



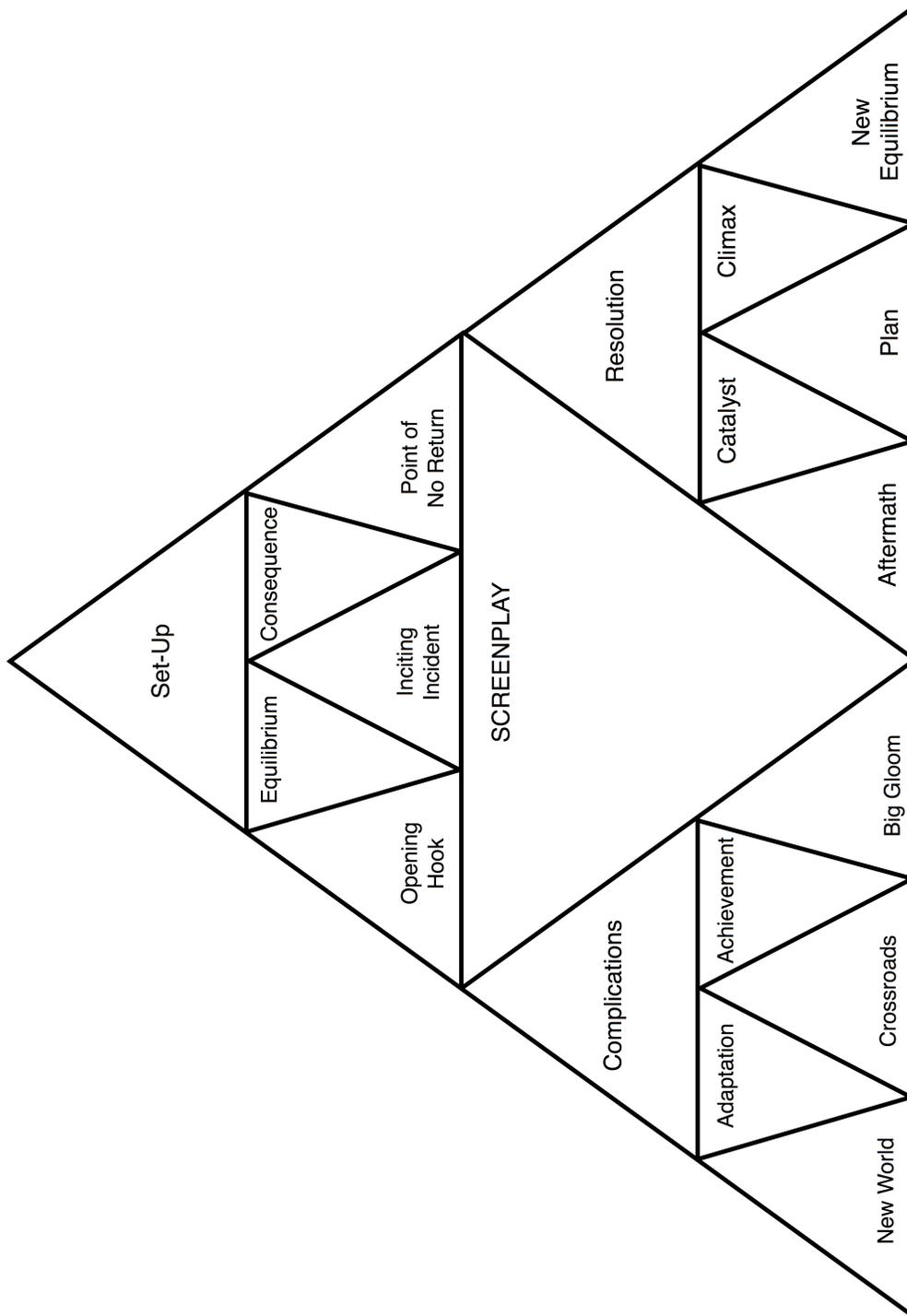
“The Art of Telling Lies Skillfully”  
by  
Brian Price  
(handout)

