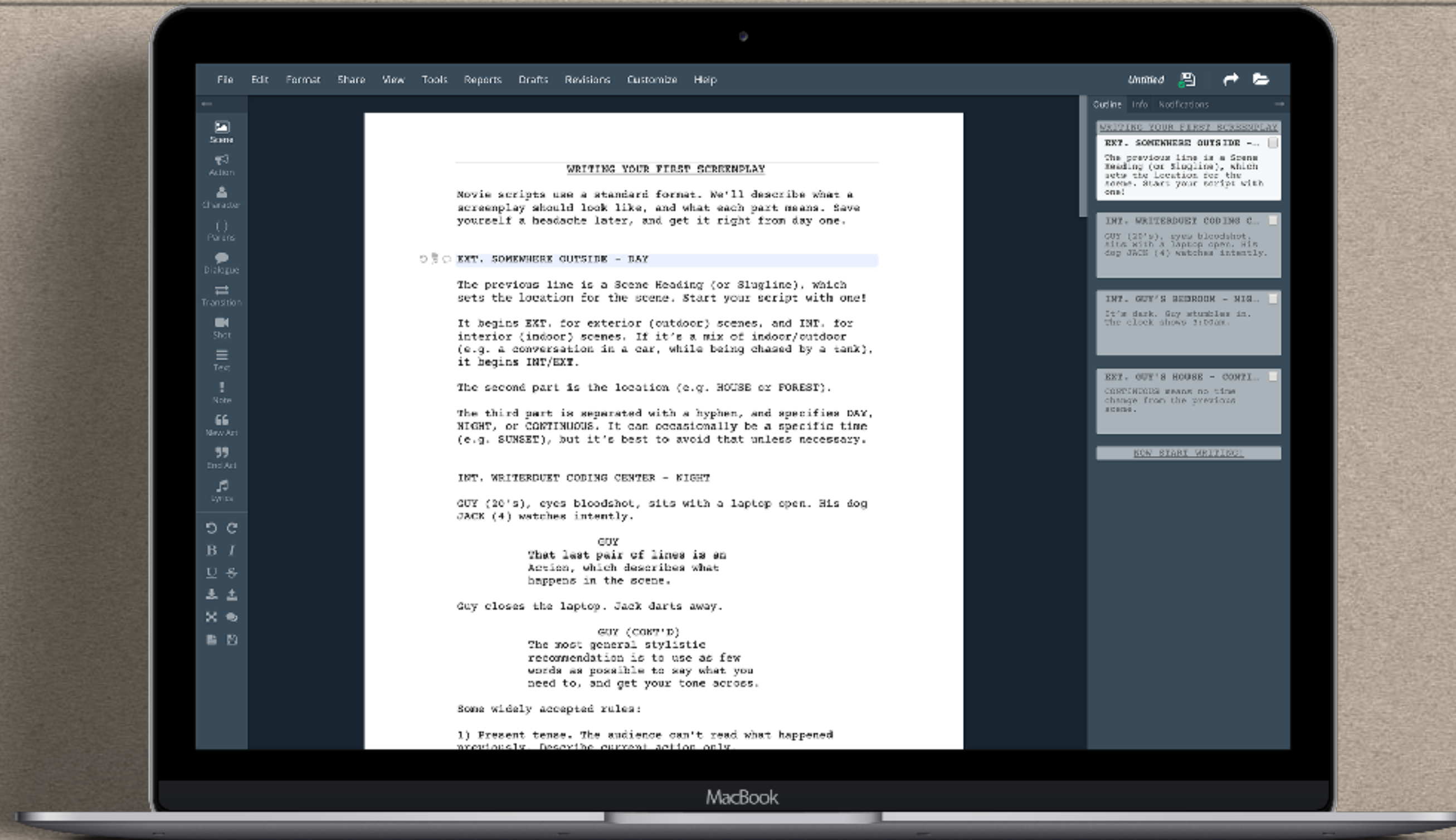
We see: John's office is actually a meat-packing plant in little Italy. And he's more alive here—in his element. His partner/contractor/best friend SAL tells him Jimmy Jackson was snatched by Feds. And now the boss wants Jimmy killed.



