

CHAPTER 1

WELCOME TO LA

The America of today is still attracting immigrants to its shores by way of Hollywood. Many overseas filmmakers and screenwriters flock here to find the American Dream – to be discovered by Hollywood and to make blockbuster movies.

It's still one of the only places on the planet where you can walk in without any qualifications holding only a spec screenplay or a low budget film, and land a career for life. Brits happen to be one of the biggest imports, so much so, that in Los Angeles, we are everywhere.

You'll hear the English accent as you walk down the street, go shopping, sit down for lunch, or switch on your TV and hear a British voice such as CBS' late night talk show host Craig

Ferguson. Hollywood loves us Brits. For some reason our accent seems classy to them – even if it's the most cockney'd thing you've ever heard.



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But for those of you who are thinking of coming here you still need to know how the Hollywood machine works and by that I mean both the studio network system as well as the lay of the land that is Los Angeles, the city.

Hollywood is actually a very small section of the city in the way Camden Town is in London, but its name has become a metaphor for the entire entertainment business in Los Angeles. Hence Hollywood's film offices and meetings stretch across L.A. from the valley, Hollywood, West L.A, Beverly Hills to Santa Monica and Malibu.

Ironically though, despite the large land mass, the actual number of people working in "Hollywood" is much smaller than you would think. There are only so many studios, so many television networks that can support so many production companies and therefore, you find that everyone knows or at least has heard of one another. While this creates a tightknit community, it also creates a lot of competition (it can be quite cutthroat and if you don't keep up, you can fall behind quickly)... and a lot of gossip. Some have said Hollywood is high school with money.

HOW DOES HOLLYWOOD WORK?

To understand the Hollywood System, you must first understand its parts and how they all work with one another in its very basic terms. First, there is (1) THE MONEY and then there are (2) THE FINDERS.

1) THE MONEY

“The Money” is split into two categories: FILM and TV.

FILM consists of the following major studios:

1. Disney.
2. Paramount.
3. Warner Brothers.
4. Universal.
5. 20th Century Fox.
6. Sony.

In addition there are the Mini Majors such as Lionsgate, Relativity and Summit.

TV consists of The Networks:

1. ABC
2. NBC
3. CBS
4. FOX
5. CW

Then there are the Cable Networks (HBO, Showtime, A&E, AMC, Discovery, Nat Geo, History Ch., Spike TV, SyFy, etc.)

HOW THE STUDIOS AND NETWORKS ARE STRUCTURED

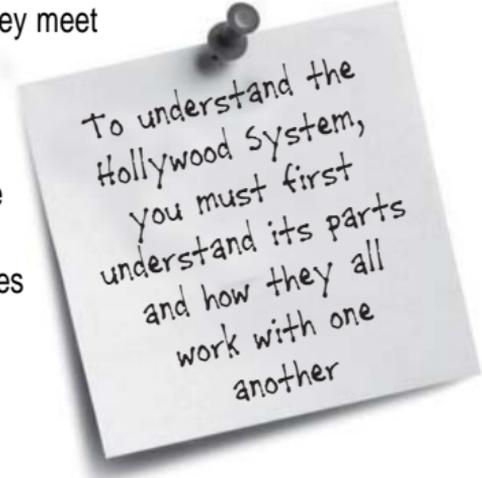
THE STUDIOS:

The CEO: He/She runs not just creative, but the entire studio business entity. They have the ability to green light a project and they have the ultimate say but sometimes choose not to be involved.

The President: She/He may have green light power although occasionally may have to check in with the CEO.

The VP (Vice President): There may be several VPs. Only the most senior VPs have green light power. VPs act as the main point of contact with production companies.

The Creative Executive (CE): There are several Creative Execs. They are the lower level executives who do exactly that – make creative decisions. They meet with many writers and/or producers who are pitching the studios and they are the ones who will bring it to their VP. Also they're the ones who will be doing a lot of the note giving. They are sometimes the main point of contact with the production companies.



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Assistants: These are the gatekeepers. They answer the phones, arrange schedules and work really hard. They all hope to move up the ladder so be nice to them and foster your relationships smartly.

Business Affairs Executive: Once a project has been given the go ahead with a studio, the Business Affairs department becomes involved to negotiate the deal. They are the ones who will contact the agent/manager/producer and speak about 'quotes' and then make that first offer.

2) THE FINDERS

These are the people who literally 'find' the product and bring it to the Studio – also known as the 'producer' or 'executive producer'.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES:

Producer: This is the person who puts all the elements of a film together.

The Executive Producer: This is a very broad term. It can be used for a producer who 'finds' the project and brings it to the studio, and then after having set up the project with a studio, he/she is out of the game. 'Executive Producer' is also a term that can be given to someone who comes on board who is instrumental on the project seeing the light of day. So either it relates to money, packaging, someone releasing their rights to a project, or someone being attached to a project...

VP (vice president): There may be a few VPs. They take numerous meetings and read lots of scripts, trying to find the good ideas to give to the Producer.