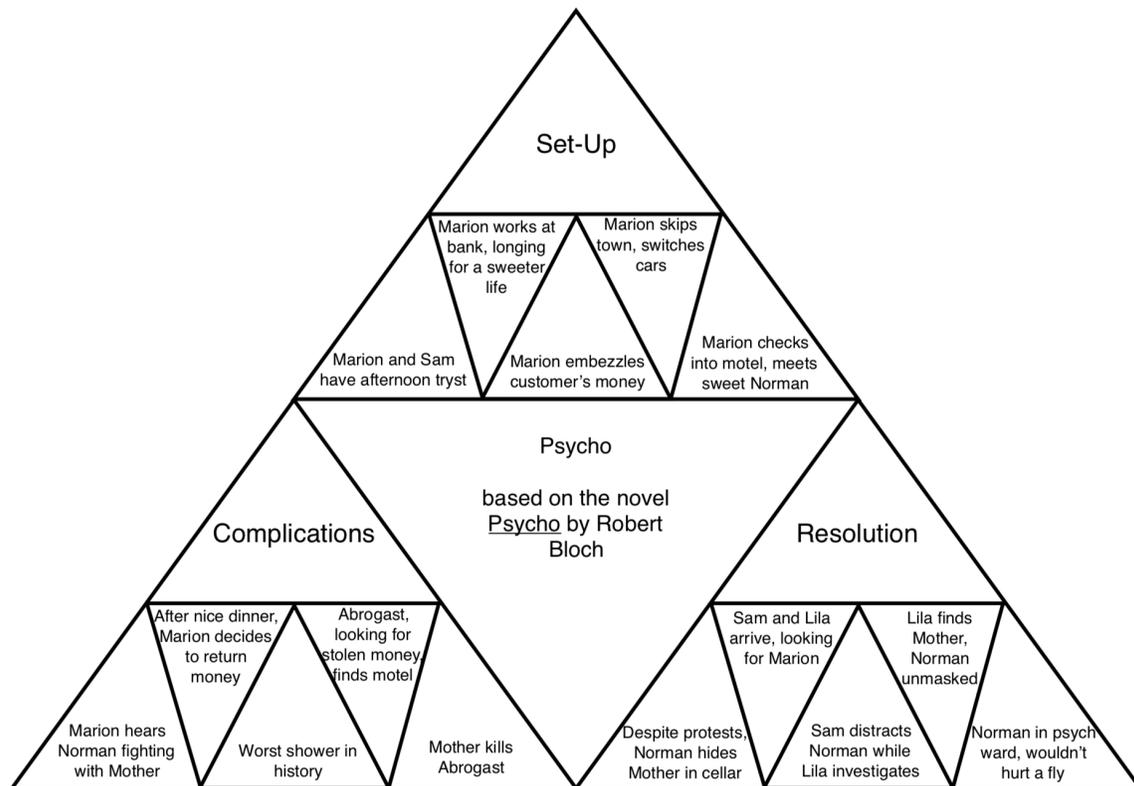
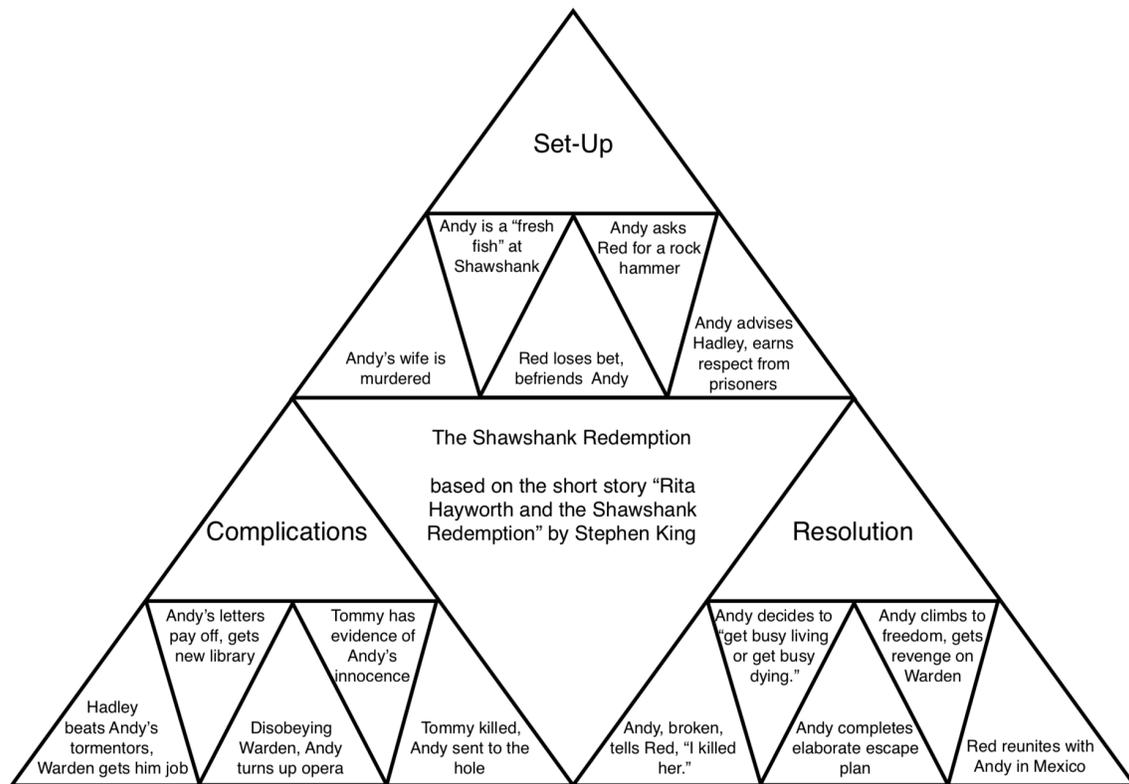
# Aristotle's Guiding Precepts

