WSAI VIRTUAL STUDIOS
Introduction To Professional Screenwriting

Screenwriting With Style
If you are new to screenwriting, planning to write a screenplay or script of any kind, the good news is that writing in screenplay format is easier and more intuitive today than at any time since first Lanier Word Processing Machine. Advances in screenwriting software now save the hours you would previously have spent learning how to write a screenplay in professional Hollywood format can now be allocated to polishing your plot, honing your dialogue, or learning screenplay structure. Some think screenwriting is eclipsing the pursuit of the Great American Novel but it certainly isn't any easier. At any rate, the making of movies is a collaborative process, which demands, that those in screenwriting produce a document in particular format, notation, and length called a 'script.'

This overview will begin to acquaint you with the screenplay format writing rules and screenwriting etiquette you'll need to know about, and as you browse the following material you may notice the words 'don't', 'avoid' and '...unless you are directing the movie'. Take that advice to heart. As you become more familiar with the world of screenwriting, you'll understand why but for now, the scope of this document prohibits a deeper explanation.

Also, you'll find script and screenwriting terminology links to a glossary we have prepared to support this overview. These links will open a separate window that can be browsed or closed at will.

Learning how to write a screenplay involves many facets but we hope this basic information will give you a head start on your endeavors, including practical information to help you get your scripts read. And hopefully turned into movies. In the right column, you will find hints for helpful products and services that have brought success to so many.

**What Exactly Is A Script?**
A script is a document that outlines every aural, visual, behavioral, and lingual element required to tell a story. Why "outlines"? Because film is a highly collaborative medium and the director, cast, editor, and production crew will, based on your "outline", interpret your story their way when it is filmed. They may consult you, or they may not. Other writers may be brought in or you may be asked to re-write the entire thing. That's life, in the world of screenwriting. But because so many people are involved in the making of a film, a script must conform to standards that all involved parties understand and thus has a specific format or layout, margins, notation, and other conventions. This document is intended to overview the typical elements used screenwriting.

It is crucial to remember that film is a VISUAL medium. You don't tell your audience your story, you SHOW them. You must learn to write a screenplay VISUALLY. Write what they will SEE and what they will HEAR. You might love your characters and know what they are thinking, but the discipline of screenwriting is how to show it on a screen. When it happens, it may be just done with a look, often improvised on the movie set. So, just write the pictures, sounds, and speeches, and leave the rest for the filmmakers.

**What Makes A Good Story?**
Let's hazard a guess. The movies you loved most featured characters that swept you up, who captivated your emotions, got you involved. The audience viewing a movie not only wants to be interested in and care about the people they see on the screen, they want to be PASSIONATE about them, whether they like them or not. Great heroes and heroines inspire us; great villains make us want to jump into the screen!
There is always something at stake in a good movie. Not just something someone wants, something that must be acquired, no matter what the risk, as in Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark. Or something highly desired by as many main characters as possible, like the small black statue in The Maltese Falcon. Sometimes it can be an intangible thing, like the freedom of a people in Lawrence of Arabia or Gandhi. All these things drive the character's quest, even gives the hero superhuman strength. It can be something personal (romance) or for the good of all (saving the world from aliens) but it must be powerful and grow more desperate as the story unfolds.

There are always obstacles, which provide that catchword that actors love so much—Conflict—(The heart of drama; someone wants something and people and things keep getting in the way of them achieving the goal. At times, the obstacles can be common to both the hero and villain, and the ultimate goal a laudable one for both parties). This is the heart of drama. Someone wants something and people and things keep getting in the way of them achieving the goal. At times, the obstacles can be common to both the hero and villain, and the ultimate goal a laudable one for both parties, as in Jingle All The Way. In that film, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sinbad battle to achieve the same goal—the acquisition of the last popular action figure for sale that Christmas season. Both of them have promised their son, and they must not fail. Conflict and obstacles can be physical or emotional. But they have to be in your story or you don't really have a story. In most good stories, the protagonist will also have an inner obstacle, some mental or even spiritual problem that will be resolved by the time s/he reaches the outward, physical goal of the story. Some people call this inner demon a "ghost", while others call in a "wound".

You need a hook. That's a songwriting term that describes that thing that catches the public's attention. A popular Hollywood term is a “High Concept”. A better idea might be a simple "What if?" In Galaxy Quest, for example, the concept is "What if the washed-up actors from the crew of a cancelled but still popular sci-fi TV show are pressed into a real war in space by aliens who think the TV show broadcasts they received were documentaries?" A good enough "what if?" will set your script apart from the pack. It is why people will leave the comfort of their homes and plunk down their hard-earned bucks at the local Cineplex.

Hollywood buys genres. Agents, managers, and producers are drawn to and specialize in specific genres so approaching them with something they can recognize is a good idea. Successful stories have a fresh face but are identifiable. You know what makes your idea unique, but can you describe it quickly to others? Is it a fast-paced thriller, romantic comedy, action adventure?

Scripts have to look a certain way. We can't stress this point enough. You must present your work like an insider. The sheer volume of submissions makes it so that if ANYTHING about your script looks strange it's headed for the circular file. If you don't know the game, they won't play. The scriptwriter has to adhere to conventions covering everything from how many pages to what font (Courier 12 pitch in the U.S.), and that's just the beginning. We recommend you follow those rules, unless you're independently wealthy and plan to finance, produce, and direct your movie. Even then, however, the people you'll need to work with will be accustomed to standard formats.

SCRIPT STYLES
Below is a listing of the most common script formats in use today. This document will be dealing with Feature Film/Television Movie of the Week, which is very similar, but the
others are distinctly different. Their attributes complement the needs of production distinct to the medium, the working style of the actors, and production personnel:

Scriptwriters for any of the above formats will present their work in either of the two variants below depending on whether they are trying to sell their work or have sold it and are working in the production part of the process.

**Submission Scripts**
AKA a Spec Script. This is a script written without being commissioned or bought, on the speculative hope that it will be sold. This overview will favor the philosophies of spec script writing which is to say, 'stay out of the way of the collaborative process'! The do's and don'ts you'll see here will reflect this philosophy.

**Shooting Scripts**
Once a script is purchased, it often goes through a series of rewrites before it is put into production. Once that happens, the script becomes a 'Shooting Script' or Production Script. All the scenes and shots of a shooting script are numbered and each scene and shot are broken down into all the component pieces required to film it. The production assistants and director can then arrange the order in which the scenes will be shot for the most efficient use of stage, cast, and location resources.

Since feature screenplay format is the most popular form of script today, we will begin by exploring that layout. Later, we'll discuss the other formats, building on what we've discovered here.

A general comment about script formatting: Although a certain format has become more and more standardized in recent years, there isn't ONE way, ONE set of margins, ONE style. There is a RANGE OF CORRECTNESS. All the software program formats and measurements fall within this range.

**SPEC SCREENPLAY PAGE PROPERTIES**
Screenplays are traditionally written on 8 1/2" x 11" white 3-hole punched paper. A page number appears in the upper right hand corner (in the header). No page number is printed on the first page. The type style used is the Courier 12 font. The top and bottom margins are between .5" and 1". The left margin is between 1.2" and 1.6". The right margin is between .5" and 1".