GOOD LOGLINES

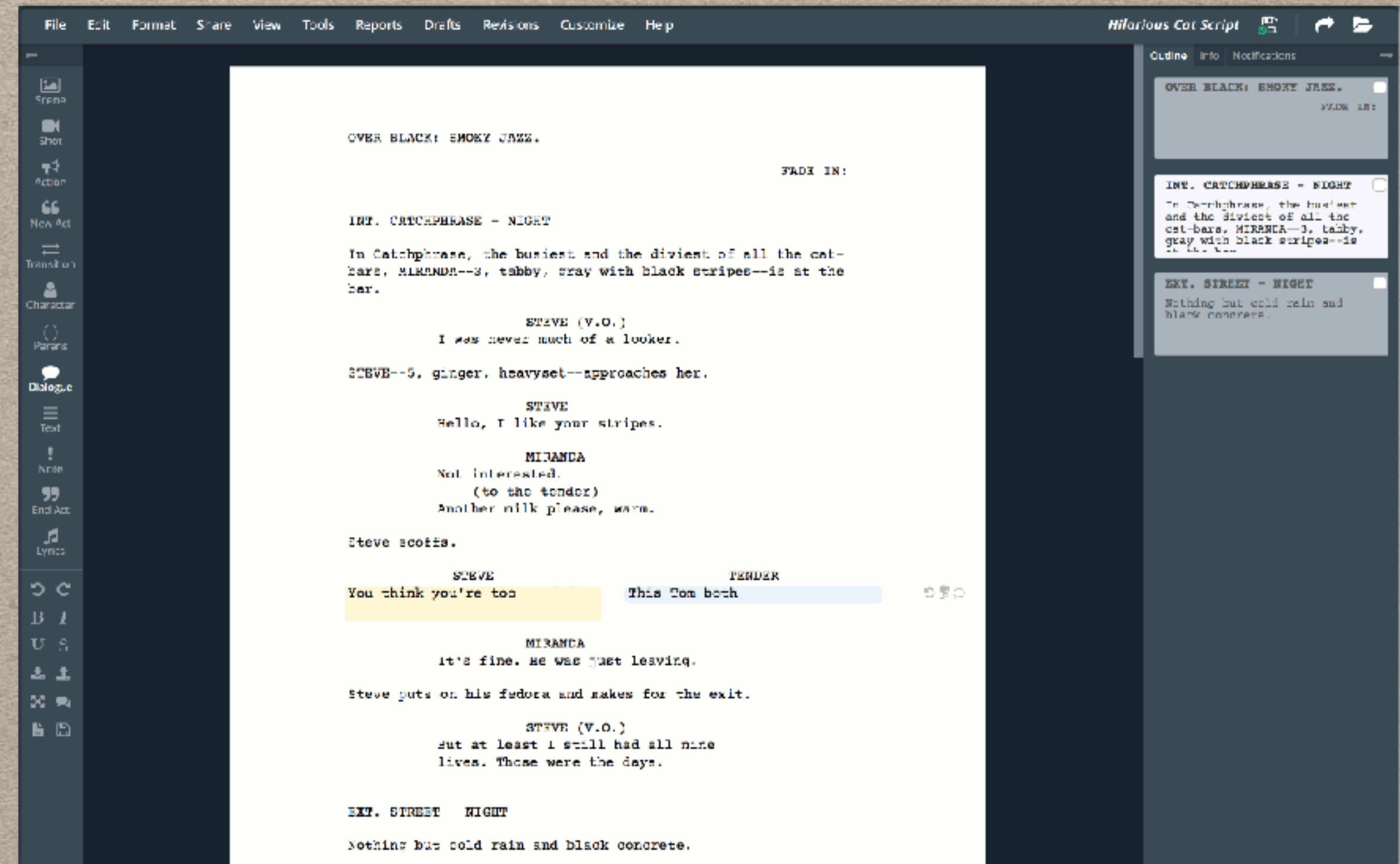
- **THE GODFATHER (1972)** - The aging patriarch of an organized crime dynasty transfers control of his clandestine empire to his reluctant son.
- **PULP FICTION (1994)** - The lives of two mob hit men, a boxer, a gangster's wife, and a pair of diner bandits intertwine in tales of violence and redemption.
- **INSIDE MAN (2006)** - A cop has to talk down a bank robber after the criminal's perfect heist spirals into a hostage situation.
- **CASABLANCA (1942)** - Set in unoccupied Africa during the early days of World War II: An American expatriate meets a former lover, with unforeseen complications.

THE SCREENPLAY



GOOD SCRIPT WRITING SOFTWARE

- * STUDIO BINDER
- * CELTX
- * FINAL DRAFT
- * WRITER DUET
- * HIGHLAND
- * FADE IN
- * MOVIE MAGIC
- * SCREENWRITER



FEATURE FILM SCRIPTS

Generally a solid feature film script is between 110 to 120 pages. The rule of thumb with screenplays is that one page equals one minute of screen time.

TWO TYPES OF SCRIPTS

- **SPEC SCRIPT** is a screenplay that's written "on speculation." That is, you, the screenwriter, write the script without a development contract or promise of payment in place in hopes of getting your script sold or in front of an agent for representation. Also in a spec script there is not much, if any, technical terms, transitions, and credits.
- **SHOOTING SCRIPT** is a script that has been vetted, changed, and rewritten some and is not being used as the blueprint for filming the movie.

KEY DIFFERENCES IN SPEC SCRIPT AND SHOOTING SCRIPT

TITLE PAGE

A spec script should have the title of the movie, "written by," the author or author's names, and some contact information (for author or agent). WGA notification is optional.

A shooting script may have, in addition to the above, multiple subsequent writers, studio or producer contact information, draft or revision dates, and copyright notices. So stay away from these things in your spec.

SCENE NUMBERS

Spec scripts should *not* have scene numbers.

KEY DIFFERENCES IN SPEC SCRIPT AND SHOOTING SCRIPT (CONT.)