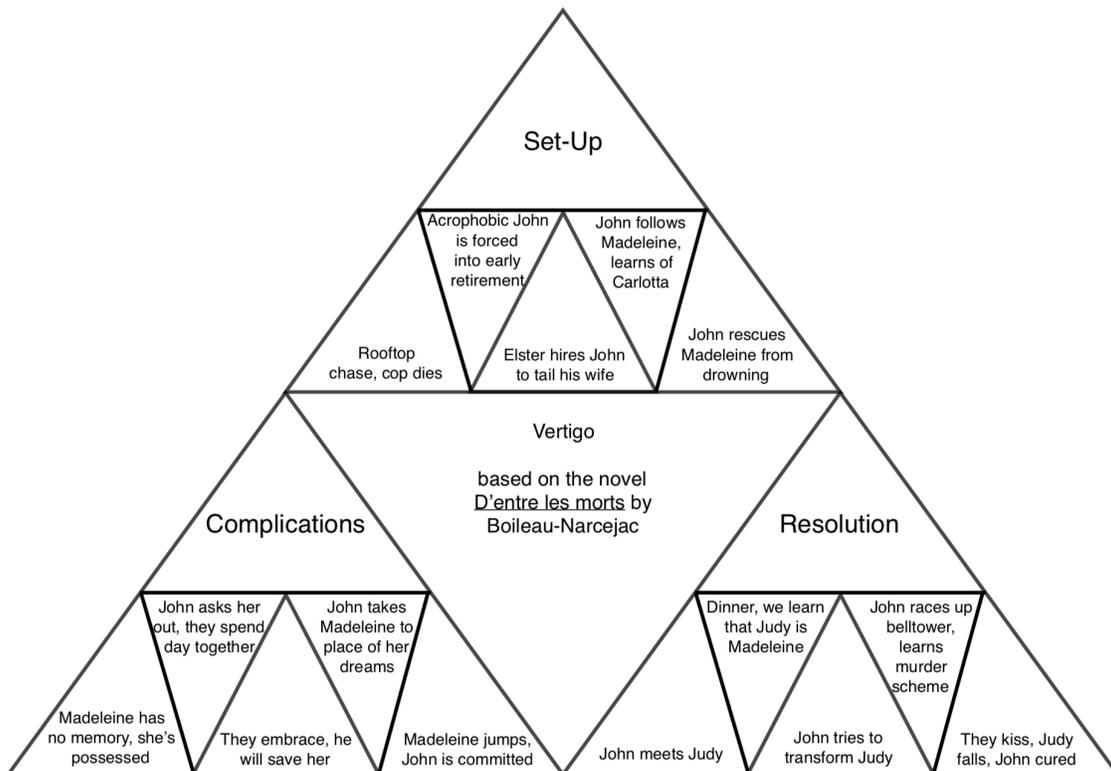
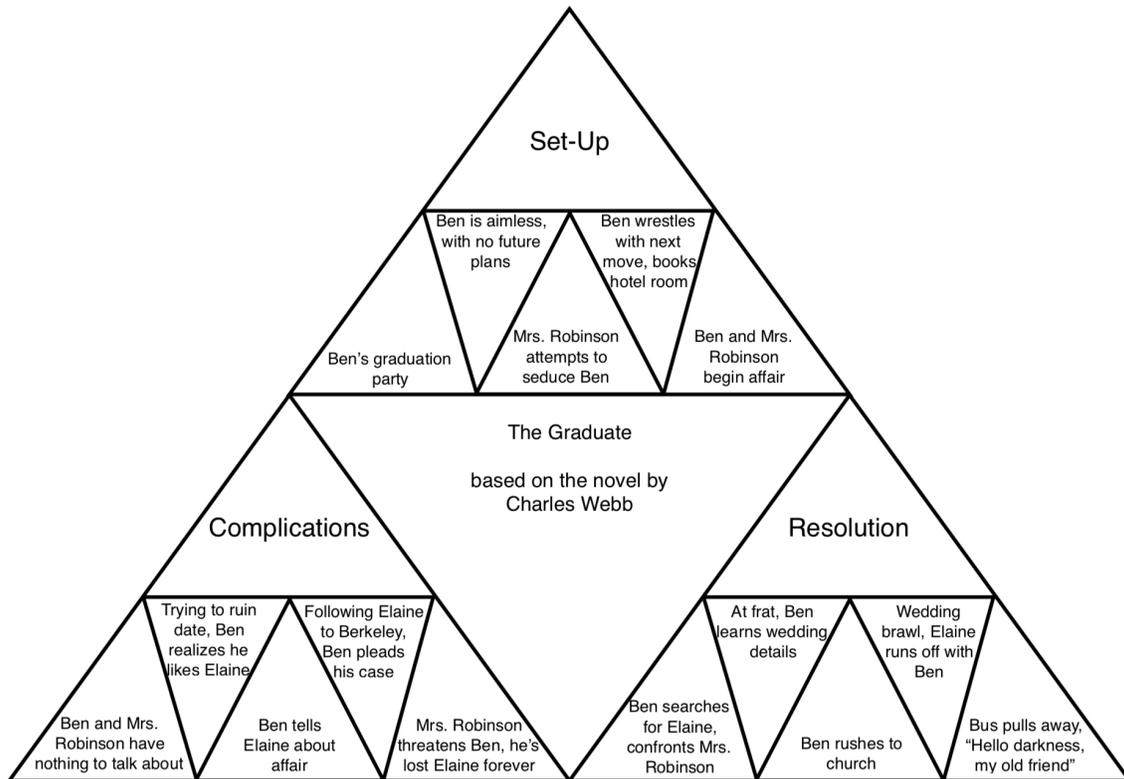
1. TO TELL A GOOD STORY EFFECTIVELY, WE MUST a) SHOW OUR AUDIENCE SOMETHING UNIVERSAL OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR WORLD REFLECTED BACK TO THEM, AND b) THROUGH THAT IDENTIFICATION, GIVE THEM AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE.
2. THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF A SCREENPLAY IS THE STORY.
3. IN A GOOD STORY, TRUTH IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FACTS.
4. A GOOD STORY IS INFUSED FROM START TO FINISH WITH CONFLICT.
5. A GOOD STORY HAS CLOSURE, WITH A CLEAR BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END.
6. A GOOD STORY HAS A UNITY OF ACTION, ONE DEFINED BY A HERO'S OBJECTIVE.
7. IN A WELL CONSTRUCTED PLOT, EVERY EVENT IS CAUSED OR AFFECTED BY WHAT PRECEDES IT AND CAUSES OR AFFECTS WHAT FOLLOWS, ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF NECESSITY AND PROBABILITY.
8. A SOUND PLOT IS BUILT UPON MOTIVATED MOMENTS OF REVERSAL AND RECOGNITION.
9. THROUGH PURSUING AN OBJECTIVE, THE HERO IN A SOUND PLOT UNDERGOES A TRANSFORMATION.
10. IN THE BEST PLOTS, HEROES EITHER OVERCOME THEIR FATAL FLAW OR THEIR FATAL FLAW OVERCOMES THEM.