The extra inch of white space on the left of a script page allows for binding with brads, yet still imparts a feeling of vertical balance of the text on the page.

The Courier 12 font is used for timing purposes. One script page in Courier 12 roughly averages 10 letters to an inch ands 1 minute of onscreen film time. The best fonts to use are Final Draft Heavy or Corel’s Courier10. Experienced readers can detect a long script by merely weighing the stack of paper in their hand.

Script writing software is pre-programmed with all these rules right out of the box.

**SCRIPT LENGTH**
The average feature screenplay, traditionally, is between 95 and 125 pages long. In Hollywood these days scripts generally don't run longer than 114 pages. Comedy scripts are
typically shorter, dramas longer. There are, naturally, variations. You could be writing an action-packed film where your description takes only 10 seconds to read, but will take 45 seconds of film time. Here's an example:

Cpl. Owens sheds his pack and picks up the machine gun. He runs from doorway to doorway, dodging enemy fire while shooting back, until he reaches the church bell tower.

If you had a script full of scenes like this, you could come up with a short script in total pages... but that doesn't mean when it is filmed it would be short. By the same token, another writer could write the same scene and have it take up half a page. It just depends on the writing style of the individual writer.

125 page scripts are considered on the long side for a screenplay. Length is a very important component of the script. When you turn in a script to a producer, the very first thing s/he will do is fan through the pages and look at the last page to see how long it is. It doesn't matter if you've written the most incredible screenplay ever; if it's too long, they may refuse to read it.

The Industry's aversion to long scripts is due to economic considerations. Films under two hours mean more showings per day in a theater, which means more revenue for the exhibitor, distributor, filmmaker, and possibly even you, the screenwriter.

When you realize your script is long and have to start cutting your work, keep in mind that if a scene can be removed and the story continues to work, that scene wasn't necessary. EVERY SCENE should not only move the story along to its conclusion; it should be an integral part of the path to the climax.

**SCRIPT ELEMENTS**

These are the unique margin, case, and position attributes that give feature film script text the format and consistency expected by all participants. Once you are accustomed to them, you'll be able to tell your story the way an industry reader is accustomed to seeing it. The elements for a script are:

- Scene Heading
- Action
- Character Name
- Dialogue
- Parenthetical
- Extensions
- Shot
- Transition

**Scene Heading**

Scene Heading are aligned flush left (which we learned is about 1.5" from the edge of the paper) and are rarely long enough to reach the page margin.

The Scene Heading is written in ALL CAPS. Use a period after the INT. or EXT., a hyphen between the other elements of the Slugline.
The Scene Heading, sometimes called Slugline, tells the reader of the script where the scene takes place. Are we indoors (INT.) or outdoors (EXT.)? Next name the location: BEDROOM, LIVING ROOM, at the BASEBALL FIELD, inside a CAR? And lastly it might include the time of day - NIGHT, DAY, DUSK, DAWN... information to "set the scene" in the reader's mind.

The Slugline can also include production information like CONTINUOUS ACTION, or ESTABLISHING SHOT or STOCK SHOT. Here are examples of Scene Headings:

INT. BEDROOM – MORNING  
EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP – SUNSET  
INT. OFFICE – NIGHT – CONTINUOUS ACTION  
EXT. KEY WEST MARINA – DAWN – ESTABLISHING  
EXT. PASADENA – ROSE PARADE – STOCK FOOTAGE

Script writing software will automatically file each new Scene Heading you use. This alleviates the need to retype the same text again and again, and it also helps you keep your script consistent. There is nothing more distracting to the reader than to see one Scene Heading read:

EXT. - OUTER SPACE RAIN FOREST – NIGHT

and two pages later:

EXT. - OUTER SPACE JUNGLE – NIGHT

Keeping Scene Headings consistent allows your reader to recognize locations and places and not have to figure out if this is a new set (location). You don't want to take the reader's mind off your story, ever.

Here is a sample in Scene Heading sample in script form:

FADE IN:

EXT. KEY WEST MARINA – DAWN – ESTABLISHING

We have 'established' that we're in a marina at dawn.

**Action**

Action runs from left to right margin, the full width of the text on the page, the same as the Scene Heading. Be sure to use the word wrap function of your script writing software, to make editing and rewrites easy. Text is single-spaced and in mixed case.

When you introduce a speaking character for the first time, you should put the name in all caps.

Script writing software intuitively formats the spacing and text between different paragraph styles for you as you type. All you worry about is your story!

The ACTION or Description sets the scene, describes the setting, and allows you to introduce your characters and set the stage for your story. Action is written in REAL TIME.
Every moment in a screenplay takes place NOW. Use the active voice (a window slams shut) not the passive voice (a window is slammed shut).

Always write in PRESENT TIME, not the past. (There are rare exceptions to this; for example, John Milius' The Wind and the Lion had description in past tense like a novel, but then, he also directed the film.)

Keep your paragraphs short... don't let them go on and on over 4 or 5 lines. The reader may scan long action paragraphs without really reading them.

FADE IN:

EXT. KEY WEST MARINA – DAWN – ESTABLISHING

Sailboats, yachts, and cabin cruisers all bob up and down in the warm blue water.

INT. MASTER SUITE – MORNING

Expensive designer sheets and comforter covers the nude, shapely body of drop dead gorgeous JULIE COOPER, 25. Sunlight filters through portholes over the muscled, tan body of FRANKIE CAMPISI, 38. He pulls the comforter down and begins kissing Julie's naked body.

The reader begins to form an idea about the setting and the action taking place. We know we're on a boat, two characters have been introduced to us, and we have some idea about their physical appearance. And we have a clue to their relationship.

Avoid a compulsion to write camera angles and shots. If you must emphasize some shot, write it on a single line. Angles and shots are the domain of the director and will likely be added in the Shooting Script.

Expensive designer sheets and comforter covers the nude, shapely body of drop dead gorgeous JULIE COOPER, 25. Sunlight filters through portholes over the muscled, tan body of FRANKIE CAMPISI, 38. He pulls the comforter down and grins at Julie's naked body. Suddenly, Frankie recoils.

There's a devil tattoo on her shoulder that he's never seen before.

Character Name

The CHARACTER NAME is formatted in uppercase letters and indented 3.5" from the left margin.

Before a character can speak, the writer inserts a CHARACTER NAME to let the reader know this character's dialogue follows.

A character name can be an actual name (JOHN) or description (FAT MAN) or an occupation (DOCTOR). Sometimes, you might have COP #1 and then COP #2 speaking. It
is okay to identify the speaking parts like this, but actors will like you more if you personalize their part with a name. Try to be consistent.

When you use script writing software the use of long, difficult to type character names is a breeze. The programs automatically learn and keep track of the CHARACTER NAMES you use, allowing for consistency and ease. No need fear those JACQUELINEs and DR. FRANKENSTEINs; two quick keystrokes are all you will need to make them appear on the screen.

Script writing software will also insert the correct spacing from the previous paragraph style, saving you thousands of keystrokes during the writing process.

FADE IN:

EXT. KEY WEST MARINA - DAWN - ESTABLISHING

Sailboats, yachts, and cabin cruisers all bob up and down in the warm blue water.