TITLE SEQUENCES

***Spec scripts* should *avoid* any reference to opening credits or title sequences. Screenwriters should just focus on crafting the best opening scene they can. Even if you think your concept for opening titles is wicked brilliant, it may brand you as an amateur if you incorporate such a sequence into your spec.**

***Shooting scripts* can contain title sequences (or at least reference their location) because at that point, the script is finalized and typically the Director knows how everything is going to play out. The guys that look after the title sequences for films are masters of their craft. They won't be left floundering if you don't "leave a spot" for the opening titles in your screenplay.**

KEY DIFFERENCES IN SPEC SCRIPT AND SHOOTING SCRIPT (CONT.)

CAMERA DIRECTION

In *spec scripts* it's never a good idea to include camera directions (PAN, DOLLY, TILT UP, ZOOM IN ON, CRANE UP, etc.). It's the Director's job to interpret your screenplay and come up with their own shots.

It is okay, however, to craft a scene that *implies* the camera direction – that *directs the mind's-eye* of the reader. Just don't specify a camera shot in your spec, unless it's absolutely integral to your vision and pivotal to your movie.

Example:

CAMERA TRACKS Bella as she plummets toward the raging ocean.

Instead, write:

Bella plummets toward the raging ocean.

MY \$1 MILLION SCRIPT LAYOUT

by
Charles Harris

Based on a true story by
Charles Harris

Revisions by
Genius Writer

Current Revisions by
Writer's Friend, October 2004

Footloose Films
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London NW3 6QE
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7435 1330
Email: development@footloosefilms.com

EXT. A DITCH - NIGHT

A light rain and crickets CHIRPING. Somewhere in the night, DANCE MUSIC is blaring, but here it's only a whisper with a beat.

Water trickles out of a jagged pipe. Splashing up mud, the riverlet weaves through hamburger wrappers and sunbleached beer cans, spent condoms and an old Spin magazine.

The tiny stream ripples past glass and trash and the body of a woman. Face up, breathing. Dead grass caught in her braids. Her name is RONNA MARTIN. She's eighteen and bleeding.

Bleeding a lot.

She tries to push herself up, but the dirt around her crumbles. Her legs are useless. Despite it all, there's a smile of perverse joy to her face, like she's just remembered the punchline to a favorite joke.

CLAIRE (V.O.)

You know what I like best about Christmas?
The surprises.

CUT TO:

2 INT. A DARK PLACE - DAY? NIGHT? 2

Pitch black. We hear an ENGINE and ROAD NOISE.

CLAIRE (V.O., CONT'D)

It's like, you get this box, and you're
sure you know what's in it.

SPARKS. A cigarette lighter flares.

We're in the trunk of a car with SIMON BAINES (22), a skinny Brit with surfer hair. He looks around, realizes where he is. Panicked, he starts POUNDING and KICKING.

CLAIRE (V.O., CONT'D)

You shake it, you weigh it, and you're
totally convinced you have it pegged. No
doubt in your mind.

The lighter goes out. It's black again.

CUT TO:

Fade In
The very first item on the first page should be these words

FADE IN:

Scene Heading
A one line description of the location and time of day of a scene

EXT. WRITERS STORE - DAY

In the heart of West Los Angeles, a boutique shop's large OPEN sign glows like a beacon.

Action
The narrative description of the events of a scene

DISSOLVE TO:

Transition
Film editing instructions

INT. WRITERS STORE - SALES FLOOR - DAY

Writers browse the many scripts in the screenplay section.

Character's First Appearance
A description of the character; name should be CAPPED

ANTHONY, Canadian-Italian Story Specialist extraordinaire, 30s and not getting any younger, ambles over.

Character
A character's name always appears above his dialogue

ANTHONY
Hey, how's everyone doin' here?

A WRITING ENTHUSIAST, 45, reads the first page of "The Aviator" by John Logan.

Dialogue
Lines of speech for each character

ENTHUSIAST
Can John Logan write a killer first page or what?

ANTHONY
You, sir, are a gentleman of refined taste. John Logan is my non-Canadian idol.

Subheader
For when a full scene heading is not necessary

The phone RINGS. Anthony goes to--

THE SALES COUNTER

And answers the phone.

ANTHONY
Writers Store, Anthony speaking.

Parenthetical
Action or attitude direction for a character

VOICE
(over phone)
Do you have "Chinatown" in stock?

I/E LUXURIOUS MALIBU MANSION - DAY

A FIGURE roams his estate, cell phone pressed to his ear.

Extension
A note placed after the character's name to indicate how the voice will be heard onscreen

ANTHONY (O.S.)
'Course we have "Chinatown"! Robert Towne's masterpiece is arguably the Great American Screenplay...
(MORE)

Mores and Continueds:
Use mores and continueds between pages to indicate the same character is still speaking.

ANTHONY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I mean, that or "Shawshank Redemption" or "Network" or "American Beauty"... Yes, we do have "Chinatown".

Intercut:
Instructions for a series of quick cuts between two scene locations

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

FIGURE
That is such great news. I've been

Page Number
Located 0.5" from the top, flush right

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INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

FIGURE

"Casablanca"





QUESTIONS?

REFERENCES

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