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Hard Feelings, An Original Screenplay

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HARD FEELINGS, AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

Barbara Sachs Kremer, BS

An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Lindenwood College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science

1995

ABSTRACT

The central objective of this creative project was to develop an original screenplay and enhance my writing skills in the process. The project consists of five chapters, the first being an introduction that provides an overview of the project.

Chapter II chronicles the progression of a screenwriter's training through a review of the books read that contributed to this project: four about writing in general, ten concerning fiction writing, fifteen on screenwriting in particular, two focusing on psychology, six about the movie business and film history, and one book about media aesthetics. Chapter III provides a detailed view of the computer program for screenwriting and the two screenwriting method books (Viki King's and Lew Hunter's) that were used during the development of the screenplay.

Chapter IV is the 120-page screenplay. It features a highly technological office setting that includes robotics and a computerized virtual reality environment. The action forces identity issues to the fore among the key characters. The story is based on paralleling the action with fantasy themes from classics such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Scheherazade*, and toys with people's abilities to trust their perceptions. The main character develops from secure to unsure and must regain her solid footing in order to get a high-paying job at this technological company. She is pitted against an opposite character, also in line for the same job, who has no problems with the absurdities of the situation because he has lower standards and expectations. The theme thus explores the issues of excellence vs. mediocrity, and strength of character vs. trickery.

Chapter V presents an analytical overview of how the screenplay grew from an idea to a story and explores ideas for additionally developing the screenplay. It also discusses how the characters were originally conceived and how they changed during the writing process.

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Professor Michael Castro, PhD, Chairperson and Advisor

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No one reaches a goal alone. The help, advice and guidance of many others along the way may be what makes the journey so exciting, so fulfilling and, in the end, so rewarding. Yet each of us finds a unique path. As a writer, I began as a student, then worked as a print journalist applying what I had learned while learning even more. Before I ever wrote a word of fiction, I learned to analyze scripts in Hollywood, worked as a fiction analyst and found myself drawn into teaching writing. And as a writer, manuscript analyst and teacher of writing, I discovered what to me was a surprising realization: I will always be learning, and my work with others, especially my teaching many hopefuls how to write, has made me a better writer.

My thanks extend all the way back to my maternal grandmother for allowing her preschool granddaughter to cover with an unintelligible but sincere longhand all the empty white margin spaces and flyleaves of her many books stored in a child-sized closet. Even I did not realize at the time that what I wanted to be in life was a writer, but interrupted, I spent many hours in that closet making my careful version of script with my stubby pencil and admiring the results of my labor.

As the years went by, I forgot about that pastime. But on a recent visit to my grandmother's house, I happened to pull a book off one of her shelves. Inside were my "fake" words covering every possible blank space, and I remembered those little waves of pencil markings were my own attempts at immortality, because that is how I have come to see writing.

Between then and now a few other significant helpers have sometimes deliberately but often unintentionally been there when I did not even know I needed their help. My English exposition professor at Southwest Missouri State University is one person I owe great thanks. I have forgotten her name but not the impact she had on me and on my writing. Despite my protests and anger at her criticism, she gently forced me to transform my still unintelligible scribbles into clear, directed prose.

I also want to thank my two publishers. My initial one, Dane Vernon, gave me my first job as a feature writer and allowed me to grow as a journalist. My second publisher, Ed Baldwin, trusted my editing and revising judgment in our collaboration to produce our five how-to books now in stores across the country.

While I was in Hollywood, Kit Stoltz from Paramount Pictures cemented my interest in fiction by validating my talent and my chances for success. His skillful training in script analysis made me understand fiction and its structure from an internal viewpoint that has served me both as a writer and teacher of writing.

I also owe thanks to teacher/writer Jerry Phillips who said to me, "You should teach," some eight years ago and got me my first job teaching fiction writing through the St. Louis Community College continuing education program at Forest Park. And a big thank you goes to my many students who trusted me to read and evaluate their manuscripts, who took my suggestions and who have, in many cases, become my friends and successful published writers.

And finally, I would like to thank the faculties of the three most influential of the five colleges and universities I have attended: the English and Communications professors at Southwest Missouri State University, the Creative Arts faculty at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and the LCIE faculty at Lindenwood College—all of them are part of this project. Not only did they teach me what I needed to know in order to get this far, but they gave me the confidence and acceptance so necessary for me to continue along my path.

By just being who we are and doing what we do, each of us affects everyone else around us. This project, then, like everything I write, is the culmination of everything I have done and everyone I have encountered in my life. Thanks to you all.

Barbara Sachs Kremer

September 30, 1995

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	1-3
II.	Review of Literature	4-17
III.	Selective Review of Literature	18-32
IV.	Results: <u>Hard Feelings</u>	33-153
V.	Discussion	154-160
	Works Cited	161-162
	Vita Auctoris	163

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

If there is one thing I have learned during my years as a writer and teacher of writing it is that almost everyone either believes he or she can write well or is already trying to write in hopes of being published. Additionally, I have often heard it said that half the people living in California are writing screenplays. Writing looks easy. Given that humans are taught basic speaking and writing skills from childhood and that computers today have spellcheck, the belief exists that anyone can write who so chooses, with no concern whatsoever that there might be conventions that should be followed.

I used to find this simplistic view annoying. I wondered how it could prevail with there being hundreds of books available about how to write fiction in general and screenplays in particular, how and where to market written works, and how to professionally prepare manuscripts. Then I decided to use it to my advantage. I began to teach fiction and screenwriting courses.

As I taught, I discovered that not only did my knowledge about writing improve, but my own writing skill increased. My judgment sharpened. I also realized that what I hadn't liked about writing was its solitary nature. Writers generally work alone. As a result, in my first five years of teaching adults about fiction, I helped four sets of students form writing groups, and I enjoyed the contact, camaraderie and feedback in the groups and classes as much as my hundreds of students did.

At the end of that five-year period, however, I realized I wasn't writing as much as I wanted to, and I felt stagnant. I needed some creative stimulation and wanted the validity of a graduate degree. I had studied writing, film and electronic media while earning my bachelor's degree, and I wanted to expand on that knowledge while exploring my creative abilities.

My first graduate class gave me that opportunity. During advanced video production, the class was given the choice of writing either a 25-page research paper or script. I chose the script and produced the first act of the screenplay that now is part of this project. The idea had occurred to me only a few weeks before school started, and I had written it out in treatment form.

My goal then became to finish the screenplay, and to discuss the screenwriting process, as the culmination of my graduate program. As a professional writer, editor and teacher, I knew the truth behind a common misconception: Producing a creative work is no easier, and is sometimes more difficult, than producing a research-based project. Yet, if creative writing—writing fiction—is to be part of my career goals, a

creative project became necessary for me to get the full benefit of my graduate efforts. And the culmination of my work prior to graduate school as well as during it needed to be in the creative arena.

I chose the screenplay form because screenwriting was the first fiction medium I learned and remains my favorite. One-third of my undergraduate major coursework was in film studies, and in 1982 I attended a weekend intensive screenwriting seminar put on by Michael Hauge at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

At the time, I did not know Hauge had authored a book about screenwriting, nor had I read any books outside the literary realm about writing fiction. I did not know about structure, form and manuscript mechanics, and I was a working professional writer. When Hauge presented the seminar group with the screenplay for the film Body Heat, its format, its economy and its pure power seemed natural yet astounding to me.

So this was how a movie looked in its written form. Hauge proceeded to explain to us all the rules and the basic formula required for a successful screenplay. Today his words make me smile. My education has grown beyond Hauge's simplified presentation.

What I know is this: Screenwriting is an art, a craft and a commercial enterprise. It encompasses creativity, skill in writing and storytelling, and a solid understanding of the business of making movies. Yet despite the many successes and failures at the box office, no fixed formula exists for guaranteeing which screenplays will result in blockbuster hits and which ones will bomb.

Because moviemaking is such big business with enormous risks, however, those in the business continue in the attempt to establish a successful formula or method for writing the ideal screenplay. Nevertheless, the best any hopeful writer can do is study the craft and the business, get a feel for what seems to work and what doesn't, look at what's been done and what hasn't, and try to anticipate creatively where the audience's next wave of interest will flow. If it is true that art predicts life, the screenwriter is part artist, part entertainer and part seer.

My screenplay, like any creative work, is a metaphor. It represents my life, my education, life in general, humanity and many more elements than I could possibly name. It has its roots in a Creative Arts pilot program in which I participated in 1973 at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, and in every other undertaking that has been part of my life before and since then. It is also connected to the four months I spent in Hollywood working on a team of script analysts that suggested changes to the screenplays for Fat Man and Little Boy, Working Girl, Total Recall and The Two Jakes,

and seeing the results one and two years later on the big screen as all these films came out.

The Results chapter of this project contains Hard Feelings presented in basic screenplay format, just as it should be for submission to a Hollywood agent. It contains no camera directions, no scene numbering and no casting suggestions. The only violations of standard format are the type of paper used and the page numbering, both of which must conform to project requirements.

The screenwriting and format guidelines and more are explained in the Review of Literature chapter along with other information from the books I found valuable in learning about writing fiction and screenwriting. This chapter also covers some books I did not find so helpful.

The Discussion chapter contains information about the decisions I made in writing the screenplay, the progression it and I underwent, comments from those who have read the screenplay, and some changes I foresee in future drafts. My intent is to provide any reader with a complete screenplay to read, along with insights into what was involved in my learning and engaging in this fascinating process.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anyone wanting to write fiction, particularly screenplays, is starved for how-to information, desperate to know the secrets of producing that blockbuster hit that will bring him or her the instant fame and fortune publishing and movies are known to offer. The usual progression is for that person to pick up the latest how-to-write-a-novel/screenplay/short story tome, read it, begin writing, and run out of things to write about approximately one-third of the way into his or her project. Frustrated, he or she enrolls in a writing course.

This is the type person I see typically in the continuing education classes I have been teaching for the St. Louis Community College system. Some of these people have even completed college-level creative writing programs, such as Washington University's or University of Iowa's. Their former professors lauded their fiction, but it hasn't sold. They want to know why not.

Of course, they bring me their manuscripts to review, and I see the same errors I might have seen in a total beginner's: wandering plot, empty dialogue, incoherent structure, repetition, poor mechanics, ideas that start out one way but are developed along a completely different track by the end of the story. Then I begin.

From years of study and application, from constantly reading novels and short stories and their analyses, from viewing movies sometimes repeatedly, and from working as a professional writer, editor and film analyst, I know what my students need to know to make their stories work. I explain that I am not a successful published author, nor have I ever sold a screenplay. I just seem to have an ability to help people go from producing unworkable fiction to getting published.

I start with teaching them how to choose a workable premise, then move on to showing them what structure is and how it works. I go into great detail about character creation, development and usage. I explain the function of and rules for dialogue. I show the importance of theme, cause and effect, symbolism and irony. I discuss how plot works, and I give them some insider tricks and tidbits. I illustrate the popular formulae, proper formats and submission requirements, and the differences between literary and commercial fiction. And I strip, strip, strip their verbage into tight prose that tells a solid story from beginning to end.

At first my students' writing regresses. Aware of all the elements now, they juggle them awkwardly, the way a beginner attempts to steer a bicycle. I tell them is normal. With information input comes a reordering in the brain before synthesis occurs and fluidity results. The first noticeable change my students see is their rejection slips move

up the hierarchy, turning into letters that at least are gracious if not praising, that sometimes even say, "We can't use this story, but what else do you have?"

Eventually two questions are always put to me: How do I know so much, and how long did it take me to become so versant in this field? I refrain from telling my life story. Instead I focus on what is available in books, through education, by practice, from informed feedback, and through making the right contacts. Writing, overall, I stress, is a BUSINESS as well as art and craft. Knowing how to tell a good story on paper is only one important element; knowing the business factors, the trends, the very context of fiction, is equally important.

At the end of my course, although they are mentioned throughout, I provide a list of the books I have found to be most helpful and least repetitive. During my lecture on character, I noted that all writers must be in part psychologists, able to understand the give and take of human interaction, motivation and dysfunction in order to make fiction out of it believably.

The two books I recommend for this purpose are Marsha Sinetar's Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow and David Burns's Feeling Good. Sinetar's book is a must for anyone who wants to work successfully outside the mainstream, and this is where writers tread. Not only does it make the reader feel brave enough to try to pursue his or her dream avocation, but it clearly points out the usual insecurities, weaknesses, barricades and detractors. Thus it gives a full picture of why people often do NOT do what they want, a useful tool for writers looking for conflict and cause/effect dynamics.

Burns's book is similar in providing the negative side by showing the positive. A cognitive therapist, Burns illustrates how to break the habit of negative thinking by showing the progression it follows in specific dialogue examples with positive alternatives. His is a direct and easily understood approach that covers a wide range of situations and mental states, from self-esteem to suicide. It is a very useful book for a writer to increase his or her own mental health while getting a grasp on character flaw possibilities. His list of "mind-sets," for example, encapsulates the most common states of mind from which fiction is made: hopelessness, helplessness, being overwhelmed, jumping to conclusions, self-labeling, undervaluing the rewards, perfectionism, fear of failure, fear of success, fear of disapproval or criticism, coercion and resentment, how frustration tolerance, and guilt and self-blame (81-86).

The many books out about how to write fiction and screenplays fall into three categories. Some books consider what should be included in good fiction from an analytically aesthetic or historical perspective (Aristotle, Gardner, Uzzell). Others tout the author's personal how-I-do-it system (Whitney, Wolff, Goldman). A third

type of book presents the author's view as an industry insider of how the fiction-writing process works and often even attempts to establish "the formula" used by the majority of successful writers of that particular form (Bishop, Bronfeld, DiMaggio, Field, King).

All three types have their value for the person who wants to learn to write fiction, but a person could easily be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of books on the market today. How does a person know which books are good and which ones are not worth buying or reading? Worse yet, some of the best books are out of print or are of such older vintage the modern student might tend to discount them automatically. To be so dismissive is a major mistake. Many of the older books contain so much more in-depth information written in a readable, almost comfortable style, it would be wrong to think newer is better. They also quickly inform the uninitiated that much of what we know about writing, including screenwriting, has been known all along. The newer books more and more merely dilute the original information the older books generously offer.

I believe so many movies fail today because their writers and filmmakers are too shallow in their grasp of the medium. No one can pick up a copy of McLuhan's Understanding Media and read the chapter about movies without comprehending that movies are power. McLuhan writes from a historical perspective that may be difficult to absorb for the person who does not know who Cervantes, Rene Clair or Yeats was. Yet his blending of their observations about film with its electronic effect helps the layman gain a much deeper understanding of the medium. If nothing else, to read that movies "translate" one reality into another as they "merge the mechanical and the organic" while assuming "a high level of literacy in their users" has to cause some kind of perceptual shift in a would-be screenwriter's mind (McLuhan 249).

An overview of the film industry is probably available in a number of more recent books, but William Bluem and Jason Squire's The Movie Business happened to be published when the transition from big studios to broadcasting companies and independents was in progress. The book's purpose was to provide "textual material" for the many courses being "devised" for film study (xi). The book is divided into eight parts written by various experts that cover screenwriting, financing, management, production, preliminaries and creative functions, distribution and exhibition, audience concerns, and "new" technology. Everything from agents to film review is discussed by the contributing industry insiders. Today it provides a deep, and sometimes humorous—thanks to William Goldman—look into what the business was, what it changed into, and how, today, many of the basic rules are still the same.

Goldman's chapter on screenwriting deserves a special look. He identifies

traditional screenplay format as "unreadable," confessing that as a novelist he created his own writing style for film, putting in the forbidden camera angles and acting directions, knowing the directors and cameramen would only laugh and do what they wanted anyway (4). He delights in how the film business "overpays its writers (4), and laments the death of the business "as we know it" (3). He freely admits writing scenes he thought were "atrocious" that worked on film and scenes that didn't work on film the way he had intended because he had "miswritten" them, so the director couldn't help but misinterpret them (7). Besides his talent, Goldman's self-effacing and open nature may be the real reason he has continued to have such a formidable and long-lasting role in the movie industry.

The wise screenwriter doesn't stop with only knowing recent history, however, since he or she won't be able to tell why his screenplay is being labeled derivative or innovative without at least a basic knowledge of film history. Books like Mast's A Short History of the Movies, Cook's A History of Narrative Film, and Bordwell and Thompson's Film Art trace film's development worldwide as well as explain technical terminology and impact. All three books are heavily illustrated.

Mast's is the most comprehensive volume going into detail about film greats, development periods, sociological and political aspects, some major theories, and technological changes. Cook, on the other hand, provides a condensed history, highlighting the significant films, figures, achievements and developments. He also includes an invaluable glossary of film terms.

Bordwell and Thompson focus on film as an aesthetic medium. For the screenwriter, their book may be the most valuable of the three from the standpoint of explaining form, production, style and analysis factors. The chapters dealing with narrative unity, ambiguity, and nonnarrative and narrative forms are of special value. Very simply the authors explain the cause and effect nature of fictional narrative, the relationships to character (51), story and plot (52), and other narrative features such as motivation, parallelism, development patterns and scene function (54-60). These elements are illustrated through an analysis of Citizen Kane, the film, they say, "critics have scrutinized" more than any other (71).

If there is one flaw in these three books, it is that they do not delineate film theory as a separate, coherent entity. The authors mention theorists and theories only briefly and do not detail this aspect of film. The uninitiated reader thus is left with the impression that, yes, there were theories, but not who the major theorists were or what the context was that surrounded this particular discipline.

Film theory, however, is a difficult area in which to delve lightly because it deals

with so many abstractions and foreign names. It would be easier for the learner to read a book like film reviewer Pauline Kael's Deeper Into Movies. I was taught that a good film reviewer not only includes a discussion about his or her feelings concerning a film but also attaches theoretical and historical relevance to the film's success or failure. That is why this level of reviewer cannot comment on one film without mentioning others. Unlike the average modern television, radio and newspaper reviewers, Kael bases her judgments not on raw feeling and personal preference but on educated feelings and experience. Kael has made experimental films, managed the first twin artfilm house in the United States, written about film for The New Yorker, Film Quarterly and other publications, worked for Paramount as a consultant, lectures at universities and film festivals, and has several other books of and about film criticism in print. She is considered one of the most respected film critics in the United States. So, Kael's book is valuable for the balanced look at movies it contains, whether her opinions are acceptable or not.

Before getting into the mechanics of fiction and screenwriting, the area of film process needs some attention. The books I recommend are about making movies, the screenplay being only one part of a multi-faceted and complex whole. The first is Donald Spoto's The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock.

Many Americans probably do not know that Hitchcock was an established British filmmaker before his American blockbusters appeared. Long before he made Psycho and The Birds, Hitchcock had, in his black-and-white British films, established characteristic filmmaking patterns of using specific physical elements (a climb to and fall from a great height, for example) and humorous touches (his attitude toward the police caused him to always portray them as bumblers), and of exploring psychological approaches to "his fascination with crime" (513). He was a neurotic and spiteful man, a genius and a truly great filmmaker who earned the title auteur, a term derived by American critic Andrew Sarris to mean that films "should ideally be a medium of personal artistic expression...which...bear their maker's...stamp of his individual personality, controlling obsessions and cardinal themes" (Cook 457).

Overall, Hitchcock was "to the public all his life, an enigma" (Spoto 7). In relating Hitchcock's famous police anecdote, where his father had him locked in a jail cell for five minutes for being "naughty," Spoto notes, "This single childhood event inspired a body of work with the recurring motif of fear of prison and enclosure, about the terror of authority at home and abroad" (7). Spoto thus directs his portrayal of Hitchcock to reveal the man behind the films, and as such to act as a clear example of how a person's whole life not only affects but is intertwined with his art. Every

screenwriter needs to be aware that his or her work will likely contain autobiographical material, whether intentional or not.

If Hitchcock is the dark genius of filmmaking, William Goldman can serve as the bright one. His *Adventures in the Screen Trade* is essential reading for all screenwriters because he goes into such detail about all the decisions he made as he produced his screenplays. He also explains screenwriting—its elements, its strengths, its weaknesses—in his usual conversational style. And he discusses, from a screenwriter's point of view, the essentialness and worthlessness of the other aspects of the movie business, such as stars, executives, directors and producers. Goldman's book is instrumental in forcing the screenwriter into realizing he or she will be "joined at the hip" with the other moviemaking powers, "locked in an uneasy alliance, groping sometimes—but by no means always—toward the same mist-shrouded goal: a hit" (3).

Another revealing book is Word Into Image, a set of transcripts for a television series about such notable screenwriters as Goldman, Paul Mazursky, Neil Simon and Robert Towne. Where they got their ideas, who they used as character models, how they wrote their screenplays and many more details are presented in these pages unhampered by narrative explanations or connections. The film clips used in the series are shown in the transcripts in their script format, juxtaposed with the screenwriter's own comments. The effect is unusual, but the impact is strong on anyone wanting to learn about writing movies.

At this point in the study of screenwriting, some people might be able to write a complete screenplay, but the average person will need how-to instructions. History, theory and anecdotes just are not enough to take a writer from idea to screenplay completion. These books so far have provided a lot of information about filmmaking, screenwriters and general screenplay content, but few specifics about screenplay mechanics. But by now the screenwriter-in-training has been grounded in context, knows the terminology and who is who, and has a much greater chance of not looking like a fool in the industry.

The first book most people who want to learn screenwriting encounter is Syd Field's Screenplay. They read it, have trouble grasping his "paradigm" concept and begin looking around for something simpler. Actually, there is nothing simpler. Field's problem was in using the term "paradigm." If he wanted to confuse people on purpose, he couldn't have chosen a better way.

As far as I know, Field was the first to put into print the exact methodology of writing a screenplay. He specifies the script's number of pages as 120, the measurement as "one page per minute," and that screenplays consist of three acts (8). He tells the

purpose of each act. Aristotle in The Poetics had already identified those same three plot segments as the beginning, the middle and the end, but he was talking about Greek drama (vii).

Field, without mentioning Aristotle or any dramatists, explains that the beginning is Act I, "referred to as the setup" (8). Act II is the middle, "termed the confrontation portion because the basis of all drama is conflict" (9). The end, of course, is Act III, or "the resolution" (10).