INT. MASTER SUITE - MORNING

Expensive designer sheets and comforter covers the nude, shapely body of drop dead gorgeous JULIE COOPER, 25. Sunlight filters through portholes over the muscled, tan body of FRANKIE CAMPISI, 38. He pulls the comforter down and begins kissing Julie's naked body.

FRANKIE

Dialogue

DIALOGUE margin is indented 2.5" from the left margin. A line of dialogue can be from 30 spaces to 35 spaces long, so the right margin is a bit more flexible, usually 2.0" to 2.5".

DIALOGUE rules apply when anyone on screen speaks. During a conversation between characters. When a character talks out loud to himself... even be when a character is off-screen and only a voice is heard.

Great dialogue is a window into the soul of your character. It sounds real... It's conversational. The audience feels like a fly on the wall, hearing natural interplay between characters. Great dialogue may use common language but express great passion, and even become a catch phrase in popular culture, as the line from Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry Callahan "Go ahead. Make my day."

It's not a bad idea to read your dialogue aloud to see how it really sounds. If you have a difficult time reading a line, it may not be good dialogue. You'll definitely be able to tell if you organize a reading of your script and hear it that way (best with professional actors, like they do in Hollywood and on Broadway).

Script writing software now has the capacity to read your dialogue back to you via your computer's sound system. You assign a gender to your character name, even different inflections, and you can have a staged reading of your script right there in your living room.
FADE IN:

EXT. KEY WEST MARINA - DAWN - ESTABLISHING

Sailboats, yachts, and cabin cruisers all bob up and down in the warm blue water.

INT. MASTER SUITE - MORNING

Expensive designer sheets and comforter covers the nude, shapely body of drop dead gorgeous JULIE COOPER, 25. Sunlight filters through portholes over the muscled, tan body of FRANKIE CAMPISI, 38. He pulls the comforter down and begins kissing Julie's naked body.

FRANKIE
Rise and shine, Bluebird. Time to spread your wings and fly.

Parenthetical
Parentheticals are left indented at 3.0" and the right margin is 3.5" although that is a bit flexible. As seen in our examples, a Parenthetical remark is NOT centered under the character name.

A Parenthetical remark can be an attitude, verbal direction or action direction for the actor who is speaking the part. Parentheticals should be short, to the point, descriptive, and only used when absolutely necessary.

These days, Parentheticals are generally disfavored, because they give direction to an actor that may not be appropriate once on the set. The slang term for them is "wrylies" as in:

FRANKIE (wryly)
Good mornin', Bluebird.

JULIE (sleepily)
What? What time is it?

FRANKIE (getting out of bed)
After six. You're gonna be late again and I don't want to hear it.

Parentheticals are also used in some scripts as the (continuing) notation. If a character is speaking followed by an action line and then the same character continues speaking, this notation can be used, but the New Spec Script frowns on all such superfluously inserted notations.

FRANKIE (getting out of bed)
After six. You're gonna be late again and I don't want to hear it.
Frankie pulls all the covers off of Julie. She sits up in bed, pulls on a long T-shirt, and shuffles to the bathroom.

FRANKIE (CONT’D)
(continuing)
You're welcome.

Script writing programs may give you the option of placing the (continuing) as a parenthetical remark or on the same line as the Character name, looking much like an Extension.

FRANKIE
(getting out of bed)
After six. You're gonna be late again and I don't want to hear it.

Frankie pulls all the covers off of Julie. She sits up in bed, pulls on a long T-shirt, then swings her legs onto the floor and shuffles off to the bathroom.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
You're welcome.

The script writing software enters the (CONT’D) automatically if that option is chosen.

It indicates that the character continues speaking throughout the action.

**Extension**
O.S. - Off-Screen
V.O. - Voice Over

An Extension is a technical note placed directly to the right of the Character name that denotes HOW the audience will hear the character’s voice. An Off-Screen voice can be heard from a character out of the camera range, or from another room altogether.

Frankie pulls all the covers off of Julie. She sits up in bed, pulls on a long T-shirt, then swings her legs onto the floor and shuffles off to the bathroom.

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Frankie pulls all the covers off of Julie. She sits up in bed, pulls on a long T-shirt, then swings her legs onto the floor and shuffles off to the bathroom.

FRANKIE
(continuing)
You're welcome.
(beat)
Hey, how long you gonna be? I've got a meeting and I need to shower.

JULIE (O.S.)
Twenty minutes.

Some writers use O.C. (off camera) in place of O.S. The "beat" used above simply denotes that Frankie pauses (perhaps formulating his next thought) before uttering his next bit of dialogue.
Another common extension is V.O. That stands for Voice Over. Think of a V.O. as a narration, or a character speaking while s/he isn't in the scene. Or s/he can be in the scene, but also acting as narrator, reflecting on and describing some time gone by. This dialogue is recorded and then laid in over the scene in editing.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
I knew I wasn't gonna get in that shower for at least 45 minutes, so I went for a run.

Our character Frankie is reminiscing about the morning on the boat in a Voice Over.

Transition
We must begin with this remark: Nowadays, in Spec Scripts, transitions are frowned upon, a waste of a couple of lines you could better use for brilliant dialogue, and are only used when absolutely necessary.

When you DO use a Transition, the left margin is at 6.5" and a right margin of 1.0". Transitions are formatted in all caps and almost always follow an Action and precede Scene Headings.

Transitions you may be familiar with are:

CUT TO:
DISSOLVE TO:
SMASH CUT:
QUICK CUT:
FADE TO:

FADE OUT (never at the end of the script)
The only time to use a Transition in a spec script is if it's integral to telling the story. For instance, you might use a TIME CUT: to indicate passage of time. More commonly, a DISSOLVE TO: indicates that time has passed. Or, you might need to use MATCH CUT: if you want to illustrate that there is some correlation between something we just saw and something in the new scene. The point is, unless you become quite skilled in screenwriting don't use these things unless absolutely necessary, because the director of the film will probably think of something different.

Most Transitions are already programmed into script writing programs, capitalized and lined up for those rare occasions when you can't resist to use one.

Frankie pulls on a pair of shorts, slips into some running shoes and exits.

CUT TO:

(Remember, the CUT TO: will probably be left out in most spec scripts these days. What it indicates is a complete change of location.)

Shots
Shots are formatted like Scene Headings, flush left margin, all uppercase. Blank line before and after.
A SHOT tells the reader the focal point within a scene has changed. Here are some examples of shots:

ANGLE ON –
EXTREME CLOSE UP –
PAN TO –
FRANKIE'S POV –
REVERSE ANGLE –

As the writer, for reasons already mentioned you should be very judicious using a SHOT to redirect the reader's focus. Your "directing" runs the risk of interrupting the flow of your storytelling. If what you really want to do is direct films, do yourself a favor and DON'T do it in a script you're trying to sell... wait until it sells and try to negotiate a package deal with you on board as the director. This most often is a possibility after you've already had one of your screenplays filmed.

Once in a while, calling a shot is necessary. You want the reader to see something not obvious in the scene or you want to achieve a particular emotion or build to a climax. This device allows you to achieve this goal.

If you are describing a prison riot, with a prisoner holding a guard at knifepoint, and you want the audience to see a sharpshooter aiming at the prisoner, you might use a shot like this:

A PRISONER shoves a homemade shiv against the throat of a PRISON GUARD.

