



Resumé and anticipation

This is the 18th editorial of *ScriptWriter* and the end of our 3rd year. When the magazine started we had no idea if we would survive one year. So special thanks to all those who have remained as loyal subscribers and a warm welcome to our new subscribers. To any lapsed subscribers who happen to be reading this, all I can say is please come back. We are missing you! And to the UK Film Council who have given us support from their Publication Fund, a big thank you too.

So what has changed in three years? Is there a greater sense of optimism amongst writers in the film and television industry? Are writers receiving a fairer share than they were? Although there is still no new Writers' Guild/PACT agreement, I hear serious efforts are being made by the Guild, so perhaps before our fourth birthday we shall be able to welcome an improved agreement to replace that of 1992.

What I hear from producers is that we don't need more scripts; we need better scripts. This would suggest that they are still not finding them. Furthermore, we clearly need more consistent - if not better - treatment from the Treasury since the lifeline of tax breaks seems at times to be the only thing getting British films into production (apart from the UK Film Council's Funds).

But even at the UKFC, larger slates of development funding will be given to fewer, larger companies, and this means that more of the available development money is in the hands of a smaller number of decision makers. This might not be good news for many writers because for those with a name and plenty of credits it will become easier, but for other writers it might become even more difficult.

In this issue Linda Seger and Chris Vogler, two of the sanest and most perceptive and 'European' of the American script experts, both call for 'more innovation in the art of storytelling' (see pages 6 and 17). Chris was in the UK recently so *ScriptWriter* was able to talk to him about the future for scriptwriters, and *ScriptWriter* - together with the WGGB - is bringing Linda to London in October for her first workshop in the UK in five years. Don't miss it!

How do we square greater originality with the inevitable homogenising of the choices we are likely to see when fewer people control the selection of material? I am not sure. The New Cinema Fund at the UKFC may become the most important source of originality in films so should it perhaps have more Film Council money?

When BBC Drama was effectively run by more than a dozen producers, there was a very diverse range of drama on the channel. In the ratings-conscious era that followed, decision-making at the BBC was concentrated into fewer hands and there was less experimentation even if the ratings did at times improve.

This magazine believes that in the long run it is probably more important to develop new, talented, untested and risk-taking original voices than it is to build the industry with mainstream commercial and conservative films. Does Britain need more *Harry Potters* and *Thunderbirds* or more *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Trainspotting* (see issue 9)?

I guess we need both but if we can't have both, I would like to see more risk-taking and more originality, coupled with substantially more investment in the development of those ideas.

Instead of providing development money to the top production companies because they are likely to produce greater profits in the short

term, should we not be playing a longer game?

Instead of offering development support to individual writers and by paying for a single script editor to work with the writer - an excellent but limited innovation - should we not be establishing small teams of specialists to work with writers on the development of selected projects, the teams to include distributors and agents?

No one voice or point of view on a writer's work can always be right. As an agent I see this every day. We do considerable editing 'in house', then scripts go out and further input is received, sometimes from more than one person, and almost always much of it is contradictory. *Non disputandis de gustibus*.

Mediating between different points of view is not the same skill as script editing but it is an essential one and relatively few producers (the employers of the script editors) are good enough writers or script editors themselves to be able to determine the best route to take.

One of my novelist clients relished having five editors (much to the disbelief of an interviewer). He claimed that sifting through the conflicting views was well worth the effort because invariably each would offer a gem of advice none of the others did. It should also be remembered that no two writers are the same.

Writers make an interesting 'psychological group' to study: they are the only people in the film industry (actors might disagree) who put their souls and most intimate thoughts and feelings out there; there are far too many writers to enable the majority to earn what might be called 'a living' so they are frequently 'driven'; they are undoubtedly at the bottom of the creative food-chain in the film industry and only perhaps a little higher in television drama and sitcom.

They are not often aggressive and the solitary, freelance and financially insecure nature of what they do makes it less likely that they will have the influence or control over the destinies of their works which producers or directors have. This is not to say that writers should have the right of veto or that they should even have all the moral rights which they have been accorded by EU law. In Britain some of these rights are regularly flouted.

But with the Directors' Guilds signing the Dublin Declaration which declares that the director is the primary creator of the audiovisual work, the concentration of development money into fewer hands and the emergence of a few dominant production companies, writers need to be prepared to embrace a somewhat different world from that of even three years ago.

Understanding budgets and the increasing opportunities that will be afforded by the digital revolution, reinforcing a stronger Writers' Guild to enable it to negotiate better deals and - perhaps most importantly - creating powerful, dramatic and original stories that will work across age ranges and cultural divides, will all make the next three years better for writers and for those who work in collaboration with them.

ScriptWriter magazine will attempt to play its part in developing this better future. We will start our fourth year by looking at the treatment of writers by others in the industry, for example, the frequency of reviewers' references to films as 'the director's film' and the insidious use of the director's possessory credit.

Until then I would say to all scriptwriters and to all those involved in the production of scripts, *bon courage*: be ambitious, even outrageous and create memorable stories in well-written scripts.

Julian Friedmann