In Field's paradigm, Act I extends from page one to 30, including a "plot point" from pages 25 to 27. Act II covers pages 30 to 90, with a "plot point" occurring during the last five pages of that set, and Act III goes from page 90 to 120 (8). Field describes a plot point as "an incident, or event, that hooks into the story and spins it around into another direction" (9). The plot point is thus the pivotal point in a story that shifts the action out of one act and into the next.

Field then opens what is probably the biggest controversy about screenwriting today by asking, "Do all good screenplays fit the paradigm?" and answering "Yes" (11). An entire master's thesis could be dedicated to this issue (and probably has been) because nearly every book about screenwriting since Field's has spent anywhere from a few lines to nearly the whole book either supporting or refuting Field's claim.

Field's book remains the flagship of screenwriting technique manuals. In addition to defining what a screenplay is, he describes the components known as the scene (128-152) and the sequence (91-109), makes the many-times-repeated-in-the-business-since-then statements "Drama is conflict" and "action is character" (195), and lists the purposes of dialogue, a fiction element he says is ultimately "a function of character" (207). He also explains how to use three-by-five cards to "build" a screenplay by writing "the idea for each scene or sequence on a single card" (193).

The only major sin Field commits is when he describes screenplay form. He suggests camera angles to use in the screenplay in order to avoid using camera directions (174-177). His directions for typing the screenplay recommend paying \$100 to a typist and do not explain capitalization, margins, tab settings or description headings.

Field's next book, The Screenwriter's Workbook, justifies his lack of attention to mechanics with the statement, "Form should never get in the way of your screenwriting" (107), but goes ahead and gives some margin and tab settings, and capitalization, centering and description instructions (107-108). The book's primary objective, however, is to deal with the paradigm problem. While trying to explain that in more palatable terms, Field does add greatly to his definition of character, expanding it to cover three chapters. He also reveals in print, probably for the first

time directly, two major insider secrets.

The first is the existence of the midpoint. While Field never really defines the midpoint except to say it is another plot point, its real function basically is to break the long second act into two sets of 30 pages each, a more workable amount equal to that of the first and third acts (135).

The second secret is the beginning of a first-10-pages rule. Within the first 10 pages, three things must be introduced: "the main character...the dramatic premise...(and)...the dramatic situation" (103).

Despite his second book, Field still left plenty of openings for others to write more about the screenwriting process. Field's books are short (less than 250 pages each) and his explanations are brief. And since Field did not credit any other authors or dramatists, their works remained for a while longer another insider secret available only to people like the students of Richard Walter, William Froug and Lew Hunter at the UCLA film school.

In 1988, Walter published his own book, Screenwriting: the Art, Craft and Business of Film and Television Writing. It is by far my favorite book on screenwriting. It comprehensively but simply tells what needs to be in screenplays and what must be avoided. Divided into five parts, it covers commercial considerations, story components, writing methods, business concerns and handling the emotions caused by criticism and rejection. It ends with a chapter on recommended reading.

Walter's book was followed by Froug's Screenwriting Tricks of the Trade. Froug's list of students who have established successful screenwriting credentials is lengthy and impressive (9), but the most helpful chapter of his book deals with story ideas. He not only tells where to get ideas—newspapers, libraries, autobiographical incidents, to name a few—but how to re-use them. The key to reusing an idea is retelling "it better, with a fresh and different approach" (17). Froug divides his book into three sections: thinking about the script, writing the script and selling the script.

Hunter's book, Lew Hunter's Screenwriting 434, arrived in 1993. With Walter's book matching Field's in length, and Froug's even shorter at 150 pages, Hunter's is massive by comparison at 351 pages. Unlike Walter's and Froug's books, Hunter's is Indexed, but not necessarily well. "Script format" is indexed under "Act I," not under "script" or "format" (346).

Separated into eight chapters, Hunter's book is the most literate of any I've read about screenwriting. In the first chapter, about ideas, Hunter refers to Aristotle's Poetics and a book I had heard about in Hollywood but had not yet read, Lajos Egri's The Art of Dramatic Writing (19). Hunter's second chapter, which explains how to

present a screenplay in a two-minute format as a test, recommends the reader also read Froug, Walter, Goldman, Field, Linda Seger, Cynthia Whitcomb and Hague (53). When I was reading Hunter, by this time I felt the man to be truly educated about film and very generous in sharing information others had either overlooked or withheld.

Hunter's third chapter covers characters. The fourth concerns structure, outlines and treatments. The fifth, sixth and seventh go into detail about acts I, II and III, respectively. The eighth is about rewriting and polishing. Like Walter, Hunter is clear about what to put in and what to leave out. For example, regarding the use of parenthetical directions for the character/actor such as (wryly), Hunter says, "Using 'wrylies' is as bad as directing the director with camera angles. Don't" (122). Although his book is detailed, he uses clever subheadings, such as "On-the-Nose Dialogue," and keeps each section brief and pointed (124).

The real eye opener for me was Egri's book. When I finally read it this past year, I was struggling to finish my screenplay, and I wondered why I had never read it before. Originally written in 1942 as How to Write a Play, it was revised and published in 1946 under its present title. Although it still refers to plays and uses classics such as Ibsen's A Doll's House as examples, the principles for screenwriting or any fiction form are there, are what I've been reading, hearing and teaching in diluted form for years.

However, had I read Egri 15 years ago, I would have been confused because at that time I did not have a solid enough understanding of the fiction-writing process to know where to begin a story based on his explanation. Egri interprets literally and thus takes issue with Aristotle's beginning, middle, end concept. In his section on "Point of Attack," Egri explains where a story should start: "at the point where a conflict will lead up to a crisis" or "where something vital is at stake at the very beginning of the play" (183).

To Egri, this is not the literal beginning but somewhere in the middle. The literal beginning would be when events began to form that might eventually lead to the crisis, or even as far back as the character's birth. Egri even postulates that maybe the middle has a beginning and an end to it, "but if that is what [Aristotle] wanted to say, he certainly could have expressed himself more clearly" (190).

In the movie business, a story's beginning is exactly as Egri specifies in his "Point of Attack" list, and everything that happened before this key point, including the character's birth if it is not the key point, is considered "backstory—the character's history" (King 88).

Other than that small but humorous point of contention, Egri covers all the basics—premise, character, conflict, obligatory scene, dialogue, plot—and in such a way, I

suspect, that set the standards Hollywood and others have been following ever since. Egri spent 35 years as a playwright before opening the Egri School of Writing in New York City. Although his book was revised and reprinted in 1960, it makes no reference to film, only to "that new and exciting medium, television" (Egri 274). Nevertheless, after he left New York, Egri moved to Los Angeles and went to work "teaching and working with members of the film industry" (302).

While Hunter, Walter, Froug and Field were teaching their classes and getting their books published, a number of writers of either teleplays or screenplays got their books on the stands for hopeful screenwriters-in-training to buy and read. In 1988 alone, at least four came out: Jurgen Wolff and Kerry Cox's Successful Scriptwriting, Viki King's How to Write a Movie in 21 Days, Cynthia Whitcomb's Selling Your Screenplay (Whitcomb is a colleague of the UCLA crowd), and Carl Sautter's How to Sell Your Screenplay. They were followed by Madeline DeMaggio's How to Write for Television and producer Robert Kosberg's How to Sell Your Idea to Hollywood. Each has his or her own angle for approaching the subject of screenwriting but cover about the same material.

They had all been eclipsed anyway by script consultant Linda Seger with Making a Good Script Great. Seger's book arrived on the stands in 1987 and takes a completely different look at the screenwriting process. It's as if Seger assumes everyone has a screenplay in a drawer somewhere that didn't sell and that might be able to be revised into a hit. Her book is full of questions a screenwriter can ask while undergoing the writing or revision process. She helps the reader find or create each needed element as she explains three-act structure, subplots, scenes, myth forms and the character spine, under the headings Story Structure, Idea Development and Character Development.

Seger's second book also is essential reading, although not geared only to screenwriting. Creating Unforgettable Characters takes the reader through a progression of character creation that starts with research, moves through consistencies and paradoxes, backstory and psychology, and relationships, continues onto minor characters, dialogue, nonrealistic characters and stereotyping, and ends with solving character problems. For identifying and explaining character dynamics, this book is excellent.

One other book about screenwriting deserves mention. It's Alternative Screenwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules by Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush. Dancyger heads undergraduate studies for the Department of Film and Television at New York University and has written for radio and television. Rush is a professor at Temple University who has written screenplays and articles.

While their credentials may appear somewhat weak from a film industry perspective, their book is different from the others in that its "purpose is not to prescribe, but to explore," and it has great value to the screenwriter (28). First they work their way quickly and efficiently through the "conventions" of screenwriting, identifying and defining the "fundamental story devices that remain constant regardless of...approach" (2). Then in "Going Against Structure," they discuss options such as two-act structure, violating or mixing genres, and making the main character unlikable. They offer two or three alternatives for every convention they just defined, alternatives they have observed in films as old as those of the Marx Brothers. Next they examine what they call "restorative three-act structure," the form they have identified as "the dominant model for mainstream films," followed by "alternative ways of structuring screen stories" (16).

Despite some of their assumptions' being faulty (since novels have more than three chapters, they don't follow three-act structure), this book is a necessary addition to a screenwriter's bookshelf (2). It stretches the perceptions and expands the screenwriter's options in a way that may help the movie business keep itself from becoming stagnant, that may encourage films to grow to a higher level.

For a change of pace as well as an education in the principles of fiction in general, there are four books I have found helpful. Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense is almost a bible of fiction. In it, Laurence Perrine enumerates the elements of the story, of poetry and of drama. A subsequent volume of only the poetry section is available, in fact, under the title of Sound and Sense, but the full volume may be out of print.

Perrine's purpose is to train readers to understand literature, but his explanations of plot, character, point of view, symbol and irony, emotion and humor, and fantasy are instructive to the writer as well. Perrine defines stories as either "escape...written purely for entertainment" or "interpretive...written to broaden and deepen and sharpen our awareness of life," which he sees as "opposite ends of a scale" (4). His definition of the "inexperienced reader" sounds like he might be describing an immature filmgoer: "He makes fixed demands of every story he reads, and he feels frustrated and disappointed unless these demands are satisfied" (5). But what Perrine is doing is providing the writer with an invaluable insight into audiences.

Perrine also is responsible for this often-quoted statement: "The immature reader reads chiefly for plot; the mature reader reads for whatever revelations of character or life may be presented by means of plot" (42). The wise screenwriter must take both types of audience members into account, providing strong plotting as well as character revelation.

Another even more specific text is Creative Writing by Howard Brashers. In his introduction to the forms of fiction, Brashers discusses the Aristotelian materials, the rhetorical modes, four forms of novelistic fiction and Northrop Frye's four genres. To a writer who has been reading nothing but how-to books about screenwriting, Brashers can provide a basic literary education. His tendency to offer a specific number of ways or kinds of one element or method also has appeal. He enumerates six kinds (pawn, type, profile, round, fragrant and heroic) and three concepts (Classic, Romantic and Mythic) of character (75), and nine ways (character's own thoughts, speech and actions; another character's thoughts, speech and actions; and the author's thoughts, style and selectivity) to reveal character (111). Even when he isn't listing a specific number, his headings still offer concrete advice: the roles of setting, a matrix of points-of-view, plots and actions in life, principles of design, and uses of theme.

A somewhat more difficult book to read but well-known is John Gardner's The Art of Fiction. The difficulty arises with Gardner's "literary-aesthetic" theoretical approach, but if this book is read in sequence with the books recommended so far, it will be more palatable. Gardner discusses such esoteric subjects as "aesthetic law and artistic mystery," "genre and fiction as dream," "interest and truth," and "metafiction, deconstruction and jazzing around" before he gives practical advice on common errors, technique and plotting.

Finally, if the screenwriter-in-training thinks fictional elements were not explained further between Aristotle's time and the 1940s, he or she can read Narrative Technique by Thomas Uzzell. Obviously dated in its 1920s' examples, this book still contains many basic principles that are still used and taught today. After Uzzell defines fiction's sound and defective purposes, he presents the unified effect principle, the four kinds of story interests (dominant character, complication, theme or atmosphere), the two ideals of drama (conflict and character), and how to select the right point of view. He ends the book with an appendix that includes advice on "The technique of writing," "How to attain publication," "Beginners' mistakes" and "How to get story ideas" (439-499).

For each of the kinds of story interests, he provides a plotting pattern. For example, in the atmosphere-dominant story, which would commonly fall in the horror or science fiction genre, the horror pattern takes the main character through eight steps or phases: "stimulated, nervous, longs to return, excited, dumfounded, exhausted, insane, dead" (373). This pattern actually works; it can be found in horror films such as The Haunting and, with a slight variation at the end, in science fiction films such as Alien.

Writing, especially screenwriting, requires economy and efficiency with words. The two books useful for learning this discipline are The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E. B. White, and Make Every Word Count by Gary Provost. Despite its being somewhat old-fashioned sounding, Strunk and White's book is the touchstone of every professional writer, a required purchase for any college writing program participant, and an invaluable resource. The subjects covered are the rules of usage, principles of composition, matters of form, misused words and expressions, and style. It is everything it tells writers to be with their words: simple, direct, clear.

Provost also discusses style but only after he positively answers the question "Can writing be taught?" and explains why (8). For the fiction writer, Provost is a healthy reminder to use active verbs, to avoid cliches and to "show, don't tell" while covering the topics of words, characterization, dialogue, description and point of view.

Just as there are books to seek out, there are many to avoid. While the avoid list could take up several pages, two examples can provide some guidelines for how to form judgments: Writing for Film and Television by Stewart Bronfeld and The Practical Writer's Guide by Mary DeVries.

Bronfeld's book may have been appropriate 13 years ago, but it has been made obsolete merely by the passage of time. It has also been superseded by DiMaggio's book. Bronfeld also committed the same sin Field did in including camera directions. Overall a screenwriter is better off not knowing what a "wipe" or "reverse angle shot" is so he can avoid the temptation to include such directions in a script. The writer's job is to write the story, not worry about showing POV angles that are the director's province.

DeVries' book is somewhat dated by its 1986 publication date, but its major weakness is the inaccurate information it provides and the poor advice it gives. DeVries is a writer, not an educator or grammarian. For example, in the entry about doubling a final consonant, DeVries gives the incomplete instruction to "double the final consonant in most cases" (41), and this pattern of false information prevails throughout the unfortunately numerous, brief and inaccurate entries in this volume.

The information provided in this book is available in accurate form in the many industry-accepted volumes such as Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the Associated Press Stylebook, Strunk and White's book, Provost's book, and any English handbook, such as the Harbrace Handbook or the Holt Handbook or Writers Inc. The correct rule for consonant doubling prevents any misunderstanding over which words to include. Not only does it discriminate between one-syllable and multi-syllable words, but it specifies that the multi-syllable word must end "in a consonant preceded by one

vowel" with the accent on that final syllable, "and the suffix begins with a vowel" as in "control" becoming "controlling" (Sebranek 277).

Books like Devries' perpetuate the use of misspelled words such as "travelled" and "cancelled," neither of which should have the final consonant doubled because the accent is NOT on the final syllable. Their correct past tense is "traveled" and "canceled." It is appalling to me that so many of these books make it into print. Even if publishers do not know better, their staff editors should.

Besides taking Hunter's recommendations, a hopeful screenwriter can figure out which other industry-favored books to read by looking at the recommended reading lists in the books by Whitcomb, Sautter, Walter and Kosberg. Like solving any puzzle, the secret is in knowing where to look. The message should at least be clear by now that two questions should be asked about any book: Who is writing this book? Does it contain anything new, or are its contents just a rehash of what's already available?

Chapter III

SELECTIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My original intention in writing my screenplay was to use Viki King's How to Write a Movie in 21 Days as a guide. By the time I read King's book, I had already written my first act, an ending and a few key scenes in the second act. According to her book, I was on Day 3 of her recommended writing schedule. I thought all I had to do from there was continue following her plan, and that I was ahead in the process.

Unfortunately her plan does not quite work that way. The 21 days are the writing schedule ONLY after the writer has done ALL of his/her planning.

I knew, from being stuck over what to do with my second act beyond a few general ideas, that I needed to evaluate my characters and story more thoroughly. THIS part of the screenwriting process is NOT included in King's 21 days. In fact, the evaluating/planning portion was never discussed with regard to how long it might take.

I found this to be a fatal flaw in King's book. However, I did read the entire volume and found some of the information relevant and helpful. King is good at explaining the structural elements (by page number, no less) and cites them in her third chapter, "How to Write" (39-49). She discusses her "9-minute movie" method in which "clothespins... support your movie at nine points from end-to-end," these nine points occurring on pages 1, 3, 10, 30, 45, 60, 75, 90 and 120 (39).

King also helps the writer deal with the inner confusions that accompany writing. For example, in creating characters, she advises the writer to examine his/her own age and stage of life. These factors, she says, often determine the type of main character and issues a writer will tend to choose (100). As I read this advice, I found it to definitely apply to me and my screenplay. I had chosen a character, Jane, who was close to my age and who was experiencing something of deep concern to me at that stage in my own life: reaching a certain level of career advancement only to be tripped up.

The problem with King's system for me was that she does not adequately explain exactly how a writer decides WHAT goes on those "clothespin" pages. Instead of clarifying things for me, she opened up new areas for me to consider—these parallels to me and my life issues—that took me far afield from my original idea.

King specifies that page 1 is where the story starts—this is obvious—and establishes the "mood and tone." Page 3 contains the "central question." Page 10 reveals "what the story is." Page 30 is where "an event will occur that moves the hero into new territory." Page 45 shows the hero's "initial growth." Page 60 has the hero reaffirming and making a "deeper commitment to what he wants." Page 75 looks as if "all is lost" and the hero is "about to give up, then something happens that changes

everything." Page 90 is where "the resolution of the problem starts," and on page 120 the story ends and "the audience is satisfied" (40-41). Later in the book are more detailed explanations of these critical points, but even after I had read them several times, I still could not compartmentalize my story without more specifics. This is where a book can be so frustrating, because the author is not available for questions.

Like many writers who produce how-to books, King recommends using index cards for itemizing what goes on each of these "clothespin" pages (42). She also recommends preparing 120 blank sheets of paper, numbered accordingly, that will contain the screenplay. This is supposed to give the writer a physical "space" for his/her movie (51-52). I ended up being mired in cards and piles of paper. For weeks, I shuffled this morass around, madly writing, thinking and rewriting, but getting almost nowhere. I knew I had a character who bore similarities to me, I had a fair idea of the central question, and I knew my character triumphed in the end, but I had great difficulty with the actual events that would turn my idea into an interesting story. The events I created were not growing out of character as King said they should (41).

The 21-Day plan calls for writing blocks of 10-15 pages, reading and rewriting them, and resting. I found writing in such increments to be impossible, especially since I had already written my first 22 pages in one sitting nearly a year earlier. While King's advice and instructions may have had an unconscious impact on me ultimately, I found myself unable to write my screenplay according to her plan. It was just too formulaic. Disappointed and frustrated, I looked at Lew Hunter's book again. He uses a "thirty step" or "forty-five step" outline system (90-93). Like King, he follows three-act structure, but he breaks each act into steps that create "your two-minute movie" (90). The steps are scenes.

For a "textured" story of an Arthur Miller nature, "you need around thirty steps" (53). For an action/adventure or comedy, "you'll be closer to forty-five steps" (93). I had begun viewing my story as a combination action/drama/comedy at that point, so I tried outlining it in forty-five steps. According to Hunter's plan, that means four to ten steps for the first act (up to page 17 because he doesn't think viewers want to wait any longer), "eighteen steps or so for Act Two" which should end on page 85, and six for the third act (95). According to his mathematics, that's thirty steps, but he falters later when he recounts: between six and ten steps for act one, fifteen to thirty steps for act two, and three to ten steps for act three (103-104). That's a maximum of fifty steps, not forty-five. But who's counting?

Even though I numbered three columns on a piece of paper and chose six steps for act one, twenty for act two and six for act three, I could not think of what to write there. To

make matters worse, the example Hunter cites is an unproduced original screenplay he wrote, The Glass Hammer, that is worse than terrible and did not illustrate his points very clearly.

Thanks to King and Hunter, I was now behind on my deadline and confused about my story. I read and re-read King and Hunter, updated my outline several times and decided to plunge ahead despite not really knowing where I was going. Within three more weeks, I had rewritten my first act twice, continued into the second act all the way to page 90 without getting anywhere close to a resolution, and disliked all my new versions. I was having problems with one of my characters being out of control (every time I'd put him in a situation, he'd leave), had developed about eight thematic angles that would take me a thousand pages to tie together, and was experiencing crippling self-doubt. Adding to my inner distress was a lack of confidence in my word processor because its disk drive failed, which may have been fate.

After two weeks of hand-writing everything, I received a brochure in the mail. While I worked in Hollywood a few years ago, I heard of a writer/teacher named John Truby who had started his own Writers Studio. I purchased his flagship cassette course, Truby's Story Structure, and listened to it. He believes "The Three-Act structure is dead," so his method revolves around twenty-two building blocks that are supposed to help in creating a screenplay more naturally (Truby brochure 1). I've been receiving his newsletters for years and have watched his product line grow to include video taped versions and then computer software.

In the January 1995 issue of Writer's Digest magazine, an article evaluated the currently-available software designed to help writers create and format fiction. Truby's StoryLine Pro was featured and received a very good review as "an interactive program that challenges you to create and polish the elements that make up a good story" (42).

The brochure I received offered StoryLine Pro's latest upgrade along with two free cassette programs and two additional software resource libraries all for \$100 off the list price. After calling Truby's Writers Studio and discussing the program with a friendly woman there, then calling the program's technical support department and talking to a technician about limitations and potential problems, I was convinced I should order the program. Both Truby representatives were friendly, helpful and straight-forward. I felt that even if I had some problems with the program, I would get the help I needed. And the program comes with a guarantee: a full refund after 30 days "if you don't write the best story you've ever written."

My first concern, that I discussed with technical support, was the ease of start-up.

The program installed in my rented Macintosh computer in less than half an hour, and I immediately began using its Users Manual to guide me through its sections. The process begins with a menu headed VIEW which "breaks the creative writing process...into specific action steps" (6.1). The view menu contains eight sections: Overview, Playground, Premise Pad, Design, Central Casting, Structure, Texture, First Draft, Rewrite and Genre.