PRISONER
(trembling)
I'll kill him! I mean it.

PRISON GUARD
Take him out! Now! Do it!

ANGLE ON - a prison guard sharpshooter
as he lines up the shot, finger poised on the trigger.

PRISONER
I want to talk to the Warden. NOW!

Another shot used from time to time is INSERT. INSERT is used solely as a direction - to focus on something integral to the scene, often something that the audience needs to read or what would otherwise be too small to be clearly seen in a full, wide scene.

INSERT - ransom note

A well-constructed action paragraph or a single line might achieve the same goal without distracting the reader. Be vigilant of the flow of the story, and try not to interrupt it.
Page Breaking
If you still need convincing that script writing software is a useful tool for a screenwriter, page breaking will clinch it for you: If you've followed the program's simple directions while writing your script, then all of the following rules will automatically, dare we say magically, self-execute right in front of your eyes, while you are writing.

Never end a page with a Scene Heading. The ONLY time this is acceptable is if another Scene Heading or Shot follows. (An example would be an Establishing shot and then an interior scene heading.)

Never start a page with a Transition.

Automatically place Continued: notations when it breaks an Action paragraph or a Dialogue.

Never end a page with a Character Name line. At least two lines of Dialogue if there are that many (including a Parenthetical, if used) must follow.

Never end a page at a Parenthetical. Dialogue MUST follow.

If you have Dialogue, a Parenthetical and then Dialogue again, break the page BEFORE the Parenthetical.

FINER POINTS
Now you are familiar with the basic elements and directions for writing a spec script. With these elements, or simply using a script formatting software, you will write a standardly acceptable script. It will look professional, and the reader will not automatically assume you are an amateur storyteller because you don't know basic screenwriting rules. Now there are a few finer points we should discuss.

Dual Dialogue or Side-By-Side Dialogue
When two of your characters speak simultaneously, that's called dual dialogue or side-by-side dialogue. In the script we've been following, our characters might have this conversation:

Frankie and Julie are in a heated argument.

FRANKIE
Get out of my life! I can't stand the sight of you anymore.

JULIE
Don't you yell at me! I'll leave when I'm good and ready! Tough!!

All of the script writing programs let you write this style of dialogue with ease, but you should probably avoid this device unless absolutely necessary.

Amateur screenwriters often do it in emulation of some old favorite scene, or to try to interject "conflict". However, you are more likely to distract the reader and disrupt the flow of the story. Don't give them a reason to put your script down by interjecting unclear scenes and dialogue.

Ad-Libs
Sometimes in a script it's acceptable or even necessary to have a crowd scene with ad lib dialogue. There are two basic ways of writing this.
The first way to do it is in an action line.

The CROWD in the bleachers taunts the pitcher: "You stink!" "Rubber arm!" "Ball!" "You throw like my sister!"

The second choice is to do it as a character and dialogue.

CROWD
You stink! Rubber arm! Ball! You throw like my sister!!

Abbreviations
The film industry uses several abbreviations as shortcuts in scripts. It's up to you whether you use these abbreviations or not. Some readers find them distracting, while others prefer the shorthand. We've already discussed several -- O.S., O.C., V.O. -- which are specific to scripts. Here are some others.

b.g. = background - b.g. is used in an action paragraph.
Frankie sits on the bed tying his shoes. In the b.g., Julie takes money out of his wallet. She also pockets his car keys.

CGI = computer generated image - CGI denotes action that cannot be filmed normally and will require the use of computers to generate the full imagery, as used in films like The Matrix.
CGI: His mouth begins to melt, then disappears entirely.

f.g. = foreground - f.g. is used in action the same as b.g., except the action takes place in the foreground.

SFX = sound effects - SFX tells the sound people an effect is needed.
SFX: The BLAST of a train whistle.

SPFX = special effects - SPFX announces that a special effect is necessary (one that might not require the use of CGI).
SPFX: A beam of light illuminates Frankie's face. His features slowly melt like a wax figure.

M.O.S. = without sound - The story goes that a German-born director (perhaps Josef Von Sternberg, who discovered Marlene Dietrich) wanted to shoot a scene without sound and told the crew to shoot "mit out sound", a phrase which the crew found humorous and thus proliferated it. It is most commonly used to show impending impact of some kind.
M.O.S. Horses stampeding down Main Street.

POV = point of view - The camera 'sees' the action from a specific character's position
JULIE'S POV - Frankie sits on the bed tying his shoes.

Montages
A MONTAGE is a cinematic device used to show a series of scenes, all related and building to some conclusion. Although a French word, it was created by Russian director Sergei Eisenstein as a "montage of attractions" to elicit emotions on several levels. Most often it is
used as a passage of time device. Think of a baby being born, then rolling over, then taking its first steps, and finally running through the sprinklers. For example:

MONTAGE
1) Josh is born. The doctors clean him and hand him over to his smiling mother.
2) Josh rolls over in his playpen. His mother applauds.
3) Holding on to the coffee table, Josh takes his first steps. His mother joyously hugs him.
4) Clad in droopy diapers, Josh runs gleefully through the sprinklers. His mother sighs, and reaches for the diaper bag.

You can also number the scenes A), B), C) if you prefer. Either numbering format is correct. (Note that the mother's emotions change through the montage from joy to weariness, once Josh is completely ambulant there should be some element of the story that a montage will illustrate.)

The MONTAGE is formatted as a single shot, with the subsequent scenes action elements of the complete sequence. It isn't necessary, but some writers write END OF MONTAGE when the montage is completed.

A Series Of Shots
A SERIES OF SHOTS is similar to a Montage, but it usually takes place in one location and concerns the same action. Think of the movie Earthquake...

SERIES OF SHOTS
A) Store windows start to rattle and shake.
B) Hanging signs swing back and forth.
C) Bricks and shards of glass begin to fall onto the sidewalks.
D) People run for cover.

A SERIES OF SHOTS is formatted as a SHOT. Just like a Montage, the shot series are action paragraphs and may also be numbered 1) 2) 3).

A Matter of Style
Some writers will incorporate a series of shots into a script without noting it as such. This generally contributes to a smoother flow of the action. The action lines might be short, descriptive sentences on separate lines.

The Piazza de Palma is packed with Saturday shoppers.
A LOUD SHOT rings out.
Pigeons take flight, WINGS FLUTTERING EN MASSE.
Heads turn in the direction of ANOTHER GUNSHOT.
A frightened child drops his ice cream cone and CRIES.
A woman SCREAMS.
Another style for writing the sequence above is:

THE PIAZZA DE PALMA

is teaming with Saturday shoppers.

A LOUD SHOT

rings out. Pigeons take flight. Heads turn in the direction of ANOTHER GUNSHOT.

A FRIGHTENED CHILD

drops his ice cream cone and CRIES. A SCREAM is heard.

This particular style of writing takes more space on the page, but it also is a faster read. Why? Look at all the white space in the second example... the reader's eyes can read that passage very quickly.

Another style of writing has to do with EMPHASIS in the action element. Too often, readers will skim a script, particularly if the action paragraphs are overly long. Here's an option of how to get the necessary points across. Italics, bold or underlining are not used for emphasis.