Director of Development: This is a high-level creative executive. He/She does a lot of reading, tracking of scripts and note creation.

Creative Executive (CE): This is the mid-level executive, who does lots of tracking of properties, reading and note giving.

Story Editor: This is a lower level executive. They focus mostly on tracking scripts and reading.

Assistant: The gatekeepers. These are the hearty young men and women who answer phones, do schedules, read the lesser important scripts, do tracking to a certain extent and run around their bosses making sure they have the right mocha latte etc.

HOW DOES IT ALL WORK?

The Money doesn't have the time to look for the properties they need to turn into movies or television so they contract out to the Finders to bring them product. Some Finders get **first look deals** with the Money, which means the Money will pay for the Finders' overhead and give them office space in exchange for bringing all the found material to them first. These deals are less and less prevalent.

Large production companies often have **'first look'** deals with the studios. In this case, it means that that particular studio will have the first choice of whether they want to be involved or not. These relationships can be long standing such as Mosaic Media's relationship with Sony.

The Finders read a lot of material that they either find themselves, get pitched by other Finders or they get from agents or managers. When they find something they like, they call the Money and send it over to them for their examination. If the Money likes it, they make a development deal with The Finder and hire a writer to work on the property. Before the Finders send the project over to the Money, they make sure the project is as appealing as it can be to the Money.

TRACKING

This is the procedure of learning what literary material is coming out of the agencies and management companies and following (tracking) when it is to be released. This applies to the progress of projects all over the town.

Representation will call executives at studios, networks and production companies with teasers of what their clients' projects are and when they will be ready. Executives will in turn query representation about what their clients are creating.

When the time is near, one entity will contact the other and try to persuade the other to read it before anyone else in town.

Representation will give preference to executives who have working relationships with their clients.

This is why **RELATIONSHIPS** within Hollywood are incredibly important. Hollywood is all about relationships. Having a good relationship will mean having a phone call returned, having a screenplay read, having a meeting set – all of which might

otherwise not happen unless you are a name or are the hot thing at that particular time. Not only that, having a good relationship will also be a huge advantage when you come to deal making and getting the green light. Friends are more likely to do favors for friends, deals will be sweeter and lets face it, everyone wants to do business with people they know and trust. So if a friend has the power to green light, your movie will have a high probability of being made.

Due to this, everyone makes sure to cultivate their relationships and Hollywood is full of power breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Just go and have lunch at a hip L.A restaurant and you'll be hearing deals going on at the table next to you. This is also the reason why many producers will not say that they don't ever like a project. In fact they tell you that they 'love it!' – but they might not get back to you for a while. Some people find this fakeness annoying – but to be honest, what would you rather? Everyone saying No to you, or everyone saying Yes, but not necessarily meaning Yes! I actually think more gets done in Hollywood due to that **false positive attitude**.

TRACKING BOARDS

There are several tracking boards/forums that exist that are private. You have to belong to that group or have a password to be able to access (such as www.trackingb.com).



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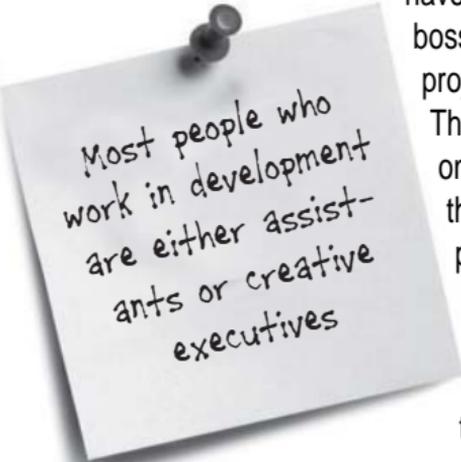
Once a screenplay has gone out and people have read, they have an opinion. Those who have heard about the screenplay and want to get an idea of whether to read or not, they will start asking questions: How was it? And if they hear 'Don't read this', 'It's terrible' - then they might have an idea of what to expect. There exists a code of honor on the boards - honesty. The various assistants from the different companies and studios share information with each other with the idea that no one is putting in disinformation to gain an edge over the other. So if your screenplay goes out, if it's not perceived as good, then the deck of cards can fall quickly. So you can spend 6 months writing a script, put it in the marketplace and it can be dead in a day.

WORKING IN DEVELOPMENT

Most people who work in development are either assistants or creative executives. They are the ones who've been asked by their bosses to keep their ears open for the next big thing. They are the READERS. The ones who are given piles of screenplays to read each weekend, looking for the diamond in the rough. They

have to be ready to report to their bosses on Monday morning about any projects that could cut the grade.

They're the trackers, the ones who are on the tracking boards all the time, they're the ones who are going out to parties and mingling with other assistants/execs working in development building their relationships with each other. If they have a good relationship with



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HOW DOES THE DEAL WORK FOR PRODUCERS, WRITERS, DIRECTORS?