Overview presents a grid that includes the scene list on the left and all other entered information in boxes across the screen. Since I had not entered any information, I went to the Premise Pad section and selected New Story. It asked me to enter a title, a short three-line summary of my premise, and any deadline information I chose to display. I decided against the deadline data and left those boxes blank. Then I returned to the View menu and selected Design.

The window that appeared contained four buttons labeled with their subsections: Brainstorm, Premise Development, Structure/Theme and World Sequence. In Brainstorm, my premise appeared automatically in a box at the top of the screen, and a list of blank numbered boxes proceeded below that. These were for listing my scenes in order, although the order wasn't permanently fixed; scene blocks could be moved, inserted or deleted on command. But I wasn't ready to begin listing scenes, so I returned to the Design menu and selected Premise Development.

There again was my typed premise followed by boxes under questions to answer and story dynamics to fill in that deal with the hero's basic action, psychological and moral weaknesses and potential, the positive and negative fundamental qualities of the basic action, how the hero will struggle to accomplish action, and what the nightmarish form of action is, all leading to a more-clearly-defined premise box. Examples in the Users Manual were from Tootsie and Officer and a Gentleman (10.4). In these and the rest of the program section blocks, I filled in my answers based on my third version of my first act.

From there I went to the Structure/Theme subsection designed to "determine the structure that will best express the deepest theme of the story idea" (10.8). Here blocks are available concerning inherent story elements, such as "Desire creating story movement," "Best structure/genre," "Theme line," "issue" "promises implied in your idea" and who the hero fights and over what (10.8-10.12). The Users Manual provides helpful explanations for what each of the boxes should have entered.

World Sequence required me to "explore how the world of (my) story develops" by providing two columns—one for "the flaws in the system that express the weaknesses of your hero" and the other for "how has the hero's world changed by his/her actions"

and corresponding sets of boxes for "power structure," "logic" and "values" to be considered (10.13).

This completed, I left the Design section and went to Central Casting. Its subsections are Cast, Conflict Map, Levels and Variations of a Theme.

In Cast, ninety-nine numbered boxes are available for defining characters by name, resume and description, and for labeling them as to hero, opponent, ally or sub-plot character. An added feature to this screen is the ability to "view conflict" which juxtaposes the main character's bio next to any other selected character's and compares their main weaknesses, psychological need, moral need, desire, values, power, status or ability, and the moral argument each uses "to justify how he/she tries to win the goal" (11.3).

The Conflict Map "represents the main conflicts at the largest level of the story" (11.3). Four boxes for the hero and "the three main opponents" are flanked by larger boxes "where you list the values of each of the characters" (11.3).

The third subsection of Central Casting is Levels where three columns list characters, their opponents and the object of their conflict. Up to eight levels of conflict can be identified.

The final item in Central Casting, Variations on a Theme, is designed to help the writer identify how the characters each "present a different approach to the same life problem" (11.5). This is done through stating the central theme, then itemizing the characters and their variations.

From there I went to the Structure section which also contains four subsections: 7 Steps, 22 Steps, Revelations Sequence and Moral Sequence. The 7 Steps "describe the minimum steps required for any human being to solve a life problem" (12.2). The steps are Problem/Need, Desire, Opponent, Plan, Battle, Self-Revelation and New Equilibrium. Ironically, since I knew about these from the cassette course and had seen them mentioned again in the Summer newsletter, I had already developed answers for these blocks during my pre-computer phase.

By now, as I'd get to a new section in the program, I'd see items I'd previously identified elsewhere that were now automatically plugged in wherever they needed to be. This feature helped me see the interconnectedness of the story elements very clearly, although at times I wasn't sure if what I'd decided to type in any given box was really valid.

Even though I was somewhat versed in Truby's 22-Step method, and the Users Manual contains a glossary of "Story Terms," I did not always understand fully what I was supposed to type in the boxes (4.1-4.8). The program also has a HELP feature and

will cite specific examples on command from the films Star Wars, Beverly Hills Cop, Witness, The Verdict and Adams Rib, the novel Hunt for Red October, the play Streetcar Named Desire and the short story "Heart of Darkness."

Nevertheless, I began to feel that all the data I entered was arbitrary. I could enter anything I wanted just to see the effect, or I could enter what I felt was the right answer and later return and see I had changed my mind. Or, as I was developing the story, earlier answers got changed by later realizations about who my characters really were and what the story actually was about. However, I did not let myself go back and make many changes.

The 22 Steps subsection lists twenty-five items, combining the original steps with added revelations steps, so the novice would definitely be confused. The actual 22 Steps are not listed as a group in the glossary, and the manual instructions for this subsection are far too brief. The 7 Steps subsection receives five pages in the manual, while the 22 Steps get only two!

While I was trying to complete the 22 Steps subsection, I did not think to go to the glossary and look up the steps individually, but later I discovered they are indeed defined but not necessarily under the alphabetic heading I expected. The actual 22 Steps are 1) Self-Revelation/Need & Desire, 2) Ghost & Context, 3) Problem/Need, 4) Inciting Event, 5) Desire, 6) Ally(ies), 7) Opponent - Mystery, 8) Opponent - Ally, 9) 1st Revelation, 10) Plan, 11) Opponent's Plan, 12) Drive, 13) Attack by Ally, 14) Apparent Defeat, 15) 2nd Revelation, 16) Audience Revelation, 17) 3rd Revelation, 18) Gauntlet/Gate/Visit Death, 19) Battle, 20) Self-Revelation, 21) Moral Decision and 22) New Equilibrium.

This subsection poses more questions and makes more boxes available for answers. The four questions in Step 1 deal with the hero's learning about himself, beliefs that the story challenges, being wrong about himself and being forced to confront his need. These questions are very clearly stated and easy to answer, but in Step 2 there are only two questions and both require the writer to possess a thorough understanding of the terms Ghost and Context. I really did not know what event from Jane's past—her ghost—was, so I guessed. After I finished the screenplay and went back through this subsection, I realized Jane's ghost was her having been at the bottom once and not wanting to go back.

For Context, I concentrated on Landing World, not even mentioning Jane's smaller, more "typical" initial work and home environments and the vast contrast between the two. My cursory answer here, however, did not prevent me from including this contrast in the actual screenplay.

I was beginning to feel that I was getting lost merely because my grasp of the 22 Steps was inadequate, but I didn't want to take the time to refer back to the cassette program. So, I forged ahead.

The third step, Problem/Need, contains four boxes and one brief heading over each: Problem, 3 Weaknesses, Psychological Need and Moral Need. I had to use the film examples to understand what was wanted here, but I was still unsure of my answers.

Step 4, Inciting Event, matches traditional structure's Inciting Incident, which I already knew was the event that sets the story in motion. The screen contains one box under the Inciting Event heading. In my story, this event is the sudden job offer.

Step 5, Desire, contains three boxes under the respective headings Desire-Goal, Desire-Motive and Desire-Stakes. I decided Jane's goal is the job, her motive is to continue moving up (to avoid going backward) and the stakes are her feelings of self-esteem, satisfaction and validation.

Next is Ally(ies), again one box under that heading. Jane's allies are probably Sam, Maris and Peggy.

Following that and with the same set-up is Opponent-Mystery which is not defined or explained. Eventually I figured out from the film examples that this character is an opponent who is not immediately known to the hero and can even function as an ally. This could fit several of my characters, including Ron, Otto/Darren and the others in the orientation program.

The next step is Opponent-Ally and again contains one box. I wasn't sure if this was the opponent's ally or something else. I should have spent more time trying to decipher the glossary because it defines this character as one "who appears to be a friend of the hero's but is really an opponent" (4.5). Otto and Peggy fit this description as do Ron and Liz and the other trainees.

While filling in 1st Revelation's four boxes labeled Revelation, Decision, Changed Desire and Changed Motive, I realized Jane also opposes herself. This is the only item actually given any explanation in the Users Manual. The "Revelations Sequence" is described as steps "in which the hero or audience learns a surprising piece of information" (12.8). I falsely interpreted revelation to mean something the hero realizes about herself, so I answered this and all other revelations items incorrectly. Since I didn't exactly know what surprises I was going to spring on the audience or on my characters when I was working on this subsection, I couldn't have used it properly anyway.

Next is the Plan step containing one small box under the heading Hero's Overall Plan. I correctly interpreted the plan to be what the hero would do "to overcome the

opponent and reach the goal" which is very close to the glossary definition (4.5). At that point, though, my idea of Jane's plan was general—just to stay true to her values and character.

Under Opponent's Plan there are two boxes—the plan itself and Main Counterattack. I decided Ron's plan was to eliminate Jane so he could have the job, and his counterattack (not defined anywhere, but the examples showed it was the opponent's specific actions) was he would try three times to discredit or defeat her. Although Ron cheats to win the virtual reality game, he tricks Jane into a secret room with no exit to prevent her from finishing the game at all.

Hero's Drive is another step with only one box, and I misinterpreted it completely. I thought it meant what the hero was driven to do, but the glossary defines it as "the series of actions the hero takes to execute the plan and reach the goal" (4.2). I put that Jane was driven by fear.

The next step listed is Added Revelation, and its screen looks identical to the earlier Revelation screen. I decided Jane would find out Ron was deliberately sabotaging her.

After that is Attack by Ally which contains two boxes, one headed with Criticism and the other with Justification. I did not realize this step is defined in the glossary as the ally functioning as the hero's conscience when the hero starts to act wrongly, or to make fun of what the hero is trying to do. My screenplay lacks this precise dynamic and instead contains protests from Sam and Maris that Jane is letting this problem upset her uncharacteristically.

The Apparent Defeat step is another one that parallels the traditional structure—the "all is lost" point in the story (King has it happening on page 75), so was already familiar to me. I knew Jane had to reach a point where she nearly gives up. The screen again contains only one box.

On the list, the next item is 2nd Revelation, which I again misinterpreted. It is supposed to be where the hero gets "a major piece of information" that causes him to "get back into the game" (4.6).

Following that is Added Revelation 2 which was worthless to me due to my ongoing misunderstanding. Adding to my lack of clarity about these revelation steps was the fact that the manual and the program screen do not match. The manual shows a list of only the first 13 of the 22 steps and says the Added Revelations are a separate feature accessible through an icon located at the "upper right corner of the 22 Steps screen" (12.9). There is NO such icon on my program's 22 Steps screen, and the steps list already includes the optional three Added Revelations (which accounts for there being 25 items

instead of 22 in my screen's list). It would have helped tremendously if the manual had shown a complete picture of the 22 Steps list, since only showing the first 13 steps compounded my confusion. Later I discovered that a separate sheet of paper added to the program package materials contained an explanation of this upgraded information, which included the adding of the additional three revelations sequences to the 22 steps menu and eliminating the separate revelations icon that used to be featured in an earlier version.

I decided the box on the Audience Revelation screen needed to contain the fact that the secret room has no outlet and Jane is going to lose. However, this step is supposed to show what key "piece of information" is revealed to the viewer, such as the supposedly turning out to be an opponent (4.2). In that case, I should have noted there that Otto is revealed as Darren.

The 3rd Revelation is next, and I followed my same misinterpretative pattern. The glossary describes this step as "where the hero learns everything s/he must know about the opponent to win" (4.6). Had I understood these revelation steps and used them correctly, I believe my screenplay would have been even better, but this realization on my part can always help during the rewrite.

Another Added Revelation is next, followed by what should be Step 18, Gate/Gauntlet/ Visit Death. This is another familiar step in traditional structuring, especially in the myth form. It is when the hero "visits the underworld" or "gains a sense of his/her own mortality" (4.8). The screen contains a single box, and I used Jane's being put into the secretarial training room as this moment.

The Battle step contains five boxes respectively labeled Characters in Conflict, Convergence of Space, Hero Like Opponent, Deepest Values in Conflict, and Sequence of Conflict. Since these items are not defined or explained, I took them at face value. My characters in conflict are Jane/Ron, briefly Jane/Sam, Jane/Ron/Darren/Liz. The convergence of space I took to mean the characters being forced into closest proximity with each other—for Jane/Ron this moment is when he falsely apologizes and tricks her into the trap, then Ron/Cat go off to steal data. Deepest values in conflict would be Ron's need to win at almost any cost and Jane's to avoid trouble. Her being naturally kind and trusting ends up giving Ron an advantage. For the sequence of conflict, I used Ron's plan—beyond that I was not yet sure of anything else.

Next is Self-Revelation, or "the endpoint of the story" as opposed to Need/Desire which "are the beginning" (4.6). These two points "represent the overall range of change of your hero" (4.6). The screen contains two boxes, one labeled Self-Revelation/Psychological, and the other Self-Revelation/Moral. I decided Jane's

psychological self-revelation is she regains her self-esteem by defeating Ron honorably. She doesn't need a moral self-revelation since she is already moral, but Ron has one in that he forgets about himself and risks his life to prevent Cat from committing a crime, and he sees that he can be better than he has been all his life.

Under the Moral Decision step, the two boxes call for a Moral Decision and a Thematic Revelation. I'm not sure if Jane made any type of major moral decision, except not to cheat even though she was losing. The thematic revelation for her would be that competition and technology are nothing to fear.

The last step is New Equilibrium. It is twenty-fifth on the list but is Step 22 of Truby's basic outline. The screen shows a box labeled Hero at a Higher Level and another one labeled Hero at Lower Level. In my screenplay, Jane ascends to a higher level while Ron descends but is a better person for the experience. The next subsection of the Structure section is Revelations. These are supposed to be the "surprises" sprung on the audience. The screen shows the four revelations boxes linked together in a series. The information I had previously typed appeared in them automatically.

The final Structure subsection, Moral Sequence, contains a list starting with Moral Need and ending with Moral Decision. In between are Immoral Actions 1 through 10, Desire, Drive, Attack by Ally, Obsessive Drive, Battle and Self-Revelation. The items that match those in the previous 22 Steps subsection are already filled in. The immoral actions boxes are still blank. I did not know how to use this screen, so I went on.

The next section, Texture, finally stopped me completely. Its two subsections are Visual Tracks and Action Tracks. The Visual Tracks screen is filled with boxes that extend far to the right beyond the monitor's available viewing area. Under the FILE menu, a special Movement Controls item must be selected. A panel then appears that provides access to the right side of this grid and the ability to move around within it. As soon as a movement is completed, though, the movement controls panel closes, so it has to be re-opened every time movement is desired. At first, seeing this screen and not seeing the usual panel of movement buttons, I had to consult the Users Manual and learn about the extra Movement Controls function. Then with this grid so large that all parts cannot be seen together, I got too frustrated to work with it. The idea for a visual track, however, is a very good one and stayed in the back of my mind. Later as I was writing my screenplay, I added metaphorical visual elements, then went back through and added even more.

The Action Track screen, also wider than the monitor's viewing area, needed the scene list which I hadn't done yet. This discovery was disappointing, but I had already begun to feel like I was going in circles somehow, not doing anything new, and

being additionally confused by the feelings I had about not understanding exactly what some of those subsection boxes were supposed to have in them.

So I stopped. I was unhappy with this third version of my first draft, and I called a screenwriting friend of mine and discussed it with him. His wife was the one person who had raved about my initial first act a year and a half earlier. I, too, had liked my original first draft, but subsequent readers had criticized it for lacking conflict, for having a bland main character and for portraying a situation that couldn't happen. These criticisms were responsible along with King and Hunter for my rewriting my first act twice, but I did not like either of the rewrites.

I realized that it is difficult if not impossible for me to spend the needed amount of effort and time writing a piece of fiction that really doesn't interest me. The only version that truly held my interest was my original first act. At that point, I decided to return to that original version, replace the few repetitive or empty scenes with action about Ron, and proceed from there.

With renewed enthusiasm, I returned to the Brainstorm subsection to begin listing my scenes. Beyond the first act, I did not know my movie by actual scenes, but I did have a fairly solid idea of action points. I listed the first act scenes numerically in the boxes on the screen, and then proceeded to just fill subsequent boxes with the actions I wanted to come next.

I worked on this scene/action list for about three days, printing it out and rereading it, revising it until I got all the way to the end with a feeling of satisfaction about the story. This was a major breakthrough for me, and I found that working with the computer program helped me more than any of the how-to books' systems had. The next decision I made was not to go back through all the previous subsections and alter my entries just because I was switching versions. I did not want to use precious time in that way.

According to the Users Manual, the next phase is to go to the First Draft section and begin writing dialogue. The First Draft screen portrays three buttons: Story Dialogue, Moral Dialogue and Fast View. Fast View can be used any time to literally read the scene list at slow, medium or fast pace for a sense of continuity and flow. Fast pace was too quick for me. I liked the medium rate better because it allowed me to read what I'd typed.

The Story Dialogue subsection first provides a new presentation of the scene list, using the same list entered in the Brainstorm subsection. This new set-up contains the scene list but in larger scene boxes in the center. To the left of each box is the scene number and a very small empty box. To the list's right is a matching list of small boxes

that allow each scene to be labeled as to the story structure step that applies (Problem/Need, etc.). I started doing this labeling but grew frustrated with it.

The Users Manual explains that the tiny blank box to the left of each scene is the point where the cursor can be placed and clicked on to access the story dialogue screen, so I clicked on the one for Scene 1. What appeared next was the most detailed and usable screen I had seen so far. At the top is the numbered scene box containing its entry. Below that is a box with five items to identify: Previous Endpoint, Desire, Conflict Point, Plan and Twist. Below that is a row that contains the scene notations INT. and EXT. and the first eight characters' names I had identified back in Central Casting: Jane, Ron, Sam, Meg, Liz, Darren, Jack (Ron's boss) and Mike (Jane's boss). Under that row is a larger box, nearly the width of the monitor screen, for word processing: typing in the scene's dialogue. Below that box is a small one-line box labeled Endpoint. The cursor can be placed in any of these boxes and then moved from item to item and box to box by using the TAB key.

I did not have a previous endpoint, and I was too eager to begin typing my scene to bother with the rest of that second box, so I tabbed down to the word processing box. The Users Manual says that the INT. or EXT. notation can be automatically entered by pressing COMMAND F1 or F2. My keyboard does not have a COMMAND key, but in other instructions there had been mention of using the CONTROL key, so I tried that. It worked. I wrote in this correction in the manual. The character name could be automatically entered, in its proper indented location, with its first line of dialogue also properly indented, by hitting the F3 to F10 keys, depending on which character was speaking. If another character was speaking whose name was not listed, I discovered I could enter any listed character's name, highlight it and type the name I wanted, and this did not disturb any of the indenting. The remaining dialogue could be spaced manually from the left over to its first line's indentation point, but the TAB key could not be used since it was dedicated to another function. That led me to discovering that the margins also were preset, and there was no way to repaginate the document. This typing window also did not allow cutting and pasting.

Despite these limitations, I went ahead and typed each of my first act scenes sequentially. For the endpoint, I usually entered the last few words of the scene, and these automatically appeared in the second box of the next scene's screen. I also discovered that I could print each scene and that each one was automatically "saved" to the hard drive as I moved on to the next scene.

When I reached the end of Act One, I found that some of the action points I had listed from here on were scenes by themselves, but at other times, two or three action

points would occur in one scene. When this happened, I had to return to the Brainstorm list so I could delete the extra steps. In other cases, I thought of actions that required new scenes not on my master list, and this too required me to return to the Brainstorm list to insert new boxes. On a couple of occasions, I decided scenes were not in the right order, and again I returned to the Brainstorm list to move them around. I ended up also having to reprint the outline several times to give myself a guide to follow, and this is where I would make additional notations for scene ideas as they occurred to me.

Otherwise, my scene typing progressed fairly smoothly. I finished the entire screenplay in nine days of working about six hours a day. I typed each scene as if it were the actual screenplay page(s), not just limiting them to dialogue. I put in all the scene information.

When I was finished, I had no idea how many actual pages the text for my 114 scenes would fill. When I printed out the scene text, all the scenes were joined as one document and the screenplay used 112 pages. Although the margins are slightly off (three-quarters of an inch at the top and about half an inch at the bottom instead of one inch), I was very happy with this page count. Using Truby's method of development had allowed me to forego worrying about what went on which page, and my story seemed to flow yet maintain a fairly close semblance of three-act structure anyway. The first act, with the additions I had made, seemed to run a bit long, but two scenes between Jane and Sam could easily be combined to help solve that problem.

The Moral Dialogue subsection is supposed to be used after each Story Dialogue screen is finished. The idea is to provide space for fleshing out additional depth and purpose for dialogue. While I looked at this option, I felt I was not ready to go to any additional depths during the first draft stage.

The final two sections in the program are Rewrite and Evaluate. Again, I felt I needed to put some time between completing my first draft and going back through to rethink and tighten it. Rewrite contains a screen that lists fifteen considerations in a column on the left, and a word processing box filling the rest of the screen. The fifteen items are Design, Self-Rev, Need, Hero's Potential, Thematic Rev, Context, Opposition, Desire, Plan, Revelations, Plot, Battle, Opening, Closing and Dialogue. The Users Manual provides seventeen pages of explanations. The already-typed scenes are pulled up into the word processing box for making any changes.

Evaluate is divided into two subsections: Creative and Analysis. Creative is for the story being worked on, while Analysis is for evaluating "someone else's story" (18.1). Creative contains a checklist pointing out "the most common and serious story errors...listed by category" such as Premise, Hero and Need (18.1). Under Premise, for

example, the checklist offers four possibilities: The premise is fragmented; the premise is unfocused; the premise doesn't speak to a larger theme; and the premise is not commercial (18.1).

I do not know how any amateur screenwriter or even one at a professional level could use this evaluation checklist with any sort of reliability. However, the Truby Writers Studio does offer professional critiquing services for a fee. Aside from the problems I encountered that I have already mentioned, the program has a few more, some minor and one major. From talking to Technical Support, I learned that a new upgrade is coming out and will automatically be sent to me. Based on complaints reported to Technical Support, each upgrade is designed to eliminate the identified problems.