11. THE PROPER WAY TO CONSTRUCT A PLOT IS TO GO FROM THE GENERAL TO THE SPECIFIC, STARTING FROM THE BIGGEST MOMENTS OF REVERSAL AND RECOGNITION AND THEN FILLING IN THE EVENTS THAT CONNECT THEM.
12. CHARACTER IS ALWAYS IN SERVICE OF STORY, SO ALL CHOICES MADE ABOUT CHARACTER MUST BE MADE TO FACILITATE IT.
13. WHILE SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE STORY, A CHARACTER AND THEIR ACTIONS MUST ALWAYS REMAIN BELIEVABLE.
14. A CHARACTER IS BELIEVABLE AND SERVES THE STORY WHEN THEIR ACTIONS ARE ALWAYS MOTIVATED BY AN IMMEDIATE GOAL.
15. A SOUND PLOT IS MADE UP OF CAUSALLY CONNECTED EVENTS THAT CHANGE THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE STORY AND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHARACTERS.
16. A SCREENPLAY SHOULD BE EQUALLY AFFECTING TO READ AS TO WATCH ON SCREEN.
17. WHEN WRITING DESCRIPTION, BE FOCUSED, PRECISE, AND CLEAR, BUT NEVER BORING.
18. IN GOOD DIALOGUE, CHARACTERS SPEAK SOLELY TO ACHIEVE THEIR IMMEDIATE SCENE GOAL, AND THAT SELDOM REQUIRES THEM TO STATE WHAT THEY THINK, MEAN, OR FEEL.
19. SCREENPLAYS ARE NOT WRITTEN, THEY ARE REWRITTEN.
20. A GOOD STORY REVEALS A UNIVERSAL TRUTH, ONE EXPLORED THROUGH THE WORDS AND ACTIONS OF THE CHARACTERS AND DETERMINED BY THE OUTCOME OF THE HERO'S PURSUIT.
21. TO BE A SUCCESSFUL SCREENWRITER, YOU MUST HAVE TALENT, A SCREW LOOSE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, SOMETHING TO SAY.