Terry DROPS to the floor as a BEAM OF LIGHT sweeps across the room. He hears the FLOOR SQUEAK in the outer office. Terry HOLDS HIS BREATH as a big, bulky SECURITY GUARD enters.

Too many amateur writers use this in order to have the actions jump off the page. Don’t do it, it’s not professional. Just cap sounds.

Short Lines/Poetry/Lyrics
Occasionally, it's necessary to write dialogue with a series of SHORT LINES. One example might be if your character is reciting poetry, or singing a song.

JULIE
Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
I'm writing a script,
How 'bout you?

Song lyrics are sometimes written in all caps.

JULIE
(singing)
ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT
GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM
MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY
LIFE IS BUT A DREAM.

Intercuts
Occasionally in a script, you might want to cut back and forth between two or more scenes. These scenes are occurring at the same time. Instead of repeating the Scene Heading for each scene over and over, an INTERCUT is used. This gives the reader the sense that the scene is
moving rapidly back and forth between locations. There is a great sequence of intercuts in The Deer Hunter of shots of hunters out in the woods with a wedding going on simultaneously, at a different location.

Here's another example:

INT. SHERRI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sherri (unseen) starts disrobing a mannequin in front of her open bedroom window.

INT. LENNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lenny gets up to cross to the fridge to get a beer. He looks out his window and catches a glimpse of Sherri across the courtyard. He freezes, watching her.

INTERCUT BETWEEN LENNY AND SHERRI

Sherri sits on the bed and unbuttons her double-breasted suit jacket.

Lenny moves closer to the window for a better vantage point.

Sherri stands, hopping a few feet, trying to step out of her skirt.

Lenny, eyes glued to Sherri, moves to keep her in view. He slams his bare foot into a dumbbell on the floor.

   LENNY
   Ow!

Sherri hears the yelp and looks in Lenny's direction.

Lenny sees Sherri and DROPS from her view.

Another type of INTERCUT is used when two characters are on the phone and you don't want one-half of the conversation to be O.S. - you want to show them both.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sherri, comfy on the couch, is reading a book when the phone rings. She answers it.

   SHERI
   Hello?

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - REST AREA

Lenny sips a Coke as he talks.

   LENNY
   Hey Honey, I'm in Barstow.
INTERCUT BETWEEN LENNY AND SHERRI

SHERRI
Oh, Honey, that's great... you'll be here by morning.

LENNY
Yep... I've got the pedal to the metal.

In older films, it was common to use a split-screen to show such a conversation. It's not common these days, and unless you have a very good reason for writing it in, it is best to INTERCUT.

Titles Or Opening Scenes
In some scripts you read, you'll see this notation:

BEGIN TITLES or BEGIN OPENING TITLES followed by END TITLES or OVER OPENING CREDITS followed by END OPENING CREDITS. An example:

FADE IN:

EXT. KEY WEST MARINA - DAWN - ESTABLISHING

Sailboats, yachts, and cabin cruisers all bob up and down in the warm blue water.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

BEGIN TITLES

as hundreds of young, perfect bodies of college age kids frolic during spring break.

Don't bother putting in Beginning and Ending titles. It is not usually done in a spec script, and you can't predict where the producer and director will want to insert the titles, the sequence of footage shot with the opening credits rolling over it. Don't give yourself the extra work.

Superimpose or Title
When the notation SUPERIMPOSE or TITLE OVER is used, text or an image is placed on top of the film footage. Most of the time, it contains information the director thinks the audience needs to know... like the place or time of the next scene.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Hundreds of young, perfect bodies of college age kids frolic on the sand and in the warm water.

SUPERIMPOSE: Daytona Beach, Spring Break, 1966
Only the text, "Daytona Beach, Spring Break, 1966" would appear toward the bottom of the screen.

Any text, like subtitles or translations of foreign signs, etc., fall into this category.

Do not use SUPERIMPOSE: unless there is a definite need for it. It has been so overused, it is sometimes spoofed, the way director Ron Howard did in Splash.

**Title Page**
The TITLE PAGE has specific information on it. Type it in the same font as your script, Courier 12. It should not be on special paper, no graphics - it should just contain only the following information:

Centered on the page, vertically and horizontally - The title of your script in bold type if possible
Two lines below that, centered on the line - Written by
Two lines below that, centered on the line - Your Name (and co-writer, if any)
In the lower right hand corner your contact information (include agent or email address)
In the lower left-hand corner, you can put Registered, WGA or a copyright notification.

The Good, The Bad, The Thin

Written by

Fatty Turner

Copyright © 2001 by Fatty Turner

Fatty Turner
1234 Lake St.
Anytown, CA 12345
(310) 555-1212

Registered, WGAw

Authorities differ on whether or not you should note on your title page that you have registered your screenplay with the Writers Guild of America, west. Some people think it is the mark of an amateur, yet some producers insist upon it. Naturally, if you live east of the Mississippi River in the United States, you might have registered your script with the Writers Guild of America, east, and would thus note Registered, WGAE. One thing is certain, however. A U.S. copyright has much more legal standing than either registration. Note the copyright on the page. For more information about your legal protection in any creative work, see the U.S. Copyright Office Web page at [http://www.loc.gov/copyright/](http://www.loc.gov/copyright/).

**MORE SCRIPT FORMATS**

**Production Drafts**
You've sold your script, and lo and behold, you're still the writer of the next phase! Time for Production drafts and revisions (a.k.a. Production Rewrite). All script formatting software available at The Writers Store are terrific at generating locked scripts (meaning the pages are finalized), A & B pages, numbered scenes and other specifics of the production draft.

One of the ways production drafts differ from spec scripts is NUMBERED SCENES. Your script-formatting program can do this automatically. It numbers the SCENE HEADINGS with numbers to the left and right of the scene heading. The purpose of scene numbers is to
aid the work of the Assistant Director and Producer in their efforts of breaking down the scenes for scheduling, and budgeting the script for production.

FADE IN:

1      EXT. KEY WEST MARINA - DAWN - ESTABLISHING

Sailboats, yachts, and cabin cruisers all bob up and down in the warm blue water.

2      EXT. BEACH - DAY

as hundreds of young, perfect bodies of college age kids enjoy spring break.

Top Continued And Bottom Continued
Script formatting software can easily insert Top CONTINUED and Bottom CONTINUED into your script, IF YOU WANT THAT DONE. It depends on who you are submitting to and at what stage the project is in.

Top and Bottom CONTINUEDs were common practice in the past, a stodgy convention indicating that a scene continued beyond the page the reader just finished reading. Typically in spec scripts this is no longer done, and your benefit of that change are the extra four lines of text you have just gained to write a better script.

REVISIONS

Locking Your Script Pages
Once the script is "published" and handed out to the department heads and talent in preparation for production, the pages must be LOCKED so that any changes made after this time are easily tracked.

If any changes are made to the script after circulation, only the REVISED PAGES will be printed and distributed. The REVISED PAGES must be easily incorporated into the script without displacing or rearranging the original pages.

All of our script writing software is designed to break revised pages according to the rules listed above, and they are capable of "locking the pages" before revisions are made. Once you lock a script, if you add more material to a page than will fit on that page, the program will generate what's called an "A" page and the subsequent writing will be a "B" page, i.e. Page 110A or Page 110B.