One I encountered most recently was not a problem while I was typing scenes but arose when I created a new file and began typing this chapter. I had already typed about six pages when suddenly any correction I tried to make that required reinserting the cursor at a previous point in the document ended up overtyping what was already there. I could not even insert a space without it taking up the next character or space on the screen, which forced me to retype whole lines to reconstruct the correct wording and spacing. I tried moving to another screen, to another subsection, then back to the scene entry screens, but I could not seem to get out of this overtype mode. Finally I called Technical Support and was told to quit the program, then restart. When I did this, the typing function was restored to normal and everything I had typed was intact. The technician said some people are having this overstrike problem occur just by hitting the space bar, and the newest upgrade will eliminate the problem.

Another problem is many of the boxes have very limited capacity. While this forces economy, it also forces the use of Post-It or other types of notes for key information that won't fit in the available screen space.

Printing ability is also limited: Some windows can be printed, and some cannot. There is a word processing window called Paper for making notes in any section, but Paper cannot be printed.

The worst experience I had was when I gave the command to print before I had turned on the printer. The entire program quit. The most recent scene I had typed was lost and had to be retyped.

The program also quit unexpectedly one time when I asked for an example from Beverly Hills Cop and a small box appeared telling me something to the effect that this example was not available and offering me the two buttons Cancel or Ignore. I selected Cancel, and suddenly the application was quitting. Later I tried using the

same film, got the same message and selected Ignore, and the program gave me the example!

In the First Draft section, when I'd finish writing one scene and select the command to move on to the next, sometimes the program would suddenly return to the main section screen. No matter how carefully I selected the NEXT command to go to the next scene's window, this problem occurred at least three times a day. While it didn't cause me to lose any entries, it would always disturb me.

Every scene in Brainstorm and in First Draft, and every character in Central Casting, must be scrolled past sequentially in order to reach the one needed. If I had stopped typing the day before on scene 102, I had to scroll through 101 scenes on the list to get to the next day's starting point. A function that allows the writer to go directly to any character or scene on a list would be very helpful and save time.

The stated 4 MB RAM capacity is not actually adequate. I had to call for assistance because my computer would not open the program, yet it had the specified capacities. And the solution ended up requiring me to use the machine's virtual memory, which also creates delays. While I was typing scenes and entered more than about four paragraphs, the computer would suddenly interrupt my typing in order to automatically save what I had typed thus far. I do not know if this auto-save feature was due to my using virtual memory or if it would have kicked in anyway, but the first time it happened, it startled me.

Even with these problems, however, the delays and disruptions were insignificant compared to the benefits I received from using this program. It allowed me to bypass anything that started to make me feel stuck or frustrated, and to get on with writing. The Rewrite section also made me realize my screenplay is still a work in progress. And the needed refining and tightening should make room for additional depth to be developed.

Although the program only allows two installs, it can be uninstalled. All files can be saved and imported into other word processing or screenplay formatting programs where margins can be changed, pages can be cut and pasted, and the whole document can be repaginated, so the word processing limitations of the program are not a permanent liability unless the user has no other word processing program available.

The happy result for me in using Story Line Pro is that I did indeed get what the guarantee promised: "the best story (I've) ever written."

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The following 120 pages contain the screenplay Hard Feelings, an original screenplay produced as a result of this project. To conform to screenplay format and pagination, the screenplay text begins at the top of the next page.

FADE IN:

INT. LANDING WORLD PERSONNEL DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. DAY

REED MILLER, director, sits behind his nameplate. Opposite him is JANE KAVANAUGH, early forties.

MILLER

Jane, we're very pleased you agreed to come in for this interview. Your record in the field is very strong. We need someone with your credentials and experience to start up our new training department.

JANE

I'd love it. I did the same thing at Waring.

INT. PERSONNEL OFFICE RECEPTION AREA. DAY.

Jane exits the director's office, nods at the receptionist MELISSA and leaves. RON LIPMAN, mid-forties, watches from a chair against the opposite wall which is alive with scenes of happy people at work.

Melissa signals Ron, and he enters the director's office.

INT. LANDING WORLD LOBBY. DAY.

Jane passes a huge gold sign bearing the name LANDING WORLD ENTERPRISES, INC. As she goes into the revolving door compartment, it almost catches her skirt. She pulls the skirt out of the way just in time and smiles in relief.

EXT. LANDING WORLD BUILDING. DAY.

In the midst of a throng of passersby, Jane looks up at the gleaming multi-story structure and raises her eyebrows. She hails a cab and gets in.

INT. CAB. DAY.

DRIVER

Where to?

JANE

Tucker and Cole, the Mercantile Building.

DRIVER

That's a far cry from here, ain't it.

JANE

Tell me about it.

INT. PERSONNEL DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

MILLER

Ron, it's a pleasure to have you here for this interview. Hiring outside firms to handle our training just hasn't been working out. We need someone like you to get our new in-house training department up and running.

RON

I'm sure it would be the right move for both of us, Reed.

EXT. MERCANTILE BUILDING. DAY.

Jane exits the cab and enters the drab, brown brick building.

INT. MERCANTILE BUILDING FOURTH FLOOR LOBBY. DAY.

The fourth floor light glows, the doors open and Jane emerges, passing a small plaque bearing the name WARING AND ASSOCIATES on a plain beige wall.

INT. WARING BREAKROOM. DAY.

Seated at a table on their break talking angrily are a uniformed group of Waring employees: a white maintenance man named JOHN, a black maintenance man in his late fifties named OTTO, and three women from housekeeping: MOLLY, ETHEL and SHARON. As Jane enters, they stop talking but smile when they realize it's her. She goes to the coffee machine and serves herself.

JANE

What's the matter with you guys?

OTTO

I don't know how you can stay so calm and work here, Jane.

JANE

You're about done here anyway, aren't you, Otto?

OTTO

Nate comes back next week.

They scoot their chairs over and make room so Jane can sit with them.

JANE

No chance you can stay on?

OTTO

Nope. The agency already told me my new assignment.

MOLLY

But we'll still be stuck here.

JANE

Okay, so what's going on?

They all start talking at once. Sharon points to a knee, John to his back. Jane listens, nods, smiles.

MOLLY

But if Mike thinks we'll park in the farthest garage, he's got another think coming, even if he IS the president of this outfit.

JANE

Did you go to your supervisor?

SHARON

He's the one told us.

JANE

Okay, I'll talk to Mike, but I'll bet this is just one of those "the president said so" fantasies.

MOLLY

What we need's a training session on how to stop rumors.

The others nod, smiling.

JANE

If you were serious, I'd set one up right away. Meanwhile, let's not look for trouble, okay?

JOHN

That's easy for you to say. You ain't NEVER had the problems we do.

JANE

I wouldn't say that.

MOLLY

Well, I would. You're a REAL person, Jane, if you catch my meanin', one of the good guys, but things just come easy for you, not bein' at the bottom like us.

Molly pats Jane on the arm.

OTTO

As Napoleon said, "It is but a step from victory to defeat."

JANE

We're going to miss you AND your famous quotes, Otto, although I don't know that I like THAT one.

They all laugh.

INT. WARING PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. DAY.

JANE

Mike, the natives are restless.

MIKE

What is it this time?

JANE

Parking.

MIKE

Parking? What now?

JANE

You haven't sent down any changes, have you?

MIKE

No, why would I?

JANE

That's just what I thought. See you later.

MIKE

Wait, Jane—I needed to talk to you anyway. Take a seat.

JANE

What is it?

MIKE

My niece is graduating this month with the same degree you have. How'd you like a helper?

JANE

You just told me last week...

MIKE

I know—this is a small company, I can't afford another trainer—But she's family, Jane. What am I supposed to do?

Jane gives him a quizzical look and shrugs.

INT. WARING HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane passes a glassed office. Inside, heavy balding HERB in shirt and loosened tie, is waving a handful of pencils at spinsterish MARY. Jane hesitates.

HERB

You women always have to challenge everything we say. What are you, some kind of femi-nazi?

MARY

I'm NOT challenging you, Herb. You just take everything in some macho competitive way!

Jane smiles and continues walking.

INT. LANDING WORLD PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. DAY.

DARREN LANDING sits in a shadow behind his massive desk faced by Miller and LIZ LANDING, a well-dressed bleached-blond, early 30's. They are laughing. Windows fill one wall overlooking the Missouri River.

LIZ

It's a great plan, Dad—everyone's excited.

DARREN

Yes, it should be fun. I like this Kavanaugh woman's credentials and experience. She'll be perfect. And Lipman's looking a little more aggressive than she is.

LIZ

I agree. They both looked good on the tapes of their interviews.

MILLER

All right then. I'll put the hiring plan in motion.

DARREN

Let the "better man" win.

LIZ

Or woman.

Darren keys his computer console and two holograms appear on his desk of Jane and Ron as they each sat in front of Miller, being interviewed.

DARREN

Actually, you know what I'm really hoping for here?

LIZ

What, Dad?

DARREN

A win, win, win scenario.

LIZ

I think you're asking for too much.

MILLER

I think we should talk about another little personnel problem. Catherine Macmillan says she needs more money, a lot more.

DARREN

We're already overpaying her for what she can do.

LIZ

Dad...she's almost family.

DARREN

Okay, okay. Tell her to come see me, Reed. I'll talk to her.

As Liz and Miller get up to leave, Darren keys in a command, and the Jane hologram starts talking. Liz shakes her head.

JANE

The first thing I would do is an assessment of managers and key personnel, including some of the people who went through training.

Darren presses another key.

RON

No, I wouldn't waste much time on an initial assessment--you can really chase your tail trying to figure out what people think they want. I'd start conducting training sessions right away, then maybe do a little assessing after things get going.

INT. JANE'S OFFICE SUITE. DAY.

Jane's secretary, MEG, looks up from typing, hands Jane a stack of messages and waits as Jane skims through it.

JANE

Herb and Mary are at it again.

MEG

Well, he's so rigid and old-fashioned.

JANE

And Mary's not? Tell me this: What do you see when you look at them?

MEG

A die-hard bachelor and a hopeless old maid. Why? What do you see?

JANE

Something else entirely.

Jane is heading into her office and momentarily fumbles the stack of messages. She manages to keep from losing hold of most of them.

MEG

You know, that wouldn't happen if you'd let me enter your calls in the new computer program. It's so easy to...

JANE

If God meant us to use computers, He wouldn't have given us brains.

MEG

Jane, everything is going to be on computer pretty soon. You'd better get used to them.

JANE

I can't relate to something that only goes beep.

INT. JANE'S OFFICE. DAY.

In the windowless, small office, Alice in Wonderland characters march along a shelf near the framed photo of a handsome man.

MEG (OS)

You just missed that call from Landing World. Want me to get him back for you?

Jane is almost to her desk and is holding that message.

JANE

No. I'll call him after lunch. Send Herb and Mary in as soon as you can get ahold of them.

INT. CAFE. DAY.

CATHERINE MACMILLAN, a very well-preserved and stylish late fifties, sits with a younger man. A large rectangular present sits on the floor beside his chair.

MAN

Are you sure you can get the data we want? We're paying you a lot of money.

CAT

You don't understand—access to anything above the first two floors is only restricted to outsiders—like you. I can get in. I work there.

MAN

When? We don't want to be sitting around indefinitely waiting for the delivery. Give me something to go on.

CAT

If things go according to my plan, I'll be able to do it a week from Tuesday sometime between 8 a.m. and noon. Is that specific enough?

INT. RESTAURANT. DAY.

Jane and her new-age-dressed friend MARIS enter. A hostess seats them.

JANE

It's just stupid, Maris. I spend so much time mediating their trumped up problems, I don't know who has time to do any work at Waring.

MARIS

And then you come to me and bend my ear, and I end up giving free advice.

JANE

What good is having a best friend who's a psychologist if you can't take advantage of her once in a while?

MARIS

Jane, at least half my clients have work-related conflicts.

The waiter arrives with water, but Jane points to her menu and indicates she needs more time.

JANE

Makes me wonder if there's a company out there where nobody cares whether the pencils are in the cup with their points up.

MARIS

That's what Herb and Mary were arguing about?

JANE

I spent two hours with them, Maris, and you know what the REAL issue was?

MARIS

Not pencils, I bet.

JANE

It was so easy, I couldn't believe I didn't see it right off. I mean, I had an idea, but...

MARIS

Jane!

JANE

They LIKE each other—yes in THAT way, but Herb was afraid of a sexual harrassment rap, and SHE thought Waring had a no-fraternization policy.

MARIS

Does it?

JANE

NO! Add that to my list of president-said-so fantasies.

Maris waves to the waiter.

MARIS

Don't be too hard on yourself. It's not like you have a crystal ball, and it sounds like they put up a good smokescreen.

The waiter arrives and sets down a basket of breadsticks.

JANE

I'll have the special, no onions.

MARIS

I'll take the celestial salad.

The waiter leaves.

JANE

Yup—it was all an illusion, and we ALL bought into it.

The hostess passes by leading Ron Lipman to a table.

MARIS

Did you go on that interview this morning?

JANE

Your timing is incredible. See that guy over there, just being seated?

Jane leans a breadstick discreetly in Ron's direction. Maris nods.

JANE

He was there, too. He went in to the director's office when I came out.

MARIS

Competition?

JANE

I don't know. This place calls me out of the blue, practically offers me the job, and—I haven't even told you about Mike hiring his niece yet—to be my assistant, no less—after he told me I couldn't have a raise...

MARIS

Jane, you're starting to babble. Look, about the time you need it, something better comes along. I know it wasn't always that way for you, but your luck has held steady for, what, ten years now? Trust the fates!

JANE

I was at the bottom once, Maris, ON it, STUCK there. I don't want to go back.

MARIS

Who's talking about the bottom? You've changed, Jane—you changed your attitude, went back to school, got a great job, met Sam—once you figured out how to let good things happen to you, your life has been rosey. Nothing bad is going to happen unless YOU let it. Remember that.

JANE

It's just hard to forget all those years of dead-end jobs, bad relationships and overall misery. Sometimes I can't believe I'm that person.

MARIS

You're not. You reinvented yourself, and now you're who you are today. You really have come a long way, baby.

They hold up their glasses in a mock toast and smile. The waiter arrives and sets their food on the table. Jane's steak is piled high with onions.

Ron is just putting his menu down when an attractive blonde, TRACY, with her friend KRISSY in tow, stops suddenly at his table.

TRACY

My god, it's Ron Lipman, spoiled rich boy, minus his chaperone. (turns to companion) Look, Krissy, this is the guy I was just telling you about—the one whose mother offered to pay me to stay away from him.

Krissy looks uncomfortable, smiles weakly at Ron.

RON

Hello, Tracy.

TRACY

Eating without Mother today?

RON

Mother passed away two months ago.

TRACY

No kidding. That must feel odd, not having her around to do all your thinking for you, make your decisions.

RON

Shut up, Tracy. Mother was a wonderful woman. Her connections may have gotten me a top executive job. I only wish she was here to celebrate with me.

TRACY

Job? You can't possibly need to work.

RON

It was in her will—I can't touch her money unless I keep working for another ten years. You know how mother believed work builds character.

TRACY

Has it? Built yours, I mean?

RON

Goodbye, Tracy.

TRACY

At least now you can have a life, start dating...

Her friend pulls her away.

TRACY (Cont'd)

...IF anybody would HAVE you!

INT. TAXI CAB. DAY.

Cat upwraps the large present. It contains a feminine satchel, a small disk drive sitting on a pile of money and a note that says: THE REST WILL BE PAID ON DELIVERY.

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. DAY.

Darren, again concealed in shadow, is watching a hologram of Reed Miller arriving at the Personnel office, carrying his nameplate.

MELISSA (OS)

Another management type interview today, Reed?

MILLER

The last two. Pull up the Kavanaugh and Lipman files for me, will you?

He goes into the office. Darren enters a command, and a holo of Jane appears seated in front of Miller.

MILLER (OS)

We'll be making our decision within the next week or so, Jane. After that, when do you think you could start?

JANE

I'd need three to four weeks for a smooth transition, to give notice, and hire and train my replacement.

Darren punches in a command, and Ron appears.

RON

I can leave at any time, Reed.

MILLER (OS)

You don't have to give notice?

RON

I'm sure I could get around such a trivial detail. You just let me know when you're ready for me. I'm eager to get started.

In the shadows, Darren taps his fingers.

INT. RON'S OFFICE. DAY.

Ron at his desk is surrounded by trophies. He has his eyes fixed on a page of personals ads spread before him, while his assistant, MABEL, stands at attention.

RON

If you'd been entering the data the way you were supposed to, Mabel, all you'd have to do now is collate it, and that report would be finished. You just have to work harder and stop wasting time socializing with the secretaries! I need that report before noon tomorrow, but I have some important phone calls to make. You're going to have to learn to handle projects like this alone!

Mabel looks close to tears, and is shaking with anger as she stomps out.

Ron picks up his telephone receiver and punches in a 900 number.

RON

Hi, SEXY AND AVAILABLE. I'm Ron. I'm a well-off, executive type, 45 years old, never been married, who'd really like to meet you for a drink tonight. If you're interested, call me back real soon.

INT. KAVANAUGH BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Jane and her husband SAM are cuddling in bed.

SAM

So that's what it's like making love to a Landing World executive.

JANE

It's not mine yet. Besides, I feel like such a traitor.

SAM

Why?

JANE

I LOVE Waring, Sam—the job, the people. They're great. It's fun to work there.

SAM

(rolling over) It's not like you to doubt yourself like this, Jane.

JANE

I know, I know—Waring means no future, I'm ready for more, blah, blah, blah. But I can't help feeling uneasy.

SAM

(sleepily)

What could possibly go wrong?

Jane rolls onto her back.

JANE

Do you ever feel like you have it "too good"? That if you take one step in the wrong direction, you'll lose EVERYTHING and have to start all over again at the bottom? Because this Landing World thing isn't a step—it's a huge leap...

Sam's snoring interrupts her. She sits there staring blankly at him, then curls up next to him. He MOANS pleasurably.

INT. BAR. NIGHT.

Ron and his date sit sipping their drinks. Ron tries to put his hand over hers, but she pulls it away.

JUDY

I can't believe you asked me that!

RON

Come on, Judy—it's not that far from here. It's a beautiful place.

JUDY

I'm NOT going to ANY cemetery with a guy I just MET—you have to be some kind of psycho ghoul!

RON

Bitch.

JUDY

Asshole.

Judy throws what's left of her drink in his face and storms out.

INT. JANE'S OFFICE. DAY.

Jane is writing on a legal pad when the phone rings.

JANE

Jane Kavanaugh.

MILLER

This is Reed Miller, Jane, and I have good news. We'd like you to head our new training department.

JANE

That's terrific...thank you...but I thought you said you wouldn't be making your decision for another week or so.

MILLER

Well, the president decided he wanted us to get moving on this sooner than originally planned. We have a management orientation session starting a week from Monday, and we'd need you to start then. We won't be having another for quite a while. Now that won't be a problem, will it?

JANE

Reed, would it be possible for me to think this over and get back to you on Monday?

MILLER

I really need to know by close of business today, Jane. Once the president decides something, things happen fast around here.

JANE

I can see that. Would everything else be as we discussed?

MILLER

Yes—salary, benefits, office with secretary, staff—all the same. No more surprises, I promise.

JANE

All right, thanks—I'll get back to you by five o'clock.

Jane presses down on the telephone cradle button to clear the line, then hits a speed-dial number, changes her mind and hangs up the receiver.

INT. SECRETARIAL POOL OUTSIDE RON'S OFFICE. DAY.

Ron is strutting past the secretarial pool. He gives a man an "okay" sign and mouths "I got the job." Mabel, standing at a secretary's desk, watches him.

SECRETARY

If he leaves, do you think Jack'll give you his job?

MABEL

He should. I'm doing it already.

SECRETARY

I feel sorry for where he's going. They're not going to be happy when they find out what they got.

MABEL

Jack gave him a really good reference. And it's not that Ron's a bad guy—he's smart.

SECRETARY

Some people are just too smart, if you get my drift.

MABEL

I got it, and if we're lucky, Mr. Too Smart will become Mr. Gone real soon.

They're mugging at each other when Ron walks up behind Mabel, startling her.

RON

Mabel, where's that report—the morning's half over, and here you stand, gossiping again. If you can't get the job done...

MABEL

If you'll go back to your office and look at your monitor, you'll see that I've already pulled it up for you to review.

RON

I just hope it doesn't need many corrections or changes.

Ron stalks off.

MABEL

Did you run it through spellcheck?

SECRETARY

Nope.

MABEL

He's a terrible speller.

SECRETARY

I know.

EXT. RIVERFRONT HARBORMASTER'S OFFICE. DAY.

A cab pulls up, drops Jane off and drives away. She rushes toward the door, catches a

heel and loses the shoe. She rubs her foot, puts the shoe back on and enters the building.

INT. SAM'S OFFICE. DAY.

SAM

Hi, babe! What a great surprise!

He gets up from his desk and goes toward her.

JANE

I hope you have a few free minutes because I have to talk to you.

SAM

(opening his arms to her) You can't want a divorce, everything's been wonderful between us.

She walks into his embrace.

JANE

Landing World just called. The job's mine if I can decide today and start a week from Monday.

She gives him an anguished look.

SAM

Let's get out of here.

They walk along the dock area, Jane gesturing wildly, Sam keeping a hand at her elbow or the back of her neck.

JANE

I hate being thrown off balance like this. I knew it was too-good-to-be-true, I knew it! It's going to be a disaster...

SAM

Jane! What's WITH you?

He takes her by both shoulders and turns her side to side.

JANE

What are you doing?

SAM

Looking for your panic button so I can turn it off.

JANE

I'm being an idiot, aren't I.

SAM

It IS a you I've never seen before...

JANE

Okay. (she smiles) I just need to get ahold of myself, it'll be fine. It's a great opportunity (she perks up). I'll take the job.

She smiles brilliantly at him and hugs him.

SAM

See? Simple! You just have to have the right attitude. Now let's go out to lunch and celebrate.

INT. WARING PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. DAY.

Mike is talking on the phone but waves Jane in.

MIKE

That's good, Sal. Call me back when you get the results.

Mike hangs up the phone.

JANE

Sorry to barge in. I need a moment.

MIKE

Landing World?

JANE

How did you know?

MIKE

They checked your references. You going to take it?

JANE

If I do, I have to start a week from Monday, and they want my decision by five today.

MIKE

Kind of sudden, isn't it?