from **Classical Storytelling and Contemporary Screenwriting**  
by **Brian Price**

“Stepping Stones of Screenplay Structure”  
from Classical Storytelling and Contemporary Screenwriting  
by Brian Price, Focal Press, 2018.







Excerpt from Classical Storytelling and Contemporary Screenwriting  
by Brian Price

## CHAPTER TEN

### LOGLINES: Putting It All Together (Part 1)

*"This is the essence of the story; the rest is episode."  
(Poetics, Part XVII)*

So what have we learned so far, from Aristotle, with regards to what makes an effective story idea, one that will help lead us to a solid screenplay?

We've learned that a solid idea must strike a balance between personal truth and imagination, must be based upon an action that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Must be rife with conflict. And must have at its heart, a unity of action, a dramatic question that is based upon a hero's dramatizable objective, one posed at the beginning and resolved at the end.

Distilling all of these vital qualities down to their essence, in a way that befits our modern screenwriting purposes, is what we call a LOGLINE.

And a LOGLINE is where every good screenplay starts.

To be clear, a logline is not a tag for a poster. It's not about a thematic or abstract idea. It's not a marketing tool, as in "In space, no one can hear you scream." That was a great TAGLINE for *Alien* that may have gotten us excited about buying a ticket, but it doesn't tell us anything about the story.

Rather, since story is what matters most, and story is based on an imitation of an action, we must think of a logline as a way to focus a story down to its barest essentials, down to that singular action that defines the complete, whole, unified story.