Locking Your Scenes
In a published script, scene numbers must also remain the same. In other words, if a scene in OMITTED, though the number is retired, it remains in the script with the word OMITTED next to it. Any new scene must have a letter next to the number to indicate that it was added after the original scenes were locked.
If you add a scene to the script, the program will automatically generate an "A" scene number. Revisions will be automatically generated by script formatting software programs and marked with an asterisk in the right margin.

1 OMMITED 1*

2 INT. MASTER SUITE - MORNING 2

Expensive designer sheets and comforter covers the nude, shapely body of drop dead gorgeous JULIE COOPER, 25. Sunlight filters through portholes over the muscled, tan body of FRANKIE JONES, 38. He pulls the comforter down and begins kissing Julie's naked body.

FRANKIE
Hey, Baby, rise and shine. You've got to get up and outta here.

JULIE
(sleepily)
What? What time is it?

2A INT. BATHROOM - DAY 2A*

The added INT. BATHROOM scene would show us what Julie is doing, while in the previously mentioned scene we only heard her O.S. as the camera remained on Frankie and the original room.

Header
Another element of the production draft is the HEADER. A header occupies the same line as the page number, which is on the right and .5" from the top. Header information is printed on every script page. Information contained in the header includes the date of the revision and the color of the page. The header of the production draft of a script might look like this:

REVISED April 30, 2001 BLUE 1.

REVISED April 30, 2001 BLUE will print at the top of every single revised page, unless you tell your scriptwriting program to omit this information on the first page. On the first page of a production draft, however, you should include your header, if you have one. The page number will, of course, change.

Don't worry about what color of paper to use for subsequent changes to the same scene. If you're still writing the revisions once the script is in production, they'll tell you what to use. This is determined by the production staff.

Do's and Don'ts
DO'S
1. Do proofread your script. Spelling is very important. Don't trust your spell-checking program, it may miss grammatical errors and won't have some terms in its built-in dictionary.
2. Do get someone else to proofread your script. A fresh pair of eyes will often catch something you continue to miss.
3. Do get the best photocopy you can. No one wants to read a dirty page.
4. Do use good quality brass brads to bind your script. Acco #5 brads are the best, because they are long enough to fit through the entire thickness of your script. Solid brass brads (as opposed to brass-plated brads) are preferable.
5. Do register your script with the Writers Guild of America but don't forget to copyright it as well. A WGA registration expires quickly, while a copyright is good for decades.
6. Do send a one-page (or less) cover letter with your script when you send it out. Make the letter short, concise and to the point. There are books and articles on the subject, but basically, they simply want to know what the script is about and where to reach you.
7. Do follow the rules unless you KNOW a darn good reason not to.

DON'TS
1. Don't create a fancy Title page with giant fonts, colored letters, etc. A Title page has title and screenwriter's name(s) in the middle, and your contact information (address, phone number) at the lower right hand.
2. Don't put a quotation on the title page. Most likely, no one but you will care.
3. Don't put a date on your script, or the draft version.
4. Don't put blank pages in the script to set things apart.
5. Don't put a second page with the quotation that tells the theme of your screenplay.
6. Don't do a page of character descriptions and back-story. That's a convention from the theater that is inapplicable in Hollywood. If your script doesn't tell that story, you're in trouble.
7. Don't include any illustrations, no matter how cute you think they are.
8. Don't put the script title on the first page of the script.
9. Don't use more than two brads, but use three-hole paper. Brads are used in top and bottom holes only.
10. Don't use colored paper or anything but 20 pound 3 hole punch paper.
11. Don't expect to have your script returned to you. Send it out, let it go. If a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) is specified, include one. Then relax; a lot of people will have sent scripts to the same company.

OTHER SCRIPT FORMATS
So far, we've mostly discussed submission or spec screenplays. The same elements used in a screenplay are used in several other script formats. Only measurements and format vary here and there.

MOW - Movies of the Week
DTV - Direct TV Movie
Hour Episodic TV Show

These formats are almost identical as the format of the spec screenplay. However, these scripts are broken into ACTS that are delineated within the body of the script. An act covers that part of the story that takes place between the commercials. Hence, an ACT BREAK is a commercial break.

When a MOW Act begins, note it this way:

ACT ONE

When an Act ends, note it this way:
MOW or DTV scripts usually have 7 acts. When a MOW ends, note it this way:

THE END

A MOW will also have a (roughly) three- to eight-minute "teaser" that begins the story, noted this way:

Teaser
A Teaser is not usually noted with END OF TEASER. Rather, the scene simply ends and a new page begins where Act One starts. A one-hour episodic script will also have a Teaser, albeit a shorter one than a MOW.

A MOW will also have a similar (but shorter) "Tag" scene at the end that caps off the story and keeps your audience riveted by the television until after the next set of commercials. This is usually not delineated as such.

A one-hour episodic program usually has 4 acts.

Page numbering is continuous for both forms.

Title Page Of TV Movies
In the TV movie formats, it is customary to place the title of the script, the show and its episode on the first page at the top.

Lettering can be either uppercase or mixed case.

Place the title(s) in quotation marks.

Center the text on the line.

Fade In: follows the act title.

The following is an example of a MOW title page:

"A Day In The Life"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. BABY NURSERY – MORNING

Also, the end of each act is signaled with the FADE OUT: notation as well as the end of act notation.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

-------------------------------FORCED PAGE BREAK-------------------------------
ACT TWO

FADE IN:

When using screenwriting software you should always place a forced page break between acts. In other words, each act starts at the top of a new page.

Do not number the scenes. That's the job of the production office.

A MOW may also have a CAST LIST and on a separate page a SET LIST, much like in theatre scripts, but these forms change with the years. It's best to simply acquire a sample of a recently-aired MOW to learn the current convention.

We hope this has been helpful and has assisted you in finding the way to get to the next step in your screenwriting adventures.

HOMEWORK
Below is the actual treatment for a registered screenplay. With your screenwriting software, your job is to format it using the formatting rules above.

“Eden's Fall”

We enter a corridor that is high and wide, carved into the center of a mountain. The atmosphere is warm, tranquil, and very pure.

The corridor begins to widen out, and we enter a beautiful courtyard where there are trees and a pool into which tumbles a waterfall.

The water in the cave pool shimmers as if alive – light and energy... and from the waterfall rises a gentle mist, through which rays of light dance, creating rainbows.

LAELIA, a beautiful Egyptian priestess, crosses the floor as though on sentinel, carrying a worried look as she passes to the edge of the pool.

We enter the library, a gigantic room resembling the reading room of an eighteenth century library. The endlessly long tables set out in the fashion of rays of light emanating from a golden sun.

We pass various tables, turning every so often to the towering shelves of books and manuscripts to our right, almost looking for someone.

We push in on the dot in the distance – quickly growing bigger – a stack of books surround a leaned-over figure who sits back in his chair, pen in hand.

GRAHAM MICHAELS, late 30’s, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, leans forward again as we come around behind him to see him writing the last notes in a notebook. He closes the enormous book, raising centuries old dust from its pages and cover, making him cough. He pushes it away from him, stands, stretches.
The air has a feeling of urgency. Graham feels it and rushes for the door.

Below in the cave, Laelia looks up to see Graham quickly descending the stairs. She motions to him, extending her hand. When he reaches her, seeing her worried expression, asks her, “what’s wrong?”