JANE

I know--makes me wonder.

MIKE

They're a reputable outfit, Jane, if not a bit unorthodox.

JANE

Unorthodox? What do you mean?

MIKE

Nothing really--It's just kind of mysterious, and I think Darren Landing likes it that way. It's like Shangri-La or something.

JANE

Great, Mike. Make me feel worse.

MIKE

Hey, don't get nervous because of a few rumors. I can't believe I'm saying that to YOU of all people. Take the job. I'll call my niece. You'll be fine, Waring'll be fine.

JANE

You're the best, Mike. Thanks.

Mike steps around his desk and hugs her.

MIKE

Of course, we'll miss you.

INT. JANE'S OFFICE. DAY.

When Meg enters, Jane motions for Meg to sit next to her on the settee.

JANE

Meg, I don't know a better way to put this, so I'll just be straight about it. Working with you these few years has been a joy...

MEG

You're LEAVING! Oh, Jane...

Meg bursts into tears. Jane consoles her.

MEG (Cont'd)

Take me with you.

INT. JACK MITCHELL'S OFFICE. DAY.

Ron lounges in a chair opposite Jack who is leafing through the report.

JACK

Have you read this?

RON

Read it? I wrote it. It's not my best work, but it's not like this was for a competition or anything.

JACK

How do you spell "project"?

RON

P-R-O-G, no, maybe J—Mabel's supposed to check the spelling.

JACK

Who's supposed...

RON

Talk to Mabel. I want to discuss the Landing World offer with you.

JACK

I thought you said you accepted the job and need to start in a week. What's to discuss?

RON

Next week. I don't see any need for me to hang around, do you? After all, Mabel can handle the fort until you hire the right man. This was the last of my pending projects. What do you think?

JACK

Suits me. And, Ron, make me look GOOD, okay?

INT. JANE'S OFFICE. DAY.

Jane dials her telephone.

JANE

Hello, Reed, this is Jane. I've made up my mind. I'll take the job.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE. DAY.

Reed sits in a plush upper floor office, overlooking the Missouri River. The furnishings and equipment are very high-tech.

MILLER

That's wonderful, Jane. Get here at 8:30 sharp and see the receptionist in the lobby. She'll tell you what to do.

Reed hangs up his phone, but it rings again. He answers it.

MILLER

Reed Miller. Oh, hello, Ron. No, there's no need for you to start any earlier. Right, the orientation session. Yes, 8:30 in the lobby. See you then.

Miller hangs up the phone. The clock on his desk shows 4:59 pm.

INT. RON'S OFFICE. DAY.

Ron is busily packing his trophies but stops when he gets to the large photograph of his mother. He kisses it.

RON

There's no stopping me now, Mom, I'm on my way UP.

He flips the photo into the air, catches it and pretends to slam dunk it into a box.

INT. KAVANAUGH TV ROOM. NIGHT.

Sitting in front of their TV, Jane is reading while Sam plays Super Mario Bros on the Nintendo.

SAM

That was such a great dinner, we should open a restaurant. Hey, look at this.

Mario is swimming underwater.

JANE

You've shown me that before.

SAM

No, this isn't the regular chamber. I found it by accident and now I can't get Mario out.

Mario bumps repeatedly against the exit pipe at the right end of the chamber.

JANE

So now what?

SAM

Now I guess I call Paul.

Sam picks up the portable phone and dials a number.

SAM (Cont'd)

Hey, buddy, I'm not calling too late, am I? Good. No, I think I just found a secret room in Super Mario Brothers. Yeah, I know it's an old game, but I still enjoy playing it. Oh, I can't? Yeah, I will, thanks.

Sam hangs up the phone. He turns off the game and starts it over.

JANE

What happened? Paul couldn't help you get Mario out?

SAM

There IS no way out. The fun is supposed to be in finding that chamber, but once you're in, you're stuck. Come on, let's play a two-player game.

JANE

You know I'm no good at computer games. Besides...

SAM

You're feeling a bit punk.

JANE

How could you tell?

SAM

We have vays of knowing zeez sings.

JANE

Did I tell you Mike said his niece can start Monday?

SAM

Jane! Forget Waring. Forget Landing. How 'bout I make mad, passionate love to you, let you beat me at cards then do the dishes?

JANE

Maybe an easy game, like War.

She has reached into the coffee table drawer and pulled out a deck of cards while Sam turned off the game and TV. As she begins to shuffle, she loses control of the pack, and cards fly everywhere. She gives Sam a sheepish look. He sweeps her up in his arms and carries her off to the bedroom.

INT. LANDING WORLD PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. DAY.

Darren, concealed in shadow, watches the hologram of Jane sitting on his desk.

MILLER (OS)

How do you feel about competition?

JANE

I don't think competition has a place at work. I prefer to foster teamwork and cooperation.

Darren keys a command, and Ron replaces Jane.

RON

It's very healthy—gives the employees a chance to show their strengths—points out the losers, you know, the ones the company probably should get rid of anyway. I'm all for it.

Cat interrupts. Darren turns off the hologram.

CAT

Darren, can you spare a minute?

DARREN

Reed said you want a raise.

CAT

Monty's selling the house out from under me, Darren.

DARREN

That house is too big for you anyway, Cat, now that all your kids are grown and gone.

CAT

Don't tell me where I can LIVE, Darren!

DARREN

I'm sorry, Cat, I didn't mean...

CAT

I know—me too—ever since the divorce, Monty keeps finding new ways to squeeze me tighter and tighter into this nasty little box, you know?

DARREN

It's just that I can't give you more money—You're at the top of the scale already. It'd be too unfair to the others.

CAT

Let me be part of this next orientation session, then. I know I haven't done it before, but I need the experience. It would take my mind off...

DARREN

But Ralph and Peggy...

CAT

I already talked to them. Ralph would love to swap—he has his hands full getting ready now, and it's only going to get worse.

DARREN

All right—I'll talk to Ralph and let you know. And, Cat, don't let Monty get you—just cut back a little more.

CAT

NO! That's exactly what he wants!

INT. LANDING WORLD LOBBY. DAY.

Jane enters and heads for the reception desk. Ron is already there. Jane looks surprised but waits. One wall displays an AT&T-type technology commercial.

RECEPTIONIST

This will only work on that first elevator. You slide it in the slot and the doors will open. The elevator will take you to the second floor where you'll be greeted by Alice. She'll take over from there. Clip the card key to your pocket and wear it at all times.

Ron takes the card key and heads for the elevator. Jane approaches the desk.

JANE
I'm Jane Kavanaugh.

RECEPTIONIST
Welcome, Jane. Here's your card key. It will...

JANE
...only work on that elevator, I'm supposed to see Alice on the second floor?

RECEPTIONIST
Right! Good luck.

Jane hurries to the elevator, but the doors close before she can catch them. She slides her card key into the slot and waits. A few seconds later, the doors open, and Jane enters.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane exits the elevator and is overwhelmed with the videos of pastoral fantasy scenes that cover the walls. In front of her is a large conference armchair, upholstered in grey, with what look like wings attached on either side of the shoulder and knee areas. A metallic voice startles her.

ALICE
Jane Kavanaugh.

The source of the noise came from near Jane's left elbow. She looks down. A three-foot-tall robot with a flat head waits there.

JANE
Yes, I'm Jane Kavanaugh.

ALICE
Please sit.

Jane positions herself in the chair, and the wings close across her chest and knees. The chair turns out to be motorized and whisks her down the hall, around a corner and through open double doors.

JANE
What is this, some kind of funhouse?

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Jane's chair takes her past Ron seated on the left and positions itself in a row on the right side of the room where the walls dance with images of carnival rides being controlled from computer terminals. As Jane counts the six others in the room, the double doors shut automatically, the lights dim, and the wall in front is filled with images of the world, zooming in to St. Louis, then to Landing World and the words

WELCOME TO LANDING WORLD'S CLERICAL AND SUPPORT ORIENTATION.

NARRATOR (OS)

Welcome to Landing World. As new members of our clerical and support staff, you are a vital link among the 480 members of the Landing World family...

Ron struggles with the wing restraints on his chair, finally finds a handle on the side of the right arm and pushes it down. The wings release. He bolts for the doors. Jane releases herself and follows.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Alice is standing sentry-like outside the double doors when Ron bursts through. The walls now display jungle scenes.

RON

I need to speak to whoever's in charge. There's been a mistake.

Jane stands just inside the door, with it cracked open enough so she can see and hear Ron and Alice.

ALICE

State the nature of the mistake.

RON

I'm not clerical and support, you tinhead. I'm management. I'm supposed to be in a MANAGEMENT orientation right now!

ALICE

Please return to the orientation room. Your presence here is not authorized.

RON

There's no point in my going back there—I'm NOT clerical OR support. Now get me somebody I can TALK to, a supervisor, security, ANYBODY!

ALICE

No one is available at this time. If you would like to leave a message, state your name and a brief description after the tone.

Alice beeps.

RON

My name is Ron Lipman. I'm the new training department head and am supposed to be...

Alice beeps again. Jane's eyes have gone wide. She pulls back and lets the door close.

ALICE

Your message will be forwarded to the next available supervisor. Please return to the orientation...

Ron doesn't wait for Alice to finish. Instead, he trots to the elevator. When he tries to slide in his key card, the panel flashes a message: OUT OF SERVICE. Alice rolls to Ron's side.

RON

Listen, you brainless, flatheaded dwarf, you'd be the perfect woman if you had full lips.

INT. A CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

Seated in front of a bank of monitors and controls, two technicians are guffawing.

MALE TECHNICIAN

I told you we should have given Alice lips.

FEMALE TECHNICIAN

You're disgusting.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

The program stops, and the lights brighten the room. The six remaining seated trainees turn to look at Jane, but a side door near the front wall opens, and Liz emerges carrying a stack of papers and walking in a halting gate. The walls come alive with park and outdoor scenes.

Liz sees Jane and goes to the podium.

LIZ

Can I help you with something?

JANE

Yes, could I speak with you...privately?

LIZ

You'll have to come up here.

Somewhat embarrassed with all eyes on her, Jane walks up front.

JANE

I'm Jane Kavanaugh, the new head of your training department.

LIZ

Hello, Jane. I'm Liz Landing, but it seems like there's been some sort of mistake.

JANE

Yes, there has! I should be...

Ron has returned and stops a few feet from Jane.

LIZ

Landing World doesn't have a training department.

JANE

I'm supposed to START one and be the director or supervisor or whatever you call managers.

LIZ

Really. Now that's interesting.

She looks at Ron.

LIZ

You want to take your seat?

Ron steps closer to her.

RON

No, I don't. I'm the new training department head, and I demand to know what's going on here.

LIZ

Who hired you?

JANE AND RON

Reed Miller.

They look at each other warily.

LIZ

Who?

JANE

It was downstairs in Personnel, he even had his own nameplate that said Reed Miller, Director.

LIZ

Both of you saw this, this Miller person who hired you to head a department we don't have? This is some kind of joke, right?

Jane shakes her head.

RON

If there's a joke being played here, it's on us, lady. You obviously don't know this place very well—we need to speak to someone with more authority.

Jane flinches. Liz remains unruffled.

LIZ

What's your name?

RON

Ron Lipman.

LIZ

The two of you might as well stay put for now—As soon as I'm done here, I'll see if I can sort this out. In the meantime, I need you to do one thing: Don't discuss this with anyone else—we wouldn't want to disturb the others, now would we.

JANE

But I'm supposed to be in a management orientation.

RON

So I am.

LIZ

There IS no management session going on—our turnover is so low, this is the only orientation program we've planned all year. There wouldn't be much difference anyway, so as I said you might as well stay put.

Liz smiles brightly at them. Jane looks thoughtful. Ron's jaw clenches.

When Jane returns to her seat, the middle-aged woman next to her leans over.

PEGGY

You got a problem, honey? What's your name anyway?

JANE

Jane, and no—it's nothing.

PEGGY

Well, I'm Peggy, and I don't fool easy. You got a problem—it's all over your face.

Jane touches her face then manages a weak smile.

INT. LANDING WORLD PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. DAY.

From his shadowy cover, Darren is watching a hologram of Jane.

MILLER (OS)

Which would you say you tend to take: the path of least resistance or the road less traveled?

JANE

For me the path of least resistance has always worked best. I know when I've made the right choice because everything falls right into place.

Darren keys in the command to bring up Ron's hologram.

RON

I think I'm a typical male. I love a challenge. That path of least resistance stuff is for wusses—you know, the type who take the easy way out.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Liz is shuffling papers at the podium.

LIZ

That was a spectacular introduction, wasn't it? Unfortunately, that's all we've developed for our new orientation program, so I'll do my best to take it from here. Yes?

A trainee is holding a hand up in the front row. It's Cat.

CAT

Excuse me, but could you undo these things?

Cat is pulling against the wings across her chest.

LIZ

I'm so sorry. They were supposed to release automatically. But I'm afraid I don't know how they work.

Jane turns to Peggy and whispers.

JANE

Man, zero. Machine, one.

Peggy smiles wanly. Jane shows her where the release lever is. Ron stands up and addresses the group.

RON

There's a lever on the right side.

Ron helps the others release the restraints.

LIZ

Thank you, Ron. Now, let's see. Here's an agenda for each of you.

She holds a stack of papers out to the person nearest her who comes forward, takes them and passes them out.

LIZ (Cont'd)

The second item, the president's address, has had to be canceled, so let's proceed to fill out your paperwork.

JANE

This is unbelievable.

PEG

Yeah, it's neat, ain't it?

JANE

That's not what I meant.

Liz presses a control key on the podium, and laptops emerge from the left arms of the eight occupied chairs facing her. The laptops slide forward on an extension and position themselves in front of their occupants.

Jane recoils, then relaxes. She sees Ron lift the lid on his laptop, so she follows suit.

Liz enters another command at the podium console, and the laptop screens fill with a title page: NEW EMPLOYEE FORMS AND BENEFITS.

LIZ

It worked? Great. I have to leave you for a while,
so just follow the instructions on your monitors.

As Liz exits through the side door, walking with a slightly halting gate, Jane reads her screen. It says PRESS ANY KEY TO CONTINUE. Jane hits the ESC key. The screen goes blank.

JANE

What did I do?

Peggy looks over.

PEGGY

Which key didja hit, honey?

JANE

I don't know—this one I guess.

PEGGY

Uh huh. You don't know nothin' about computers, do ya?

JANE

You do?

PEGGY

Worked with 'em at my last job—nothin' as fancy
as this, but close enough.

Peggy shows Jane how to get back into the right screen and which keys to hit.

JANE

Can I ask you something?

PEGGY

Shoot.

JANE
Who interviewed you?

PEGGY
The gentleman in personnel, Max Anderson.

JANE
He wasn't the director then?

PEGGY
Um, yeah he was. It was on his name thing, on his desk.

JANE
How long ago?

PEGGY
Give or take a day, 'bout three weeks back, I'd say.

JANE
Have you seen him since?

PEGGY
Yeah, on my way in today. You sure ask a lot of questions.

Ron is zipping through the screens, pressing keys. He finishes and starts looking around. Cat gives him a smile.

CAT
I could use some help.

Ron pivots his laptop aside and walks over to Cat's chair and kneels beside her.

INT. CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

Liz is sitting between the two technicians watching a bank of monitors. In the right screen, Peggy is helping Jane operate the laptop. In the left screen, Ron is helping Cat.

Ron stands and walks up to the podium, putting him in the center monitor screen. He goes behind the podium and starts examining its control panel.

LIZ
Curiouser and curiouser.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Liz enters from the side door, walking in her characteristic halting gate, and heads for the podium. Ron looks up. Jane pushes her laptop aside and hurries up front. The walls now display rainbows and other weather scenes.

RON
Any news?

LIZ

I'm afraid not. You shouldn't be up here.

RON

I shouldn't BE here at all.

LIZ

Please take your seats. I'm sure I'll have some news for you before much longer.

JANE

Maybe I should go downstairs, talk to Personnel myself.

Ron looks hopeful.

LIZ

The director—Max Anderson—left to go out of town this morning. He won't be back till Wednesday—that's why I'm having so much trouble getting any information for you. I'm sorry.

JANE

That's all right—we can wait.

RON

(Under his breath)

Don't speak for ME, lady.

Ron sits and repositions his laptop but leaves it closed. Jane leaves hers aside.

LIZ

I'm afraid there's been another change in our agenda. Due to some unexpected, um, activities upstairs, instead of a company tour this morning, we're going to switch with Wednesday's CPR training. I also forgot to tell you that portions of this session may be recorded for quality control purposes.

Jane looks at Peggy and whispers.

JANE

Shouldn't we have to sign something?

PEGGY

Nah—lotsa places record stuff.

Jane scans the room for cameras. She can't find any, but there's a large bubble in the middle of the ceiling. Liz is looking straight at Jane.

LIZ

Are there any questions? No? Okay. Stephanie Hiller will be here in a few minutes with the equipment. Thank you.

Liz walks carefully to the side door.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Stephanie is walking toward the orientation room beside a motorized table that carries a very real looking CPR dummy.

The side door opens, and Liz comes through.

LIZ

They're all yours.

STEPHANIE

Tired?

LIZ

Exhausted. I can't wait to get back into my chair.

STEPHANIE

Harvey has it around the corner.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Everyone is standing up talking and stretching. Ron and Cat are together.

CAT

This'll be a snap. I have to jump start my mother's heart almost every week when I drive her to the doctor.

RON

Then you're already certified?

CAT

Oh, no. Are you?

RON

No, but it can't be that hard.

Stephanie and the dummy table stop in the center aisle. She leaves the dummy there and goes to the podium.

STEPHANIE

Okay, everyone, I'm Stephanie, and if you'll all get back in your seats, we can get started. The procedure is this: we'll watch a set of instructions on video then practice each technique on Grace here. When you're ready to show me and have me sign you off on each phase, let me know. After I've checked you off on the skills, you can take the written test. The whole process should take us into the lunch hour, but food service will wait for us.

Stephanie enters a command, but nothing happens. She fiddles with the controls. Finally the video starts, and she sits in an unoccupied chair.

Montage of CPR techniques being practiced on Grace, Stephanie having trouble getting Grace to function properly, Grace's mouth being swabbed with alcohol, and Stephanie checking the trainees performing CPR.

Cat has difficulty breathing into Grace's mouth—Grace's "lungs" don't inflate. Stephanie demonstrates. Cat tries again and finally gets the lungs to inflate to the minimum acceptable level. Ron watches Cat, performs each technique perfectly, and then helps her.

Everyone finishes the last check-off point.

STEPHANIE

Okay, let's get back in our seats. The written test is on your laptops.

Jane cringes but manages to begin. Peggy gives her a "Need any help?" look, but Jane makes the "okay" sign.

INT. LARGE ROOM. DAY.

Maintenance, housekeeping and food service employees are scurrying to get tables, chairs, carts, utensils, dishes, food items in warming bins, and trays set up, transforming the room into a dining area.

Three female employees who look like secretaries position themselves near the door, get the okay from the person supervising this operation, and relax in nearby chairs.

Four others go through the food line, stop at its end, wait a few seconds, then walk to a table. The supervisor gives her approval. They return to the food line and set their trays down at its beginning.

The supervisor looks everything over, smiles at everyone and takes her position behind the food line.

About forty employees enter the room, go through the food line filling their trays, then seat themselves around the room at tables, leaving four tables empty in the center of the room.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Ron finishes his test, hits the enter key, pushes his laptop away and rises. Everyone else is still taking the test. He looks down at his laptop. He scored 100 percent.

Ron heads toward the double doors.

INT. CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

MALE TECH

He's on the move again!

FEMALE TECH

We're supposed to let him go, right?

MALE TECH

Right.

FEMALE TECH

I don't see any reason why we have to be boring about this, though, do you?

MALE TECH

Not at all. Not at all. I think Alice could use some excitement in her life.

FEMALE TECH

I agree completely.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Ron is walking toward the elevator and Alice is rolling along beside him.

ALICE

Where are you going, Ron?

RON

Downstairs, to Personnel.

ALICE

Are you coming back?

RON

I suppose.

ALICE

I want you to come back, Ron.

RON

That's a switch—aren't you going to try and stop me?

ALICE

I like you, Ron. I will help you.

Ron eyes the robot with suspicion. For the first time he notices that the previously-decorated walls are now blank grey. He sees the bubbles set every 10 feet in the ceiling.

RON

Very funny, guys. Hilarious.

He reaches the elevator and slides in his key card. The doors open.

INT. PERSONNEL OFFICE. DAY.

Melissa seats herself and turns on her computer terminal. Ron enters.

MELISSA
May I help you?

RON
Do you remember me from about a week and a half ago?

Melissa studies his face then shakes her head.

MELISSA
I see so many faces in here.

RON
I interviewed with Reed Miller. Now do you remember?

Discomfort overcomes Melissa.

MELISSA
I'm sorry.

RON
You do remember Miller, though, right?

MELISSA
Our director's name is...

RON
I know—Max Anderson.

MELISSA
And he's...

RON
Out of town. I want to know about Reed Miller.
Where is he?

MELISSA
Please, you'll have to talk to Max. I really can't...

RON
So set it up. I'll talk to him.

MELISSA
I have no authority.

RON
Look, you...

LIZ (OS)
Is there something I can do?

Ron pivots. Liz is standing in the doorway. Relief floods Melissa's face.

RON
Yeah, tell me what's really going on.

LIZ
I'm trying to find out.

RON
How much longer do I have to wait?

LIZ
I wish I knew. Now why don't you come with me?

RON
I won't go back to the orientation room.

LIZ
Well, it's either that or the door. Those are the choices, Ron.

Ron tenses, considers. Then he walks toward Liz. He is clearly disgruntled.

RON
Lead the way.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Jane's laptop screen shows a 98 percent score on her test. She and Peggy are sitting in extra chairs flanking Cat.

JANE
How many compressions?

CAT
Six. No, four. I don't know.

PEGGY
This isn't difficult, honey. Stop trying so hard.

Cat hears the doors open and looks up. Ron enters. She waves at him.

CAT
Excuse me.

She hurries toward Ron and leads him to a pair of unoccupied chairs.

PEGGY
She always does that.

JANE
Always? Do you know Cat?

PEGGY

Uh...(lightly) kind of.