The crew of the spaceship *Nostromo* accidentally brings on board a deadly alien life form that begins to pick off the crew one by one, until only one, science officer Ripley remains, and the fate of humanity rests on who makes it back to earth first.

What is the dramatic question here? Will the humans defeat the alien in time? What is the beginning, middle and end? An alien comes aboard. A bunch of people die. The alien is defeated (or isn't. No spoilers.) Is there conflict? Hell yes. A unity of action? Yep. And does it deal with universal truths though fiction? I'll say, not because we've all been stranded in space with an acid-bleeding monster, but because we all know what it is to be afraid, to be helpless, to find inner reserves of strength and determination we didn't know existed.

So, it makes a good idea for a story. And a great movie by the way.

Try these other logline/ideas on for size. While you do, think about how they demonstrate the critical elements of universality, conflict, wholeness, and unity.

While attempting to thwart a tragic prophecy, the King of Thebes tries to discover who's responsible for the plague upon his land, unaware he's brought it on himself.

After being visited by the ghost of his dead father, the Prince of Denmark sets out to get revenge on his murderous uncle, now the king, but is beset by doubt and hesitancy.

Michael Dorsey, an unemployed actor with a reputation for being difficult, disguises himself as a woman, Dorothy Michaels, in order to land a role on a soap opera, but complications arise when he falls for his leading lady and her father falls for him.

Allen Bauer falls in love with the woman of his dreams, unaware that she is in actuality, a mermaid.

Private Eye Jack Gittes is tasked with a simple case of adultery, but stumbles onto a vast criminal conspiracy to control the Los Angeles' water supply.

A young boy, Elliot, discovers a stranded alien in his backyard, and enlists the help of his friends and family to help the creature return home before government forces capture him.

Rick Blaine, an apolitical nightclub owner in Morocco, has his world turned upside down when his lost love, Ilsa, returns and asks him to help her husband escape the Nazis.

Marion Crane, having just embezzled a small fortune from her employer, hides out at the Bates Motel, unaware that it's proprietor is a psychopathic serial killer.

Father Karras, a priest who has lost his faith, is tasked with determining if a 12 year old girl is actually possessed by the devil.

Dorothy, forever wishing for adventure "somewhere over the rainbow," rides a twister all the way to the magical land of Oz, where her only hope of returning home to Kansas is to steal a Wicked Witch's broomstick with the help of some unlikely allies.

Did you notice any patterns here?

First, these loglines are not dissimilar from what you might find in your cable guide, simple descriptions of the STORY IDEA.

They include a protagonist, a dramatic premise, and any other relevant dramatic circumstances that are essential to understanding the basic story.

And they all answer, implicitly or explicitly, the following three questions:

WHOSE STORY IS IT?

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

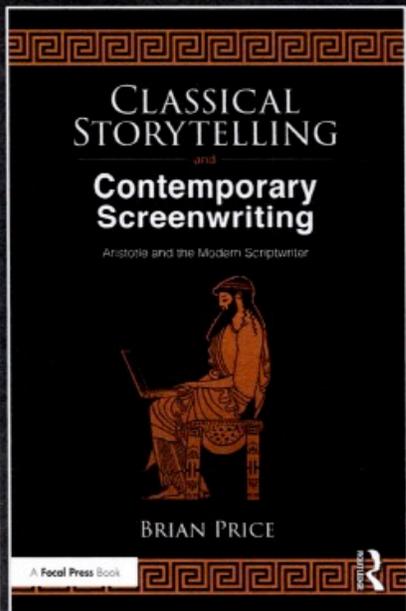
WHAT IS STANDING IN THEIR WAY?

The answers to these essential questions provide the premise of any good movie since they

describe the elements necessary for a story that's based upon an imitation of an action, that has a unity arising from a singular objective, that is told through conflict, and that contains a clear beginning, middle, and end.

And as we can see, these answers can be encapsulated into one or two sentences.

That is a logline. And crafting one is the first step in developing a screenplay.



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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Brian Price** is an award-winning screenwriter who has worked with major studios, television networks, and independent film producers from around the world. As an instructor, he has taught screenwriting at Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, and the Brooks Institute, among others, and is a proud member of the prestigious UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television screenwriting faculty.

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