She takes his hand and silently leads him to the doors: “Eden has fallen,” she says, grimly.

As they approach, the doors slide open of themselves, displaying a green expanse of field, a surrounding regiment of trees, and the plastic towers of a city beyond. They step out onto the grass, slowly walking towards the forest.

As they come nearer, a piece of the beautiful scenery doesn’t co-operate. Six hundred and nineteen dead men swing from the limbs of the first row of trees. They are in uniforms bleached by suns and snows and their features are mostly of ragged teeth and yellow bone. Blasts of the cruel wind make them swing idly, indolently, as though in their timeless way they waltz and spin to an unheard dirge.

Graham stands there in stupefied amazement, looks from the flowering beds, well-groomed grass, and splendid walks back to the hanging dead.

Laelia reminds him that, over the years, he has developed certain sensitivities that are not necessarily recognized as senses. That he has passed through the quickening and possesses the knowledge forbidden by the various systems and states, and though he is a flesh and blood mortal, things happen.

Yes, things happen, more than a hundred ebony coffins lay in the little chapel of their far off base (Eden) – white-lighters who have come home forever.

Graham has no choice than to take on this mission.

Further.

Graham, guided by the sound of repair arcs and hammers, promptly brings himself to the sub-surface shops beside the field.

There’s ten or twelve mechanics doing mechanics work – but they are shackled one to the next by long, tangling strands of plastiron (plastic iron) which are electrically belled every few yards to warn of it’s breaking. And overseeing them is not the usual super-educated artesian-engineer, but a dough-faced guard of bovine attention to the surroundings.

Graham is about to back out when a GUARD instantly hails him. He advances toward Graham, turns, “Hey, Elias! Sound it!”

A gong strikes hysterically somewhere in the dark metallic depths of the place.

Graham tosses up whether to use his telekinetic powers to protect himself and bolt or just stand there and explain, but an instant later a barrel is digging a hole in his back held by
ELIAS, a gravel-faced demon/animal almost resembling something human. “He ain’t gotta chain,” Elias barks. “Must’ve just arrived.”

Graham attempts to explain, “If you’ll please—“

Elias plants his thick boots squarely in Graham’s path. “They’ll be here in a minute, bud.”

They arrive in less than that. An entire squad sled of them, complete with dirty uniforms, unshaven faces and yellow reptilian eyes. Elias grabs Graham’s shoulder, yanks him towards the sled.

A young corporal grabs Graham’s other arm. Elias shoves him in. Graham mounts the sled which promptly soars off toward the city, ten feet above the ground and travelling erratically.

In the glimpse he has of the blue-green pavements and yellow houses of the suburbs, Graham is aware of the neglect and misery. A number of the inhabitants are evidently of oriental origin, for the architecture has that atmosphere, but now the once-colorful pagodas look more like tombs, their walled gardens gone to ruin, their stunted trees straggling out from broken bonds.

The desolation is heightened by the bobbing gait of a few ancient inhabitants who dodge in fear below the sled. It shocks Graham to see that each is chained to a round ball.

The sled sweeps on toward the blue towers, but as it nears, the first illusion of palace gives way to a gray atmosphere of prison.

The government buildings are all enclosed in many walls, each complete in its defenses, each manned like some penitentiary – a prison within a prison. And the central portion, instead of being a courtyard and keep, is a metal-roofed dome, wholly bombproof. The sled has no business there. It bounces to a landing outside the guardhouse of the first walls.

Elias comes around to the side and Graham is yanked off, falling to his knees on the landing, grabs Graham’s collar and drags him into the building.

Graham is dragged into the office and thrust into the presence of a dissolute young man. Tunic collar unbuttoned to show a dirty neck, greasy hair awry; he sits with his heels amongst the glasses and bottles on his desk. He is one of the decayed school that thinks to be dashing, one must be drunk.


Graham has nothing but the golden soul-star medallion around his neck, a passport to the greatest kingdoms in the universe. Elias grabs his medallion.

“What’s that?”
“My identification. I’m a member of the Azinaki.”
“The what?”
“I’m a white-lighter. A healer... of sorts.”
The young man shifts in his seat, now bright and interested. He brings his feet off the desk, upsetting several glasses and bottles and snatches up the communicator.


He tells Elias to take him away. Elias shoves Graham forward towards and through a cell door to their right.

In the wake of the reeling officer, Graham is unceremoniously delivered through five separate ramparts, each gated, each guarded, until he comes at last to a stairway leading underground -- The officer having navigated this without falling -- to an underground chamber.

Graham is ushered – or rather shoved – into a chamber done in blue silk, a particular gloomy place which has for furniture, but one bed and a chair.

SIR RAMAN, a flabby, fat Mongolian of no definite features, gets out of bed, rolls himself up in a food-splattered dressing gown, sits soddenly in the chair and stares at Graham while tucking his fat into a seam-strained uniform.

“You really a doc, Mac?” Sir Raman inquires.
“I am.” Graham says, with authority. “If you have someone to be treated, I’ll be happy to oblige you. Came here--“
“Clam it, Mac. We’ll go right up to Her Majesty.”

He’s taken to the palace throne room accompanied by about twenty guards, and thrust by Elias into a chamber that’s more like a powder magazine than a throne room.

It’s huge, and at one time, majestic. But all the murals and mirrors have been removed, and in their place are sheets of steel. No sunlight enters here and the pale blue gleam of lamps thicken the gloom. The dais is thickly curtained, and in the curtains are set the kind of glass that emits light and therefore sight only one way.

Someone or something sits behind on a throne. Sir Raman salutes and bows. Telling the shadowy figure that he has bought a doctor.

From behind the curtain, the female voice is rasping, and in no good mood. After a brief discourse, Graham is ushered out.

Elias urges Graham ahead of him followed by the escort of twenty guards lead by Sir Raman. A door opens. Sir Raman, Elias, and Graham, held by two guards enter, crossing to a pair of ornate silver doors. Sir Raman comes forward and passes his hand over the red sensor.

A laser hum is heard as the elevator walls form around them, the sound slowly increasing to a deafening high-pitched squeal.

Seconds later the sound abruptly stops, changing to the original laser hum as the walls retract to nothing, leaving them in almost total darkness.
Sir Raman leads them to a chamber, barred, sealed and guarded in three separate depths, but opening at last into a mean, damp cubicle stinking of unwashed flesh and rotting straw.

Graham is thrust into the darkness with a shove sending him against a stone wall, stunning him. The barriers CLANG grimly behind him, leaving him ruefully rubbing his head in the fetid gloom. He raises his hand, emitting a spreading ball of light that raises above him into the mote-filled chamber.

The ball lights a young woman dressed in ragged finery, pale and soiled from long imprisonment, clinging to the far wall fending off the glare from the eyes of a small child in her arms. Chin up and nostrils flaring, she glares back at the light.

Turning, he sees a man laying in the dirty straw, face hidden by his arm, his fine frilled shirt ripped, his scarlet sash blackened with grime, and his trousers and small boots white-dusted with straw. Graham steps towards him. The young woman grabs his cloak. “You shan’t touch him!”

Gently, he removes her hand from his cloak.

Graham lets her know he is a healer and the queen has allowed him to treat them.