THE PRODUCER: This is generally how the Producer Deal works:

If Working in Film: Producers get paid when a project goes into production. Some producers can negotiate a development fee like directors and will take a producing fee during the production. The development fee is important as many projects never see it to production, so the development fee may be the only fee the producer gets for that project. Once the film is produced, the producer will also get a certain percentage of the profits from a film based on their career track record.

If Working in TV: Producers in television are generally TV writers and they get paid as a writer and will also receive a producer fee and credit. They may also get a “Created by” credit too – and “written by” for the episodes that they write. Those that are pure producers get paid as feature film producers.

THE WRITER: There are several ways writers can enter the Hollywood Film market.

- A) SPEC MARKET
- B) SPEC MARKET WORKING WITH A PRODUCER
- C) REWRITE MARKET

A) SPEC MARKET

It has been said that you only need one really great spec screenplay to be picked up and your career is set. You can come from nowhere and suddenly overnight be a working Hollywood screenwriter.

The spec market is exactly that – speculative. There have been times when the spec market has been booming and script sales hit the roof. Screenwriters such as Shane Black (Lethal Weapon, The Long Kiss Goodnight, Predator...) and Joe Eszterhas (Basic Instinct) sold their screenplays and outlines in the '80s for ridiculous amount of monies. Even M. Knight Shymalan received a whopping \$2.25 million as a newcomer for his screenplay The Sixth Sense back in 1999 – which included an automatic production green light in his contract.

The popularity of the spec market seems to be cyclical. In the last few years, the spec market has been poor. Not many specs by new writers have been picked up. The studios have not been wanting original material, but instead 'branded entertainment'. This has made it difficult for that original idea that's coming from a new writer. Instead, the screenwriter would have had to have optioned the rights to a branded project so that they could then write a draft based on that idea.

There are several ways the spec market operates.

1) If you've written a full length screenplay on an idea that you're passionate about, and the agent or manager is also on board, with everyone agreeing that the screenplay is as ready as it can be; then it's ready to present to producers – and the next

step is to 'go out with it'. Going out with it would either mean, going 'wide' – to a variety of producers who have first look deals with studios, or to a select few who are considered to be the ones who would be more likely to come on board. Your agent or manager might decide to 'slip' the script to certain producers before they go out 'wide', giving those friendly producers a first look. Prior to releasing it, the agent and/or manager will have done their part in hyping up the screenplay before they release it to the town.

If your screenplay is good – then it will create a buzz and a **bidding war** could start over producers/studios wanting to purchase your work.

If your screenplay is not perceived as good – then word will get out and executives will pass the duty of reading the script to their underlings who will only read about 30 pages or so to make sure the buzz is correct. Worse case is if a producer who was eager to read your screenplay, hears the bad reviews and then decides not to bother to read.

If your screenplay doesn't sell
– then it's not all doom and gloom. That screenplay may not see the light of day as an actual movie, but now many producers have got to know your work, and now your unsold screenplay will be used as a sample and given to producers who are looking for a writer to rewrite a screenplay or to write an



idea that they have... And so more meetings begin with new projects on the horizon. And for you as a screenwriter, your spec was a great way to get your foot in the door.

2) If the spec might not be deemed original enough, or high concept enough – another route is where the agent and manager may consider getting attachments before they approach the studios.

ATTACHMENTS: This is when a screenplay comes with 'elements' attached. This can be one of the following:

- 1) A director
- 2) Cast
- 3) Visual FX company

1) A Director: A producer sends their screenplay to a hot shot director who loves the script and he/she signs on. Once they're attached, the producer can either sell the screenplay to a studio who likes working with this director, or the producer can then start shopping around for other elements such as cast and then have a full package to approach the studios. This route is usually the first port of call for a producer if the screenplay has no director already attached.

2) Cast: A producer sends their screenplay to a leading actor who would have a certain amount of pulling power with the studios or financiers. The actor would hopefully then love the script and sign on to be 'attached'. Going to actors before a director would work well if you or your agent/ manager had a good relationship with an actor i.e. your agent knows that Brad Pitt is looking for this kind of

film, so they would contact his office directly. However, one of the first questions the star might ask would be, who's the director? If there was no director attached, they may still be interested as they would have a director in mind who they like to work with or would like to work with. If there's already a writer/director attached, again they may still be interested but now they would have to get to know the writer/director's previous work and to become a fan.

3) Visual Effects. If your screenplay is effects heavy, then attaching a visual effects house to come on board and co-produce your film, could give your project a lot of clout. Also within many of the visual effects houses, there are directors; and one of their in-house directors would be attached to direct.

B) SPEC MARKET WORKING WITH A PRODUCER

This happens in either three ways:

1) A producer has read your screenplay and would like to come onboard to develop the project to then be able to take it to the Studios; or

2) You have pitched a producer an idea, which they love and would like to come onboard to develop the project to then be able to take it to the Studios; or

3) You have been approached by a producer with an idea they wish to develop into a screenplay. The producer has read a