JANE

That sounded like more than "kind of" to me, Peggy.

PEGGY

Let's see how the rest're doin'.

Ron and Cat are huddled. Everyone is looking very bored.

STEPHANIE

Okay, everyone, if we're going to eat lunch, we'd better hurry.

CAT

But I haven't finished.

STEPHANIE

We'll schedule you for a retake this afternoon, okay?

Stephanie leads the way, and the rest follow.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

The group troops around a corner to another set of double doors. Stephanie and the first five go through, but the line stops leaving Jane, Ron and Cat waiting. Two women, standing just outside the doors move two feet away but are still in earshot. One of the women is tearful but trying to hide it.

TEARFUL WOMAN

So Liz told me--PROMISED me she'd take care of it, and the next thing I know, not only am I getting a letter of reprimand put in my file, but I'm demoted!

OTHER WOMAN

I told you not to trust her. She's about as two-faced as you can get.

The line moves forward, Jane staring straight ahead. Ron whispers to Cat.

RON

Who is Liz?

CAT

The blonde who's been running the orientation. She also happens to be the president's daughter.

RON

The president?

CAT

Darren Landing. She's Liz LANDING.

INT. DINING ROOM. DAY.

Jane has her head tilted slightly toward Ron and Cat. Her eyes widen with this last revelation. She grabs Peggy's elbow.

JANE
(very softly)
Peggy, when did Liz introduce herself to the whole orientation group?

Peggy thinks momentarily, then her eyebrows go up. She quickly makes her face impassive and shrugs.

PEGGY
I don't know.

JANE
But you do know who I meant.

PEGGY
I overheard her tell you.

JANE
I could barely hear her. You must have really good ears.

The line moves forward again. The supervisor is repeating the same message.

SUPERVISOR
I'm sorry. Sandwiches are about all that's left.

Jane and Peggy get their food and go to one of the four empty tables. Ron and Cat sit at the next one. Next to them, several employees have finished their lunch and light up cigarettes. One checks behind the napkin container for an ashtray, finding one.

FIRST EMPLOYEE
Oh, good, we're in the smoking area.

SECOND EMPLOYEE
Yeah, the president ordered it moved again yesterday.

FIRST EMPLOYEE
Are you sure his name isn't Adolph?

SECOND EMPLOYEE
I'm not sure of anything around here. But sometimes I wonder: Is he REALLY the one behind all these changes or are they somebody else's idea, and he gets the blame. You know?

FIRST EMPLOYEE
It's him all right. It has to be, but it's not like we could waltz into his office and ask—ever try to see him in person?

SECOND EMPLOYEE

Sure—got as far as his third assistant's assistant before I finally gave up. All his crazy orders bug the hell out of me. If they didn't pay me so much money, I'd quit this nuthouse.

Two other trainees have joined Jane and Peggy, who are eating in strained silence.

JANE

Do you guys know the name of the blonde who's been running our orientation?

The first trainee blurts out the answer.

FIRST TRAINEE

Sure—that's Liz Landing, the president's daughter.

Peggy gives the trainee a withering look.

FIRST TRAINEE

At least, that's what I heard.

Jane fixes her gaze on the second trainee.

JANE

But you didn't know, did you.

SECOND TRAINEE

I do now.

Jane scans their faces. They all look innocent and busy themselves eating.

INT. CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

Liz and the two technicians are relaxing in chairs before the bank of monitors.

LIZ

I can't believe I was so stupid.

FEMALE TECH

I thought they handled that fairly well. Don't worry about it.

INT. DINING ROOM. DAY.

Many of the employees are getting up to leave, returning their trays. Two men within hearing range of Ron and Jane stand up from their table.

LOUDSPEAKER

Attention, everyone. The president is moving through the building. Please clear the halls and stay at your work stations.

FIRST EMPLOYEE

Now we're stuck here.

SECOND EMPLOYEE

No, we're not. We can make it if we hurry.

LOUDSPEAKER

Attention, diners. The president has just approved the plan to relocate the dining room to the fifth floor. Please be kind enough to assist maintenance in this task.

FIRST EMPLOYEE

You know what that means.

SECOND EMPLOYEE

Do it, or else. Of course, HOW we're supposed to move all this junk and still stay out of the halls is the big mystery.

FIRST EMPLOYEE

All we have to do is remember one thing: Big Brother is watching.

They look up at the bubble in the ceiling.

Stephanie is going from table to table signaling the trainees to follow her.

STEPHANIE

If you haven't finished your lunch, bring it with you. We'll also take a short bathroom break before the next session begins.

Stephanie heads toward the door. Ron goes to a soda vending machine in the far corner. He puts in his 50 cents. Two cans of soda fall into the bin, and change floods the change return, spilling onto the floor. Ron glances over his shoulder and scoops up the money, pocketing it. Ron catches up with Cat and gives her one of the sodas.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

As the last of the trainees file into the orientation room, Jane pulls back and goes to the elevator. It accepts her card key, opening the doors.

INT. PERSONNEL OFFICE. DAY.

No one is there when Jane enters. She grabs a pen and piece of paper, scribbles a note, folds it and prints REED MILLER on it. She starts to lay it on Melissa's desk but stops when she sees the phone. She picks up the receiver and punches in a number.

JANE

Is Sam in? No, no message.

INT. LOBBY. DAY.

Jane approaches the receptionist and hands her the note.

JANE
Would you see that Reed Miller gets this?

The receptionist reads the name.

RECEPTIONIST
Certainly. (reads the name again) then looks closely at Jane) Oh, no, wait a minute (consults a roster). We don't have anyone by that name.

Jane's look of triumph melts. She returns to the elevator.

The receptionist picks up her telephone receiver and punches in four numbers.

RECEPTIONIST
Did you guys see that?

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

When Jane returns, everyone has finished and is clustered in groups talking. Ron and Cat are off by themselves. The others are with Peggy. Neither Liz nor Stephanie is there. The walls display playground scenes.

PEGGY
Hey, Jane. We were wonderin' where you were.

JANE
I went down to Personnel.

PEGGY
Got a problem?

JANE
It's not important. What's everybody doing?

PEGGY
Just standin' around waitin'.

JANE
Well, I don't know about you, but I think it's about time we got to know each other.

Peggy calls over to Ron and Cat.

PEGGY
You two wanta join us? We're doin' introductions.

Ron and Cat exchange glances and walk over to the others.

FIRST TRAINEE

I'm Joan, clerical.

SECOND TRAINEE

I'm Bob, maintenance.

THIRD TRAINEE

I'm Helen, housekeeping.

FOURTH TRAINEE

I'm Fred, security.

PEGGY

Well, I'm Peggy—food service.

CAT

My name is Catherine, but everyone calls me Cat.
I'm also clerical.

RON

Ron.

JANE

I'm Jane.

PEGGY

Aren't ya gonna tell us your jobs?

Ron and Jane exchange challenging looks.

JANE

We're not really sure.

RON

I am. Human resources.

PEGGY

Both of ya?

RON

So far.

HELEN

What kind of work, clerical?

JANE

I guess we're unclassified.

RON

Management. We're supposed to be management.

Everyone registers shock.

PEGGY

How'd you end up in here?

RON

I wish I knew.

CAT

It's probably just a red tape glitch.

JANE

Well, it just adds to all the things that make me wonder about this place. This whole orientation program, for example. It's a mess.

BOB

No worse than any others I've been through.

FRED

Same here. Every company has its problems.

HELEN

The facilities are excellent.

JANE

But nobody knows how to operate them. Think about it—Landing World is supposed to be the world leader in technology development, yet neither Liz nor Stephanie has been able to run things smoothly, and everything's half done. How could ANY company develop innovations when it's this incredibly disorganized?

PEGGY

Everywhere's disorganized, Jane.

RON

Landing World's no different...

JANE

But that's exactly my point. Landing World SHOULD be different.

CAT

That must be your problem, Jane. You have this illusion that perfection is possible.

JANE

I'm not looking for perfection. I'm looking for things to add up in some logical way. But the more I see here, the less things make sense.

RON

Could be you just don't belong here. Maybe you should consider asking for your old job back.

JANE
You'd like THAT, wouldn't you.

Cat takes Ron's arm. The others look confused.

CAT
Ron, why don't we step into the hall for a few minutes?

They head for the double doors.

RON
I'd love it if she left. It would solve half my problems.

CAT
Half?

The group is standing in an awkward silence when the side door opens and startles them. Liz enters carrying another stack of papers.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

The walls are awash again, this time of beach and ocean scenes. Ron homes in on Alice and begins probing and examining her. He opens panels, studies the controls.

CAT
What are you doing?

RON
Trying to find out what makes this baby tick.

ALICE
You make me tick, Ron.

Cat turns her head and stifles a laugh.

Inside Alice's control panel, Ron sees two indicator lights. The one next to "Automatic" is out. The one next to "Override" is glowing.

RON
Just as I thought.

CAT
What?

Ron stands up and leads Cat to several feet away from Alice, then whispers.

RON
She's on override.

CAT
Is that supposed to mean something?

RON

It means she's being operated by remote from somewhere else.

CAT

Is that important?

RON

I don't know yet.

Ron returns to Alice. Liz exits the double doors. Ron is squatting down next to Alice and has his hand inside the control panel.

LIZ

Ron!

RON

I wasn't hurting her. I just wanted to have a look.

Liz gives Cat a funny look.

LIZ

Both of you need to come back in. We're about to begin.

RON

This ought to be exciting.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

As Ron and Cat follow Liz up the aisle, Ron catches up to Liz. Roller coaster, ferris wheel and octopus rides fill the walls.

RON

You'd better keep an eye on Jane. I'm sure she's good secretary material, but she's a troublemaker. She's not getting with the program.

LIZ

Thanks for the advice.

They are near Jane's chair. Jane's eyes flash angrily. At the podium, Liz picks up a stack of papers.

LIZ (Cont'd)

As you might expect, most everything at Landing World is computerized. If you're not already comfortable with computers, you will be by the end of this session. But first I have some papers you'll need to sign.

Again she holds the stack out. Fred goes up, takes them and starts handing them out.

LIZ (Cont'd)

The first sheet is the assignment of rights release. Basically it means anything you design while under our employ is ours. The second sheet is the proprietary rights agreement. It says any knowledge we give you is yours to use but not yours to sell. The release indicates your agreement to participate in experimental programs we're developing—we'll need that for tomorrow. Other than that, we don't really have any policies, rules or job descriptions I can give you in writing—things change too fast around here for that.

By the time Fred gets to the bottom of the stack, he has gotten to Cat but is out of forms. Ron gives his to Cat.

FRED

I'm short one.

Liz looks through the few papers remaining.

LIZ

I don't seem to have any more. I'll have to bring another one in later on.

Jane leans toward Peggy.

JANE

I heard Landing World was unorthodox, but this is ridiculous.

A man comes in at the side door.

LIZ

This is our computer support specialist, everyone. Harvey will spend the next couple of hours helping you through the tutorial on your laptops. It will familiarize you with the basic functions you'll need to know to get started here.

Harvey steps up to the podium, and Liz starts to leave then turns around.

LIZ

Ron, I need to speak with you, please.

Ron disengages himself from his laptop and joins her.

LIZ

A satellite conference has been arranged for you with Max Anderson in about an hour. Harvey will take you.

RON

Thanks. It's about time.

Jane is staring and straining to hear. As Ron returns to his seat, Liz signals Jane to come

up front. Jane hurries over.

LIZ

I don't have any solid answers for you, but I've managed to arrange a satellite conference between you and the personnel director.

JANE

That's right—he's out of town, isn't he.

LIZ

Yes—he's in Los Angeles. It'll be in about an hour. Harvey will take you to the conference room.

JANE

Thank you so much.

LIZ

You're welcome.

Harvey conducts the tutorial process. Jane's tutorial is for clerical staff. Ron's is for maintenance staff. Harvey has to help Jane. Ron doesn't need any help. Harvey returns to the podium.

HARVEY

Now that you've mastered how to handle one task, I want to walk you through the real beauty of this system: multiplexing.

JANE

What's that?

HARVEY

Multiplexing allows you to work on several tasks at the same time. Let me demonstrate.

INT. VIDEO PRODUCTION STUDIO. DAY.

Max is seated in front of a Los Angeles backdrop rehearsing, and technicians are setting up the cameras and lighting.

MAX

It's not going to work. You have to let me do it live.

DIRECTOR

You won't be able to keep a straight face, Max.

MAX

Yes, I will.

DIRECTOR

You'll have to repeat those key words exactly the same way, with the same expression.

MAX

How about this, then: I do the first part live and you tape me. Then if you have to play it again, you can run the tape.

DIRECTOR

Now that might work. We can handle both of them that way.

INT. SATELLITE CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY.

The room is dark. As the door opens and Harvey and Ron enter from the hallway, the lights come on. In the center of the room in front of a large screen is a single chair upholstered in grey. It is fixed to the floor.

HARVEY

Everything is automatic, Ron. All you have to do is sit down.

Ron remains standing until Harvey is gone, then goes to the chair and checks it over. It does not have any controls.

Ron turns his back to the chair and lowers himself into it.

The screen comes alive. Max Anderson appears, smiling.

MAX

Welcome, Ron. I'm sorry we haven't had the chance to meet before now. I understand you have a bit of a problem.

RON

I'd say it's more than a bit.

MAX

Why don't you tell me about it.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Harvey, standing in front of a T-rex-filled wall, is looking at his watch.

INT. SATELLITE CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY.

Ron is still sitting in the chair but is obviously agitated.

RON

I WON'T work in the maintenance department. I was hired to start a training department here, and that's what I'm going to do.

MAX

That's impossible, Ron. I didn't want to have to tell you this, but the man who supposedly hired you, Reed Miller, well, he has put us in an embarrassing position.

RON

How so?

MAX

Miller was moved up to replace me when I was promoted recently. What we didn't know was the man was having a personal crisis, a breakdown, if you will. During the week he was in my office, he kept all his dealings secret. The truth is, we have no record of you, Ron.

RON

This is bullshit.

Ron stands. The screen goes blank.

INT. CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

MALE TECH

There he goes again! Pay up.

The female technician reaches into a pocket and pulls out a \$20 bill.

FEMALE TECH

Here. Hurry up and rewind the tape.

MALE TECH

All cued up.

INT. SATELLITE CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY.

Ron is examining the chair. Finally, he presses on its seat with both hands. The screen activates, and Max Anderson appears exactly as before.

MAX

Welcome, Ron. I'm sorry we haven't had the chance to meet before now. I understand you have a bit of a problem.

Ron remains silent.

MAX

Why don't you tell me about it.

Ron lets up on the seat. The screen goes dark again.

RON

I'll be damned. You guys aren't as smart as you think you are.

INT. SATELLITE CONFERENCE ROOM TWO. DAY.

Harvey escorts Jane in, and the lights come on. The room is exactly like the one where Ron was taken.

HARVEY

Everything is automatic. All you have to do is sit there.

Harvey indicates the lone chair, and Jane goes toward it.

The door shuts behind Harvey as Jane sits. The screen comes on displaying Max in front of the same Los Angeles backdrop.

MAX

Hello, Jane. I'm sorry we haven't had the chance to get acquainted before now, and I understand you have a bit of a problem.

Jane remains silent.

MAX

Would you like to tell me about it?

JANE

Didn't Liz fill you in when she set this up?

MAX

Actually, she did.

JANE

Then all I need to know is how this happened and what you're going to do about it.

MAX

It happened because the man who hired you had only been in that position for a few days and had a nervous breakdown. If he kept records of his dealings, we can't find them.

JANE

But I gave him my resume and a portfolio of my training program designs.

MAX

We haven't seen them.

JANE

I can't go back to my old job—I trained my replacement before I left. What am I supposed to do now?

MAX

There's an opening for a secretarial position in our Human Resources Department. We were going to pull someone from the pool but we're prepared to offer it to you.

Jane slumps in the chair, fighting to maintain control.

INT. UPSTAIRS OFFICE. DAY.

Cat hurries past a secretary's desk.

SECRETARY

How's it going?

CAT

Good so far, I think. We're done for today—Liz wants us "trainees" out of the building before you all leave, but I need to make a quick phone call.

Cat enters her office.

INT. CAT'S OFFICE. DAY.

Pictures of two young families and a separate young man line the shelf next to Cat's desk. She grabs the phone and enters a number.

CAT

Monty? I was hoping I'd catch you. I'm really getting tired of talking to your machine and never hearing back from you. I'm your mother—you should want to see me. No, I won't talk about your father—even though the bastard is...okay, okay. NO, I don't WANT another lawyer—your father would just buy him off like all the others. I've found a way to solve my money problems anyway. Now are we on for dinner or NOT?

She listens.

CAT

Go to hell, Monty, and take your father and your snotty brothers with you.

She slams down the receiver then throws all three pictures in the trash.

INT. LANDING WORLD LOBBY. DAY.

Ron lounges on a chair nonchalantly picking at a cuticle. The technology commercial still occupies the back wall. Jane exits the elevator, and Ron waves her over. She looks around, points at herself. He nods.

RON

I was afraid I might have missed you. I just got done having a satellite conference with Max.

JANE

What kind of job did he offer YOU?

RON

We got everything straightened out—I'll start setting up the training department as soon as orientation ends.

Jane blanches.

JANE

Is that why you waited, so you could tell me that?

RON

Actually, no. Harvey wanted me to tell you that the time for tomorrow's orientation has been changed. We're supposed to start at 9:30 instead of 8:30.

JANE

Forget orientation, Ron. I quit, I give up, I'm not coming back. The job's yours, Ron. I won't stand in your way.

Jane pivots and heads for the door. Ron rises and hurries after her.

RON

Hey, don't go away angry—let me at least buy you a drink.

JANE

Now that's something I could use about now, but NOT with you.

Cat and Peggy are coming out of the elevator area. When Cat sees Ron, a bright smile breaks through her stormy expression.

RON

We were just talking about going for a drink. Why don't you come along?

Jane angrily stares off into space. Peggy gives her a worried look.

PEGGY

Sure—I like a stiff one now and then.

Ron and Cat lead the way.

JANE

Nothing like drinking with the enemy. We can celebrate my defeat.

PEGGY

Enemy? Defeat? What's...

JANE

Never mind. I shouldn't have said anything, Peggy. It's nothing to do with you. Really.

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. DAY.

Hidden from view, Darren watches a hologram of Jane on his desk.

MILLER (OS)

How do you feel about honesty?

JANE

I believe we're all basically honest. I tend to think the best of people, but I also know practically anyone will lie if backed into a tight-enough corner.

MILLER (OS)

Can you give me an example?

JANE

Sure—say your wife comes home with a new hairdo, and she's in tears over it. It really does look awful, but I bet you aren't going to tell her that. You're going to say how beautiful she looks and how brave she was for trying something new.

Darren replaces Jane's hologram with one of Ron.

RON

I pride myself on my honesty. And I can spot a liar a mile off—their eyes blink too much, you know.

MILLER (OS)

Do you think lying is ever justified?

RON

No, never.

MILLER (OS)

What about if your wife got a horrible new hairdo?

RON

I don't have a wife, but if I did, I'd use the same dodge you use for an ugly baby.

MILLER (OS)

What's that?

RON

That's a baby all right.

INT. BAR. DAY.

Ron, Cat, Peggy and Jane sit at the bar in that order, their drinks in front of them. Ron is showing Peggy how to flip a coaster from the edge of the bar and catch it with the same hand. Jane and Peggy watch.

Ron successfully flips and catches the coaster repeatedly. Cat tries it and succeeds on the second try. Then Ron looks at Jane, challenge in his eyes.

RON

Come on, Jane, try it.

JANE

I'm no good at games.

PEGGY

That ain't no game—it's a simple parlor trick.

JANE

You do it, then.

Peggy takes the coaster, places it on the edge of the bar with the backs of her right hand fingers just under it, flips it and catches it on the first try.

PEGGY

We used to do somethin' like this when I was a kid.

Peggy hands the coaster to Jane. Jane positions it but flips it so high, it flips several times and goes behind the bar. The bartender shoots her a dirty look but returns the coaster. It is bent. Jane ignores the stack of new coasters within her reach, but Ron hands over a new one from the stack near him.

Jane tries again, this time sending the coaster to the floor by her stool's legs.

JANE

I told you—I'm no good with games.

Ron and Cat go back to talking to each other. Peggy turns her back to Cat and keeps her voice too low to be overheard.

PEGGY

Why don't you tell me now what's eatin' you?

JANE

If I could, Peggy, I would. The truth is I can't.

PEGGY
You can't. Too painful?

JANE
I can't because I was told not to.

PEGGY
Oh.

Jane rests her left hand on Peggy's right arm.

JANE
Thanks for asking, though.

They finish their drinks. Ron and Cat order another round.

PEGGY
I gotta go. One drink's my limit.

Jane looks at her watch.

JANE
Me, too. I'm supposed to be somewhere at 5:30, and I just have time to make it.

PEGGY
I'll walk you out.

As Peggy climbs off the bar stool, Jane checks to make sure no one is looking, then puts the stack of new coasters into her purse.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER. DAY.

Maris is busily placing pans of vegetables into a warming tray when Jane arrives and grabs an apron.

MARIS
How was your first day at...

JANE
Don't ask. Let's get this done first.

Maris gives Jane a quizzical look, and they serve everyone in silence. Maris keeps watching Jane who is totally focused on her serving task.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Jane is nearly finished washing the dishes, pans and utensils while Maris quickly dries the last of them. Finally, Maris hangs her wet towel and sits on a nearby stool. Jane drains the sink.

MARIS

We're out of dry towels, my feet are killing me, and your silence is driving me nuts. If you don't start talking soon, I'm going to explode.

JANE

If I start talking, I WILL explode.

Jane grips the edge of the sink with her rubber-gloved hands.

MARIS

That's all right. I'll just wipe up the mess with my wet towel here.

Jane rolls here eyes, but a smile overtakes her.

JANE

You're a good friend, Maris.

MARIS

So you had a bad day—a good cry will take care of that.

JANE

I'm not sad, Maris, I'm, I'm, I'm... angry, yes, that's what I am, angry and confused and mystified (tears spill onto her cheeks) and frustrated.