Half-doubting, she lets him come nearer.

The bright, hectic spots in the man’s cheeks, rattle in his lungs, the odor of him and the wasted condition of his hands cry tuberculosis – and in it’s last stages.

Graham can’t believe they allowed a child in here with this dangerous illness. He asks how long they’ve been there.

She lowers her hand, raises her eyes, proud of her endurance to the light.

“Two and a half years”, she says, and introduces herself as Ayilt, and the man, her husband, Rie, uncrowned king of Eden, and the woman upstairs is the wife of Conroe...dead nearly three years, now.”

Ayilt explains that they know little of the world beyond. They came from angel stock and the mainstay of their population was terrestrial oriental. To them, Eden is known as Shambhala.

She tells him of the last of the great revelations more than two thousand years ago after King Conroe’s ancestors stabilized the government.

Conroe himself, ruled justly and wisely and was loved by everyone. He took a royal princess of the Keori line to wed, forgetting she had been born in a prison settlement she had been removed from at the age of four and grew into a brilliant, beautiful woman.

They reigned well and wisely until there came a day when new ‘angels’ came. No one knew from when or where or why, but they were not of their system. They are all dead now, but it was said their leader was terrestrial. Unsuspected, they raised revolt amongst the Orientals and then struck the blow themselves.
During a pageant given in honor of and to celebrate Rie and Ayilt’s marriage, the rebels threw a bomb into the royal calash (carriage).

Palace guards were prompt but not quick enough to prevent the bomb. King Conroe was killed outright.

His wife Pau-ma is seriously injured about the face and blinded in one eye. She has them hanged, six hundred and more of them. She butchers the royal servants and casts Ayilt and Rie into the dungeon.

She tries and tortures to death more than a million people on the six continents and then the stomachs of all decent folk turn and they try to smash her.

Graham takes a small metal plate beside Rie, rubs the dry and stale remnants off with a handful of straw, turning it to brush off the dirt from the underside, placing it on Rie’s chest. By moving it around, he can see the lungs in their entirety. There’s little left of Rie, he should’ve died days ago.

He takes a moldy remnant of bread, the herb Dragons Blood growing between the floor stones and crushes it on the plate, spits in it and mixes it with his finger. Placing his hand over the potion, a blue light emanates from his palm, turning pink, then red, then orange, and then to white. He takes a finger full and trusts it between Rie’s lips.

He then turns his attention to Ayilt.

He’s amazed, when passing the plate over her chest to find her in perfect health. Her heart is strong, her lungs perfect. The only thing she suffers is malnutrition and this on a small scale.

The child is somewhat like the mother, but there’s a spot on her lungs. It cries when Graham makes it take the potion and Ayilt looks dangerous as the child protests.

He tells her to hold her nose, then takes an object from his pocket the size of his thumb, exploding it against the floor. A dense white cloud, luminescent with ultraviolet light springs up, filling the chamber.

The guard outside protests, opens up, rushes in, and drags Graham out, thrusting blaster muzzles into his ribs.

The door clangs shut and then the other two barriers shut. Graham is hastened up the long passageway and thrust into the throne room.

The curtains move slightly. Now that he has some idea of what is behind them, a chill comes over him. Sir Raman steps forward to tell the queen, Pau-ma, that the treatment was performed. She asks if they’ll recover.

“No thanks to you”, he says.

Graham has an idea – to play on her fears – this works better than expected, causing the guards to suddenly bolt.
A scream from behind the curtains then terrified anger as she vainly attempts to order them back. Graham crosses slowly to the curtains, apologizing for the display. There’s a sigh behind the curtains. Graham flings them open.

Had he not known the things she had done, pity would have moved him now. For the sight he saw was horrible. The bomb three years ago had left little flesh and had blackened that.

He places his hand on her shoulder and she instantly stands unconscious before him.

She must’ve spent all her time behind the curtain for there was a bed, her few clothes and a small dresser. And on the dresser, where the mirror should’ve been, was a life-sized painting of her as she had been in her youth. Indeed, she had been a beautiful woman.

The work doesn’t take long as Sir Raman is guarding the door and growling from time to time, admitting no-one.

Graham rips the finery from her, baring her back. His all-purpose knife – his hands – are more than a sculptor’s whole rack of tools. He looks up from time to time at the life-sized painting and then back to his task. With every thrust of his hands, and before he’s finished with the back, it has already begun to heal. Her back shimmers, the very life cells hurling into an orgy of production.

He turns her round to work on her face. The work is long for the likeness must be good and the scar tissue is stubborn. The cartilage has to be formed just right. And it takes a while for the follicles of the eyelashes to set and it requires much care to restore activity to the eye nerves. But it’s a masterful job. Graham takes a step back and tells himself so.

He positions the chair behind her, trusts her into it. Coming round the front, he eyes her scars which cease to be pink and then turn bone white. Finally they sink out of sight and something like circulation begins to redden the cheeks.

It’s time now to do other things. Sir Raman barks his compliance and leaves to order the workmen up and soon a stream of these, hampered by their chains until Graham has them struck off, begin to restore the mirrors and painting to the walls.

Other furniture appear, a little frayed from years of storage, but nevertheless very brightening.

The lighting is altered. New clothes are issued.

Any time any one comes in to demand authority for orders such as the removal of the hanging dead, Graham has only to shove a hand inside the curtains and a signature came out.

Soon he is able to bring up the rightful king, Rie, and Ayilt and the princess, their child. And as they came, blinking and dirty to be seized and rushed away to be washed and robed.

The news spreads. More and more people come until Graham sees the doors bulging. The corridors and courtyards full.
Rie and Ayilt stand before him dressed, shaven, healthy, Rie bearing little resemblance to the dying man in the dungeon a few hours before.

Graham faces them squarely. “You are going to take that throne in about five minutes and you are never to mention a word of the last three years to your mother, Rie. I have to have your word on that. You are going to retire her to a villa and keep her in luxury. Do I have your word?”

They look at him numbly, but there is life and hope in them once more. They agree.

Graham has to restrain Ayilt from kneeling to him.

Brusquely, he places the two on the old restored thrones.

He leads Pau-ma out from the curtains - which are taken down and destroyed – still entranced but looking as exquisite and as youthful as her portrait.

Pau-ma stands looking obediently at Graham until, placing his finger gently on her forehead, the spell is broken and she wakes from her trance.

Rie and Ayilt on their thrones, nod graciously to their queen mother at her greeting, but before they can speak more than a few words, the great doors burst inwards and the place floods with people, commoners, burghers, soldiers coming to know where they stand, and their mouths are full of fled garrisons and a populace burst from the bonds of slavery.

They don’t notice Graham as he glances at the queen. She too has been thrust back, but she preens herself before a mirror, coquettishly turning her head this way and that to admire herself.

Shortly afterwards, outside, Graham walks through the deserted city streets, passing two dead guards and shackles strewn about, broken.

The light seems brighter as he walks back to the field.

Then it is clear why. A dark star had been quarter covering the bright one on his arrival and is now moving clear. The trees around the field are now clear of any burden but green leaves and the light on the hill gleams golden in the pleasant expanse.

Moments later, on the hilltop, the doors slide open of themselves, displaying Laelia waiting at the entrance of the cave.