Jane turns her back to the sink and slides down until she's squatting on the wet floor. She brings the backs of her hands up to cover her eyes. Maris climbs down on the floor and puts her arms around Jane.

MARIS

What IS it, Jane, what's happened?

JANE

(Between gasps and sobs) Do you know what my first thought was when I came out of Landing World this afternoon? I was thinking how beautiful the real world looked. I was thinking the buildings, and the pavement, and the cars, and the people outside all looked so, so nice.

MARIS

The REAL world? That sounds pretty drastic.

JANE

I didn't really mind the orientation screw-up, but I can't be a secretary again, I CAN'T. It's like I never went to school, never...(Her sobs grow louder.)

MARIS

Where's your car?

JANE

Sam dropped me off. I was going to catch a ride home with you.

MARIS

Let's go, then.

INT. MARIS'S CAR. NIGHT.

MARIS

From what you've told me, it sounds like you've gotten yourself worked up over nothing. You don't know anything for certain. You could be imagining the whole thing.

JANE

You said half your clients have work-related problems. Have any of them been from Landing World?

MARIS

No. Wait—yes. There was one man about two years ago. But he was so confused in general, I didn't put any truth to what he said.

JANE

Which was what, exactly?

MARIS

Oh, Jane, that was hundreds of clients ago. I don't remember.

JANE

Well, here's something else. Liz Landing introduced herself to me privately. Later, the other trainees not only knew her name but they knew she was Darren Landing's daughter. I didn't even know that. Then she, Liz I mean, acts like she never heard of Reed Miller, but later Max tells me Miller was his replacement, if only for a short time.

MARIS

So what are you saying—that it's all some kind of conspiracy? You're beginning to sound paranoid, Jane.

JANE

I'm saying none of it makes any sense—Liz, the trainees, all that nonsense in the dining room, and the general ineptness and disorganization in the orientation overall.

MARIS

Could someone at Landing be after you?

JANE

That makes even less sense.

MARIS

In a way, though, what they're doing does make sense. In a war, look at how the enemy treats a prisoner: the poor guy is told his comrades have confessed, his side is losing, his family is dead or has forgotten about him. If the prisoner buys into the illusion, the enemy gets what it wants: the prisoner in his confusion and distress reveals maybe a tidbit of key information. The enemy gets these tidbits from a series of such prisoners, puts it all together and gains an advantage.

JANE

But this is not a wartime situation.

MARIS

Maybe it is. The corporate world IS at war right now—there's downsizing; takeovers and Chapter Elevens every day; people are working three part-time jobs because they can't get on full-time anywhere; college graduates are accepting minimum wage just to HAVE jobs. If that's not a war, I don't know what is. People are angry about it.

JANE

That still doesn't explain why Landing World would go to such elaborate extremes to fool two people.

MARIS

Okay, then, what else could it be?

JANE

It could be like you said—that I'm getting myself all worked up over a simple mistake and a few incidents that didn't live up to my expectations.

MARIS

You DO have a tendency to do that.

EXT. MARIS'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Maris pulls up in her driveway and stops the car. She and Jane get out, and Jane starts walking across the lawn to the house next door.

JANE

I don't want to start over, Maris.

MARIS

Go back tomorrow. See what happens. Something good is bound to come of this. You'll see.

JANE
I hope you're right.

MARIS
I'll be up late if you need me.

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

In the dark, the only thing visible is the hologram on Darren's desk of Ron helping Cat with the CPR dummy. Peggy enters.

PEGGY
Where IS everybody?

DARREN
They'll be here any minute.

PEGGY
It's been a VERY long one, Darren. I really wanna get home.

DARREN
I know, but think about the time off you'll get when this is over.

Peggy sits in one of the chairs facing Darren's desk. She massages a foot.

PEGGY
I hope you know what you're doin'.

DARREN
You want another George Appleby, Peg?

PEGGY
Nobody wants that.

Miller enters pushing Liz in a wheelchair. They take their places beside Peggy.

LIZ
Where's Cat?

PEGGY
She must be with Ron still.

DARREN
Those two seem to be hitting it off really well, don't they?

PEGGY
They were thick as thieves when I left 'em.

MILLER
I don't see any harm in it, do any of you?

LIZ

Let them have their fun. We're certainly having ours.

PEGGY

Well, I'm not, having fun I mean.

Liz and Miller register surprise. Darren's face, hidden in shadows, cannot be seen, but his voice is kind as he speaks to Peggy.

DARREN

What's bothering you, Peg? You've been through these before...

PEGGY

I like Jane. She's really nice. I don't like foolin' her.

MILLER

Maybe you should withdraw. It sounds like you're becoming biased, and I have to admit right now my vote goes to Ron.

LIZ

Mine, too—he's showing strong leadership ability. Jane's polite but she appears afraid of everything.

DARREN

It's too soon to be making any real judgments, so let's not rush things. Peg, what do you want to do?

PEGGY

Stay, I guess.

LIZ

Dad, I don't mean to be crabby, but I'm about to collapse. If we don't have anything more to discuss, let's call it a night. You can stay here and play if you want to, but I need to get to bed.

DARREN

I want to show you one thing.

He enters a command on his console, and a hologram of Ron and Jane in the lobby appears.

RON

Harvey wanted me to tell you the time for tomorrow's orientation has been changed, and we'll start at 9:30 instead of 8:30.

PEGGY

Why that rat.

INT. PEGGY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Peggy in her pajamas is making a phone call.

PEGGY

Hello. Is this Jane Kavanaugh's house? Could I speak to her, please? Oh, well, this is Peggy from Landing World. Yes, we met today. No, I'm goin' to bed, honey, so I'll just leave a message. Tell her the start time for orientation has been moved back to 8:30, okay? You be sure you tell her that. Thanks.

INT. KAVANAUGH TV ROOM. NIGHT.

Sam is writing down Peggy's message when he hears the door SLAM. He grabs a tissue-wrapped red rose and hurries for the foyer.

INT. KAVANAUGH HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Sam holds the rose out to Jane who is barreling toward the bedroom. She looks at the rose blankly, then at Sam.

SAM

Don't you have anything to say?

JANE

Such as what?

SAM

You're supposed to say "A wed wose, how womantic."

JANE

Can't you see I'm upset?

SAM

I'm not a mindreader, Jane.

Jane looks stricken.

JANE

The world doesn't revolve exclusively around you either, Mr. See, Simple!

SAM

What's that supposed to mean?

JANE

Take it any way you want it.

SAM

Geez!

INT. KAVANAUGH KITCHEN. NIGHT.

He stomps into the kitchen and thrusts the rose into the trash. He sees the aspirin bottle on the windowsill and removes two tablets, then fills a glass with water.

INT. KAVANAUGH BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Sam enters carrying the glass in one hand and holding the two aspirin tablets in his other palm, open as an offering. Jane is sitting on the edge of the bed, removing her nylons.

JANE

I'm not in the MOOD, Sam! Sex isn't going to help.

SAM

It always makes me feel better.

JANE

That's because it's a testosterone thing.

SAM

It's always the man, isn't it? Some jerk did something terrible to you today, and now you're making ME pay for it.

JANE

I'm not making you pay for anything! I don't...

Sam puts the water and aspirin tablets on the dresser and moves toward Jane.

SAM

I suppose strip Nintendo is out of the question?

Enraged, Jane bolts up and goes into the closet, returning with an overnight bag and throwing it on the bed. She storms between the dresser, bathroom and bag, stuffing it with underthings, toiletries and necessities.

Sam stands frozen, a look of disbelief growing on his face.

SAM

Jane, what are you doing?

Jane comes out of the closet again carrying a suit, blouse and shoes.

JANE

I can't be what you want me to be tonight, Sam, and I HATE your seeing me like this.

She shoves the shoes into her overnight bag.

SAM

Be what I want? I only want you to be yourself.

JANE

Then I guess that's the problem because I don't know
WHO I am right now. Maybe I never did.

Loaded with her purse, the overnight bag and the clothes on hangars, Jane stalks out of the bedroom.

Sam follows in silence, totally baffled.

EXT. KAVANAUGH HOME. NIGHT.

Sam watches Jane cross the yard to Maris's house.

INT. KAVANAUGH TV ROOM. NIGHT.

Sam turns on the television and Nintendo, tries to play a game, then angrily throws down the controller and turns everything off. He kicks the coffee table, looks at it and kicks it again. The phone message floats to the floor. Sam picks up the piece of paper.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT.

Two cars pull up and park. Ron emerges from one and Cat from the other. They walk toward each other, and Ron takes Cat by an elbow, leading her into the darkness.

RON

This is so great of you, Cat.

CAT

It's no big deal. I come here all the time anyway.

RON

You do? For what?

They reach a gravestone and Cat stops, nearly tripping Ron.

CAT

My father's here.

The headstone bears the name INDIGO KENNETH EDWARDS.

CAT

He died five years ago. Monty would never have done me so wrong if Daddy were still alive.

RON

Your son?

CAT

My son's junior. His dad is the REAL asshole and my ex.

RON

How old's your son?

CAT

Twenty-three.

RON

How old are YOU?

CAT

Fifty-eight.

RON

Wow. You don't look it.

CAT

Thanks, but with Monty's—my ex's—money, I could afford the facials, the spas, the special care only available to the rich to keep them young and beautiful looking. I hate to think what's going to happen to me now.

RON

You didn't get alimony?

CAT

I got alimony and child support until Monty junior moved out a little over a year ago.

RON

So your free ride ended—you have a job. You'll make it.

CAT

You don't understand: My ex has been working at putting me in the poorhouse ever since. His latest target is our house—he wants me out, so he's selling it.

RON

Don't you own half?

CAT

I was broke when I married him, Ron. It was all his.

RON

Fight him—go to court.

CAT

He not only owns every lawyer in town, he has the judges in his deep pockets, too.

RON

You don't want to work, do you?

CAT

I hate it—the fact that Darren... I mean, since I was lucky enough...

RON

Darren? You know Darren Landing? Of course you do.

Ron takes Cat's hands and pulls her ahead to another gravestone, not far away.

This headstone reads MARIBEL A. LIPMAN.

CAT

Your mother?

Ron kneels beside the headstone and brushes some grass clippings from it.

RON

She's only been gone a short time, but it feels like a century.

CAT

I know what you mean. They give so much protection. Ever since Daddy died, I've felt so exposed, and I don't seem to know what to do about it, about anything.

RON

It's been the same for me. I thought I'd be glad when she was out of my life. She never let me have girlfriends or go anywhere she didn't choose for me...

CAT

But it hasn't turned out like you thought, has it?

RON

No. I miss her.

Ron stands. Cat was so close to him, he comes up nearly face to face with her. Their eyes meet, and her hand goes up to caress his face. They kiss.

EXT. SONIC DRIVE-IN. NIGHT.

Ron and Cat sit in his car, sipping drinks and sharing a bag of onion rings.

RON

So I left, and guess what happened?

CAT

What?

RON

When I came back in and pretended to sit down again, the whole thing started over, exactly the same as the first go round. It was a fake, and you're in on this too.

Cat chokes on her drink. Ron pats her shoulder, then holds her left hand high.

CAT

(with a scratchy throat) What makes you think that?

RON

You know Liz AND Darren, you smirked when Alice put the moves on me, and you pretended to have trouble with the CPR lessons when you really knew what to do.

CAT

(Clearing her throat) The CPR trouble wasn't part of the rest.

RON

What was it for, then?

Cat looks slightly embarrassed.

CAT

I couldn't say.

RON

I don't think forty-five and fifty-eight are all that far apart, do you?

CAT

You ARE an awfully YOUNG forty-five.

RON

You're a young fifty-eight, but I see what you mean. You've probably had a lot more experience than me.

CAT

What do you mean exactly?

RON

You've been married, raised a family, and now that you're free, there have to be lots of men, older and uh better.

CAT

Monty was the first and only, that bastard. I may be older, AND more experienced, but after Monty, I didn't want to LOOK at another man.

RON

You're looking at ME.

CAT

And you've been with lots of women, I'm sure. You HAVE had sex, haven't you?

RON

Sure—of a sort—in the backseat, in the park.

CAT

Never in a bed? Come ON. What about prostitutes?

RON

If mother ever found out...

CAT

She HAS controlled your life.

RON

Still does.

CAT

In what way? You don't hear voices do you?

RON

No, of course not. I'm not working because I WANT to either.

CAT

Really? How come?

RON

It was one of mother's basic beliefs that work builds character.

CAT

So?

RON

If I don't work, I can't touch the estate.

CAT

Oh, your mother left you some money, with strings attached. Your situation is as depressing as mine.

RON

Then let's talk about something else. I want to come home with you.

CAT

We just met today!

RON

I know—I can't help it—I want you more than I've ever wanted a woman before in my life.

CAT

I don't...tomorrow's going to be an important day...

RON
It's just more orientation.

CAT
It's a lot more than that.

Ron sets his cup down and reaches for Cat's hands.

RON
Maybe a young older woman is what I've needed
all along?

Ron pulls her to him and kisses her. Then she pushes back enough so she can look him in the eyes.

CAT
It doesn't bother you?

RON
What?

CAT
What's going on at Landing World.

RON
I'm way ahead of that game.

INT. MARIS'S DEN. NIGHT.

Maris is listening on the phone and copying a message onto a piece of paper. On the fold-out couch nearby, Jane is in her nightgown and is rummaging through her purse. She finds the stack of coasters, puts one on the edge of the side table, and tries to flip and catch it.

MARIS
I'll give it to her, Sam. Don't worry—every marriage
has its setbacks.

The coaster careens off the lamp and lands on the floor. Jane sets up another.

MARIS (Cont'd)
Well, does anybody ever really know anybody else?
Marriage isn't a fixed setting, Sam. You have to give
her room to grow or you WILL lose her.

Instead of trying so hard, Jane gently lifts the back of her hand under the coaster. It flips only a few inches upward, then fits right between her thumb and fingers. She looks at Maris triumphantly, but Maris isn't watching. Jane sets up two coasters, one stacked on the other.

MARIS (Cont'd)
Now stop whining. You've just had it too easy up till
now. It's really your choice—are you in, or are you out?

Jane catches the double set of coasters, and stacks four, setting them up.

MARIS (Cont'd)

I realize this is a Jane you haven't seen before—she hasn't been in a SITUATION like this before. But no matter what you think, she's still the same Jane inside. Yes, I will. Good night, Sam.

Jane has successfully flipped and caught the four-stack and now has set the entire stack of some twenty coasters on the table edge.

JANE

What was that all about?

Jane flips the stack, and coasters fly everywhere.

MARIS

He had a message he forgot to give you.

Jane is picking up coasters from the floor.

JANE

Sounded to me like he wanted you to be on his side.

MARIS

He wanted to know what's wrong with you.

Jane stands up from retrieving the last coaster. She shakes the stack at Maris.

JANE

What's wrong with ME!? I've been married to him for five years, and I never suspected that if I ever REALLY had a crisis, he'd turn into such a goon. What am I saying? I knew he WOULD be a goon—that's why I put on my Miss Happy act. I'm so angry I could spit.

She sets the stack of coasters on the table edge, flips them and catches the whole stack.

MARIS

I'd say anger suits you.

JANE

You know, you're right. I go along being Miss Nice To Everyone. I NEVER lose my cool. I NEVER say a word in anger. I may FEEL fed up, but I NEVER show it.

She gets up and paces, searching the room, clenching her fists to keep herself from grabbing the breakables.

JANE (Cont'd)

I need something to hit! I wish I had a picture of that Reed Miller. Any of those Landing World people would do!

Maris grabs a cushion off the couch and holds it in front of Jane.

MARIS

Here!

Jane punches it, but the impact sends Maris back a couple of steps.

JANE

That's no good!

MARIS

Hit ME then, dammit.

Maris tosses the cushion aside and steps close to Jane. Stunned, Jane stares.

They burst out laughing. Jane hugs Maris.

JANE

Why can't Sam do that?

MARIS

He's a man.

JANE

I want him to be my friend, not just my lover. But if I even get a little serious, he starts with the jokes and games.

MARIS

Then make him your friend. Show him that being serious is okay.

JANE

You make it sound so easy.

MARIS

Maybe it is. Who said you can only have it one way? There's only a battle between the sexes for those who accept that mindset.

Jane is staring at Maris intently, turning the stack of coasters over and over in her hands.

JANE

I should go home, but I'm so tired. If I go back, Sam and I will be up the rest of the night hashing this out.

MARIS

Stay here. Sam will keep. You don't always have to be a pleaser.

Jane collapses on the couch which sits perpendicular to French doors open to the patio.

JANE

I AM exhausted. It's as if I feel the weight of all those years of pretending NOTHING was ever wrong-- not at school, not at work, and certainly not at home.

Sam is standing just inside the French doors listening. Maris starts moving backward.

MARIS

I'm going to get a drink. Want anything from the kitchen?

JANE

No thanks. But, Maris, is it really possible that—no, I've tried. Sam never lets me express negative feelings. It's not just me.

Maris raises her eyebrows at Sam. He holds out his hands in a guilty gesture.

MARIS

Then you have to tell him he needs to let you express yourself, good AND bad.

JANE

You think that would work?

MARIS

Why don't you ask him?

Jane turns to look at what Maris is seeing and sees Sam. She turns back away, but he comes around the couch and kneels in front of her. Maris slips out of the room.

SAM

There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Jane. I can't live without you. My dad was an angry man, and my mother never went a day without complaining and doing things to spite him behind his back. But I didn't know until now that I was letting them cripple me, cripple US. I'm sorry.

Maris comes running into the room holding an apple as if it's a prize.

MARIS

I remember that client's name, the one from Landing World?

JANE

What was it?

MARIS

I can't tell you THAT—but I can tell you what else I remembered. It didn't make any sense to me, but maybe it will to you, Jane.

Sam and Jane look eagerly at Maris.

MARIS (Cont'd)

He said the walls came alive, but it was the toad that got him.

INT. JACK MITCHELL'S OFFICE. DAY.

Jack is at his desk when his intercom buzzes.

SECRETARY (OS)

Darren Landing is on line 4 for you.

JACK

I knew this would happen.

He picks up the receiver.

JACK (Cont'd)

Darren? This is an unexpected surprise.

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. DAY.

Reed Miller is sitting in front of Darren's desk. Darren in shadow is talking on the telephone.

DARREN

I think it's about time we meet, Jack. We have a man on board who used to be in your employ, and I need to talk to you about him. Ron Lipman, right. What do you say to ten a.m. tomorrow?

Miller winks in Darren's direction.

DARREN (Cont'd)

Golf? Oh, I see. Yes, that would be fine. I know the place. I'll meet you there.

Darren hangs up the phone.

MILLER

Golf?

DARREN

He has a regular Tuesday morning tee-time at ten. I've seen him play before—he's not that good. You're MUCH better.

INT. LANDING WORLD PERSONNEL RECEPTION AREA. DAY.

Melissa locks her desk then pushes back and stands. Jane enters. Melissa quickly masks the surprise that briefly registers on her face and sits.

MELISSA

May I help you?

JANE

Hi, Melissa. Actually, I was hoping you'd tell me what happened with Reed Miller. It's all so strange, you know? His being here just long enough to hire both Ron and me for the same job, you do know, to start up a new department that nobody knows anything about.

Melissa is looking very uncomfortable, but Jane is talking too fast for her to interrupt.

JANE (Cont'd)

And nobody seems to know where my personnel file has gone or why I'm being offered a secretarial job while Ron is getting the training department head position.

MELISSA

Ron's not...um...

Melissa stops herself, but Jane places both hands on Melissa's desk and leans her face as close to Melissa's as she can.

JANE

Not what, Melissa? Not getting the job? What's really going on here—he's not what? Come on, Melissa, tell me!

MELISSA

I don't have...

JANE

The authority? Is that what you don't have? What DO you have?

Melissa is close to tears. She looks at her computer terminal, but it's turned off. Her eyes show confusion and misery.

Jane kneels beside Melissa's chair and gives her an imploring look.

JANE (Cont'd)

I'm sorry, Melissa, but you have to understand—you people are messing with my life.

Melissa nods.

MELISSA

I'm sorry, but I can't help you.

JANE

That's okay, Melissa. I think you already have.

This time surprise registers fully on Melissa's face.

INT. LANDING WORLD LOBBY. DAY.

Ron is waiting at the ladies room entrance past the technology commercial wall. Jane comes out of the Personnel Office and nearly collides with him.

JANE
Just the man I wanted to see.

RON
Jane? What are you...

JANE
Peggy called me at home last night about today's start time.

RON
Peggy?

JANE
Surprise, surprise. But I have a better one for you, Ron. That wasn't the only lie you told me yesterday.

Ron starts to leave but looks back at the ladies room entrance and hesitates.

JANE
What kind of job did Max really offer you, Ron? Something in security, or was it maintenance? Or was it in some other support area? I don't want to be a secretary, Ron, and you're not the blue collar type—together we might be able to convince them that Miller may have been nuts, but he was right—Landing needs its own training department and it needs US to get it going.

RON
Get lost.

JANE
You won't get very far with an attitude like that, Ron.

RON
Farther than you.

JANE
We'll see about that—because I'm NOT quitting, Ron. And today no matter what you do, I'll do it better.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

Liz stands in front of the cluster of eight trainees in a room where one wall contains ten

doors in a row, each door within a few feet of the next.

LIZ

We're each going to go into one of these doors. Then I'll use the intercom to give you some final instructions.

JANE

Can you tell us what this is first?

LIZ

I'm sorry, of course. The test you're about to undergo is experimental and completely conducted within the virtual reality environment. Behind those doors are cubicles that contain the equipment you'll need.

RON

What do you mean, test?

LIZ

It's a kind of game.

JANE

(to Peggy) Ugh—not a GAME.

FRED

How long will it take?

LIZ

You have up to three hours, and you WILL be timed.

JANE

Can I ask why we're doing this?

LIZ

Sure—it's to show your problem-solving ability, uh, and some other abilities. You'll find out after you finish—you'll be asked to evaluate it then.

PEGGY

I don't b'lieve I know enough about computers to do this.

LIZ

That's the beauty of virtual reality—the environment is set up so anyone can run it. There's even a help character I'll introduce to you when we get started.

HELEN

I agree with Peggy. I don't think I can handle it all by myself, even WITH the help thing.

LIZ

I'm so glad you brought that up—you WON'T be alone. You'll need to team up with at least one other person, OR you can all work together to solve it.

JANE

Solve it?

LIZ

You'll see. Oh, and Ron, you need to sign this.

While Ron signs the form, the group quickly pairs off: Cat with Ron, Jane with Peggy, Fred with Bob, and Joan with Helen.

Liz leads the way, pointing at Peggy to take the first door, Jane the second, Helen, Joan, Fred and Bob to take doors three through six, Ron to take seven and Cat to take eight. Liz opens the ninth door and enters.

INT. RON'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Ron steps onto the cushioned floor and faces a bank of controls. Headgear and gloves hang from clips.

LIZ (OS)

You're hearing me on the intercom, but once the program starts you'll be able to talk to each other by telling it to open a channel to Peggy, for example, or you can open multiple channels just by saying the names of those you want to talk to. I'm entering your names into the system right now. You're also seeing headgear and gloves. Put these on.

RON

Can we just listen to the others without them hearing us?

LIZ (OS)

No. Once they're open, the channels are two-way. But you can say "Close all channels" if you want privacy, or just open channels between certain people.

INT. JANE'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Jane stands stiffly in her headgear and gloves, hands up like a surgeon.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY ENVIRONMENT. DAY.

The group stands in a row in a room where the walls are covered with funhouse mirrors that distort their shapes. Everyone turns to face Liz and moves enough to the left or right to see her past the others.

LIZ

Okay, I've turned off the intercom and have activated channels between me and all of you. These pads will provide the clues you need and allow you to type in your answers. Drawer, please.

One mirror is replaced by a vertical row of drawers. Liz opens one and pulls out eight electronic notepads, each with an LCD screen, stylus and keypad, and hands them down the line, turning each one on as it goes.

RON

This is great!

Ron pulls out the stylus and circles a word shown on his monitor.

LIZ

Your notepad monitors display the seven clues that will lead you to the locations of seven riddles, more or less, whose answers form a phrase.

JANE

That's it? Figuring out riddles?

LIZ

That's it. As soon as I introduce you to the help character, I'm going to sign off and return to my office. If you need me, you can access me at my computer terminal through Otto.

At the mention of his name, the same Otto appears whom Jane knew at Waring.

JANE

Otto? Close all channels.

Suddenly Jane is alone with Otto.

JANE (Cont'd)

Otto, can you still hear me?

OTTO

Yes.

JANE

It's me—Jane—don't you recognize me?

OTTO

You haven't logged on before.

JANE

What's the quote for the day, Otto?

OTTO

"As the water shapes itself to the vessel that contains it, so a wise man adapts himself to circumstances."—Confucius.

JANE

It IS you. But it's NOT you. Open channels to everyone.

OTTO

In order to open comm channels you must state the other party's name or say "Open all channels."

JANE

Open all channels, then.

The others reappear.

PEGGY

Where'd you go?

JANE

Apparently when you close all channels, you're cut off visually, too. Where're Ron and Cat.

RON (OS)

We're not waiting for you. You're too damn slow.

Everything goes dark.

INT. JANE'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Jane removes her gear, opens her door and peeks out.

The others have done the same. Liz is nowhere to be seen. Cat looks in Liz's cubicle, but it is empty.

CAT

I was in here with Liz earlier. I think I can get us going again.

Cat goes into Liz's cubicle. The others return to theirs and shut their doors.

INT. RON'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Ron dons his gear and waits for the system to come back on.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY ENVIRONMENT. DAY.

The group reappears, except for Cat.

JANE

Otto?

Otto appears.

OTTO

Yes?

JANE
What just happened?

OTTO
The participant named Ron violated the rules.

JANE
What rules?

OTTO
No racial slurs, no profanity.

BOB
What is this, sensitivity training?

OTTO
The program is equipped with a sensitivity awareness feature.

HELEN
Someone had better watch his language from now on then, or we'll NEVER get done.

She looks pointedly at Ron. Cat appears and joins the group.

JOAN
I can't do this. It's impossible. It'll take me more than three hours to find my way around in here.

JANE
Not if we work together.

RON
Count us out. Close all channels.

Ron disappears.

CAT
I guess that means me, too. Close all channels.

Cat vanishes.

FRED
That only leaves three teams to handle all seven clues.

JANE
Why don't we do the first clue as a group—then we'll know what to expect and how it all works.

BOB
Yeah, and we can divvy up the rest, two clues to a team.

Jane maneuvers around. At one end of the mirrored room is a large sign flashing the words START HERE. Jane loses her balance and reaches out a hand to catch herself.

Instantly, the mirror she touches becomes an enormous dragon, roaring and spitting fire. Everyone SCREAMS.

Fred is the first to recover.

FRED

Whatever we do from now on, stay away from the walls.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

Ron and Cat are walking down a hallway, its walls containing images that seem to shift from spirals to circles, lightening and darkening randomly.

RON

You weren't with Liz earlier. You were with me.

CAT

The others don't know that.

RON

But I saw the control panel—it needed your ID and maybe an access code to activate this.

Cat doesn't say anything.

RON

You're not just IN on this—you WORK here, don't you.

Cat just looks at him. They arrive at a pair of doors, one yellow, the other green. Ron starts to pull his notepad from his pocket but changes his mind and moves over so he can read from Cat's.

The first clue says: A PASTORAL SCENE STARTS WITH A CARPET OF ME, BUT NOT IN ALL SEASONS IS MY GLORY COMPLETE.

RON

Carpet of me, pastoral scene: It has to be grass.

Ron moves toward the green door.

CAT

But what about the rest?

RON

It's meaningless. Green is it.

At the door, there are two large circular buttons that bear the words PUSH ME. One is near the top left of the door, the other near the bottom right. Stretching his arms as far as they'll reach, Ron cannot push both buttons by himself.

CAT
It can't be that simple—it never is.

Ron stays with one hand poised at the top left button while Cat gets into position by the right one.

RON
NOW!

INT. TUNNEL. DAY.

Ron and Cat find themselves hurtling down a narrow tunnel that zooms downward, sharply left, sharply right, then sharply left again. Cat SCREAMS.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY MIRRORED ROOM. DAY.

A mirror opens like a door, and Ron and Cat tumble out.

CAT
God, I forgot about the tunnels.

RON
You've PLAYED this before?! If you knew the answers, why put us through this?

CAT
If I KNEW the answers, bright boy, I wouldn't have.

RON
But if you've played before...

CAT
The designers aren't STUPID, Ron. They change the game every time.

RON
They don't change the SYSTEM, Cat.

CAT
Of course not...

Her gaze meets his, and a smile spreads across her face.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane and the others stand at the green and yellow doors reading the pastoral clue.

JANE
This is like The Lady and the Tiger.

FRED

Green seems too obvious to me.

BOB

Let's try the other one then.

Fred reaches for the PUSH ME button at the top right beside the yellow door, and Bob reaches for the lower left button. When they press them, the door opens revealing a glowingly colorful room.

INT. FIRST CLUE ROOM. DAY.

Jane and the others move to the center of the room and look around. The door closes behind them. Brightly colored words flash and disappear in what seems like a random pattern at different levels on the four walls: ALPHA, FIRST, MYSELF, LEADING, TWENTY-FIVE, I, THE, OF, ONE, THE, OTHERS, AM, MY, UNTO, KIND.

JOAN

It might help if we knew which direction to go in.

PEGGY

It's readin', ain't it? Try left to right.

The "I" appears on the wall where the door is, to the door's right.

JANE

If "I" is first, then "AM" should be next.

FRED

I am alpha—the—first—

BOB

One—unto—myself—

HELEN

Leading—the—twenty-five—

PEGGY

Others—of—my—kind.

BOB

What the h...

THE OTHERS

BOB!

BOB

Sorry—almost forgot myself.

Jane has typed the message onto her notepad.

JANE

Alpha is the Greek letter for "A."

The room flashes brilliant green, and an opening to a corridor appears on another wall.

FRED
I suppose that means "Go."

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

The group exits a corridor into the main hallway, and the corridor opening disappears. On the opposite wall are two more doors, one containing a large star emblem and the other containing an asterisk. PUSH ME buttons are in the same locations as they were at the last set of doors.

Fred walks back down the hallway to where it bends and peeks around the corner. Then he walks past the group to the next bend in the hallway and looks around it.

FRED
The green and yellow doors are back there, and in front of us is a set of red and blue doors. Looks to me like all we need to do is keep following this hall.

JANE
Peggy and I can take this set and the next one—that's clues two and three, right?

BOB
Fred and I'll take four and five.

Helen and Joan look at each other.

HELEN
I guess that leaves six and seven for us.

FRED
I think we'd better meet at the seventh clue's doors. If this is like putt putt golf, the only way out of this place may be through that last room.

Everybody nods. Jane and Peggy look at their notepads, and the four others head down the hall.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

Cat is pulling Ron down the hall past the yellow and green doors.

RON
Shouldn't I see the insides of each clue room so I'll know what they look like?

CAT
(Keeping voice low) If the others have divided the clues up between them, we need to hurry. Just look at the doors—each pair is different.

They come around the bend to the star/asterisk doors. Ron notes this on his keypad.

RON

If you say so—at the rate we've been going, there's no way we can win with the fastest time.

CAT

Who cares about winning? I teamed up with you because I thought you'd be a whiz at this. But with the others' teaming up, we can't afford any more delays from your mistakes.

RON

MY MISTAKES? Wait at least one more minute, lady. I thought you CARED about me, but you just want to USE me.

CAT

I DO care, but there's something else I haven't told you yet.

They pass the blue and red set of doors. Ron makes another notation.

RON

You might as well tell me now.

CAT

(Whispering) Not until we get out of here. We've probably said too much already.

RON

We're cut off from the others—they can't hear us.

CAT

The way this place is wired, somebody could be monitoring us right now. So keep quiet.

Going around three more bends—to the right, left, then right again—they pass three more sets of doors. The first bears a sun on one and a moon on the other. The second set includes one white and one black door. The third set contains a right hand, palm out, on one and a left hand on the other.

At the next bend, something in the corner catches Ron's eye, and he stops.

RON

Wait—I saw something.

He reaches toward the wall, but Cat grabs his hand.

CAT

Don't touch it!

An image of a corner doorway appears then quickly vanishes. Ron shakes his hand free and poises it as if ready to touch the image if it appears again.

RON

What is it?

CAT

It's a trap is what it is. As soon as you touch it, it sucks you inside a special room.

RON

Why can't I have a look?

CAT

Because once you get in, there's no way out.

Cat pulls him along to the seventh set of doors which bear an up arrow on one and a down arrow on the other.

CAT (Cont'd)

That's the last of them. Take off your gear and meet me outside my cubicle.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane and Peggy are coming out of an exit corridor. Ahead of them on the opposite wall are the blue and red doors.

INT. FOURTH CLUE ROOM. DAY.

Fred and Bob stand in a room where a sentence snakes around the walls. It says I BEAT TO MY OWN DRUM, DESPITE BEING BROKEN, PIERCED WITH AN ARROW OR TURNED TO STONE.

BOB

We never should have split up the group.

FRED

Quit whining and THINK, man.

MIKE

Give me a break. I don't have the heart for this.

Suddenly the walls flash red puffy hearts and an exit corridor opens. The two men give each other the high sign.

INT. ORIENTATION ROOM. DAY.

Cat is sitting in a chair with its laptop in front of her. Ron is watching over her shoulder. The walls are oppressively blank.

CAT

I don't know why I didn't think of this before.

She types ACCESS VIRTUAL REALITY. The screen flashes ENTER ACCESS CODE. Cat pulls a small rumpled piece of paper from her pocket.

She types in one set of the numbers written on the paper.

RON

That's not yours, is it.

CAT

Are you nuts? Let's just say it's borrowed.

The screen flashes the VIRTUAL REALITY title and goes into a series of graphics, then presents a list of game titles.

Cat selects ORIENTATION QUEST. The screen displays a vertical row of the seven sets of doors marked with their colors or symbols, the correct one flashing. The clue is displayed to the right of each pair. Ron quickly digs an index card and pen from his pocket and jots down the right answers.

The doors and clues are:

First: YELLOW/Green—A pastoral scene starts with a carpet of me but not in all seasons.

Second: Star/ASTERISK—Only when you know the meaning of your wish will you succeed.

Third: Blue/RED—Together we are royal, but your choice will make you indebted to me.

Fourth: SUN/moon—Day and night are graced by my light.

Fifth: Black/WHITE—There is no grey where we exist, but the purely righteous know the way.

Sixth: RIGHT HAND/Left hand—Sometimes each of us doesn't know what the other is doing, but even when I guess, I am never wrong.

Seventh: Up arrow/DOWN ARROW—What goes up must come down, and there it lies upon the ground.

Cat positions the cursor on the yellow door and double clicks. The first room appears, its words flashing on the walls. Then the words cascade off the walls to form a complete sentence at the bottom of the screen, an equals sign and the letter "A."

As Ron notes this on his index card, Cat returns to the doors and selects the asterisk on the second pair.

The room displays the sphinx saying its classic riddle in a cartoon speech bubble. At the bottom, the equals sign is followed by the word MAN.

Cat returns to the doors and clicks on the flashing red door. Inside its room, letters on one wall scramble and rescrumble themselves. They cascade to the bottom forming the phrase MUST BE GOOD AT after the equals sign.

Repeating the procedure, Cat clicks on the flashing sun on the fourth set of doors and sees the same snake of words Fred and Bob saw and an equals sign followed by a puffy HEART.

At the next set of doors, the flashing white one leads to a strange chicken scratch looking pattern on one of the walls. The equals sign is followed by the words SEE NUMBER SIX.

In the sixth room, a similar chicken scratch pattern appears. At the bottom, the scratches from the fifth room fit themselves perfectly above those from this room and, joined, they form the words TO WORK AT after the equals sign.

In the final room a funny clown holds nine balloons bearing the words WHAT HAS 960 LEGS AND 12 STORIES BUT CANNOT WALK. After the equals sign are the words "(The building that is) LANDING WORLD."

RON

Now what?

CAT

Follow me.

INT. FIFTH CLUE ROOM. DAY.

Fred and Bob stand before the wall of hieroglyphics, completely baffled, but the exit corridor is already open.

FRED

This beats all. It looks like chicken scratch.

BOB

Copy it, quick, and let's get out of here before that exit thing disappears. Maybe we can figure it out later.

INT. SIXTH CLUE ROOM. DAY.

Joan and Helen stand before an equally confusing array of hieroglyphics, but this room has no visible exit corridor. Joan is very upset.

JOAN

Now what are we going to do? We're STUCK here.

HELEN

Darren's going to get a piece of my mind...

JOAN

Quiet, Helen!

HELEN

I don't think they can hear us, Joan—I can't hear them. Can you?

JOAN

No, I can't, and we SHOULD be able to, shouldn't we?

HELEN

Otto?

Otto appears, his fingers laced together at chest level, a smile on his face.

OTTO

Yes?

HELEN

Why can't we hear Fred and the others?

OTTO

The channels to Ron and Cat are closed. The channels to Fred, Bob, Jane and Peggy are set at close-proximity volume.

JOAN

Can we increase it?

OTTO

Most certainly.

HELEN

Darren, is that you?

OTTO

There is no participant named Darren...

HELEN

Never mind. Just increase the volume, would you please?

Loud voices fill the room.

HELEN (Con't)

Not so LOUD!

The volume lowers to a tolerable level.

JOAN

Jane, Peggy, where are you?

PEGGY (OS)

We're still at number three—it's some kinda anagram, but we're gettin' close to figurin' it out.

HELEN

Well, we're...

Loud male voices are followed by the door opening revealing Fred and Bob.

FRED
(Booming) Hello, ladies, Otto!

Helen and Joan cover their ears but realize the gesture is useless.

HELEN
Otto, can't our volumes be set on automatic or something?

OTTO
Most certainly. Volumes can be set to maintain close-proximity levels regardless of true proximity.

HELEN
Then do it and get out of here.

BOB
What's the matter, Helen, game getting to you?

Helen scowls.

INT. SEVENTH CLUE ROOM. DAY.

Ron and Cat stand amidst a fireworks display surrounding them on the four walls. The exit corridor appears.

CAT
Say it.

RON
Why does it have to be me?

CAT
Don't ARGUE!

RON
Damn, damn, damn!

Everything goes dark.

INT. CAT'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Cat rips off her gear and opens her cubicle door.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

Cat rushes down to Peggy's cubicle as the other cubicle doors start opening.

FRED
What's going on?

CAT
Everybody hold tight for a sec.

Cat enters Peggy's cubicle, shutting the door behind her. Ron has exited his cubicle and looks appropriately contrite.

HELEN
It was YOU again, wasn't it.

Ron nods.

INT. PEGGY'S CUBICLE. DAY.

CAT
Don't go back into the game when I restart it—I need to see you.

PEGGY
I can't leave Jane!

CAT
It's an emergency, Peg. I'll explain it to her myself.

Cat jerks the door open and leaves.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

The group is angrily surrounding Ron.

BOB
We were nearly done! If you've caused us to lose...

Cat emerges from Peggy's cubicle.

CAT
Go back in and get ready. I'm restarting the game now.

RON
I SAID I was sorry!

Before Jane can close her door, Ron gets hold of her arm. He holds a finger to his lips to silence her. She tries to jerk her arm away, but he holds a palm out to make her wait.

The other doors close. Cat goes to Liz's cubicle. Ron enters Jane's and shuts the door.

INT. JANE'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Ron has let go of Jane's arm, and she is backed against the control panel.

RON
Where were you when the game was interrupted?

JANE
Wouldn't you like to know.

RON
I'm serious—were you in a clue room or in the hall?

JANE
In the hall—we'd just finished a clue.

RON
Good. Put on your gear. I want to show you something.

JANE
Why should I trust you?

RON
I'm sorry about earlier—the whole thing. I want to make it up to you since it looks like we'll be working together.

He smiles disarmingly at her. She looks suspicious.

The game comes back on, and Jane's gear is activated.

RON
Please, Jane—I know I've been a jerk, but I've seen the error of my ways. You're good with people—we'd make a great team.

Jane still looks doubtful, but she slowly puts the gear on.

JANE
Okay—show me.

RON
That's more like it. Where are you right now? What do you see?

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

JANE
I'm in the main hallway, across from two doors—a sun on one and a moon on the other. They should be—
(looks at notepad) they are—number four.

RON (OS)
Go down the hall two more sets of doors. (He waits)
Where are you now?

JANE
I'm just passing doors with hands on them.

She holds her hands up to match the ones on the doors.

RON (OS)
Stop at the next corner.

JANE
I'm there. OH!

RON (OS)
You saw something, right?

JANE
What is it?

RON (OS)
Get ready. As soon as the image appears again,
touch it.

JANE
I'm not touching ANYTHING—the last time we
touched a wall, a dragon attacked us.

INT. RON'S CUBICLE. DAY.

RON
(Registering surprise) Well, this is different. They
probably set that up to keep us from finding this,
and you can't win without it.

JANE (OS)
Let me get the others.

RON
NO! There's only room for one.

JANE (OS)
I don't like it—are you sure?

RON
You have to trust me, Jane. Has the image returned yet?

JANE (OS)
Several times.

RON
Get ready!

JANE (OS)
All I have to do is touch it?

RON
Yes.

JANE (OS)
There! Whoa!

Ron slips out of the cubicle.

JANE (Cont'd)
This is incredible.

No response.

JANE (Cont'd)
Ron?

INT. JANE'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Jane slips her headgear up enough to see—Ron is gone. She puts her gear back in place.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

Cat is standing by the main door waiting for Ron. He exits Jane's cubicle.

CAT
Hurry.

RON
Did Peggy buy it?

CAT
Hook, line and etc. Did Jane?

RON
Eventually. Now that we've slowed them down,
what are WE going to do?

CAT
Implement some financial planning.

INT. THIRD FLOOR. DAY.

Peggy exits the elevator and approaches a receptionist's desk.

PEGGY
What's the emergency, Maxine?

MAXINE
I don't have anything for you, Peg. Maybe Don does.

PEGGY
Have you seen Liz?

MAXINE
Not this morning.

Peggy hurries past Maxine's desk.

INT. SECRET ROOM. DAY.

Jane is viewing the image of a cartoon lion on the wall in front of her, a PUSH ME button where he navel would be.

LION

If I only had some courage, I could help you.

Jane turns and looks at the three other walls, each one bearing a PUSH ME button. She pushes the one closest to her.

The cartoon image of a striped cat wearing a toothy grin pops up.

CARTOON CAT

Anything can happen, but I can't help you.

Baffled, Jane pushes the next button. A toad in top hat and tails appears.

TOAD

You're in for a wild ride if you don't weaken.

Suddenly, Jane is sitting beside him in a flivver, and they're barreling down a winding bumpy road.

INT. CAT'S OFFICE. DAY.

Cat has a portable disk drive and two large disks for it under one arm. She's unclipping her ID with her free hand.

CAT

Take off your badge.

She clips her badge to a potted plant on her desk, and Ron clips his on a lower branch.

RON

Won't we need these?

CAT

I'll have to use a different code, so nobody will know it's us.

RON

Why can't they know it's us, Cat?

They leave Cat's office.

INT. HALLWAY. DAY.

Cat and Ron come out of her office. She keeps her voice soft.

CAT

We're supposed to be playing the game, aren't we?

RON

Oh, right.

CAT

But I need to get, um, caught up on a few things.

RON

You'd think they'd have someone take over for you—you ARE still working, after all.

CAT

Usually they do—this is some extra work I'm doing.

They pass a few workers, and Cat nods and smiles hello.

RON

What kind...

CAT

Don't talk any more.

INT. SECRET ROOM. DAY.

Jane is standing unsteadily.

TOAD

Thanks for the company!

Jane approaches the fourth wall, hesitates, then pushes the button. Scheherazade appears.

SCHEHERAZADE

I will entertain you for 1,001 nights, if you'll let me.

JANE

RON! I should've KNOWN! You LIAR.

Jane circles the room, holding out her hands, moving them toward the walls, then pulling back.

JANE (Cont'd)

Otto, I need you!

OTTO (OS)

I cannot enter.

JANE

But you can help me.

OTTO (OS)

No help is available.

JANE
Where are the others in my group?

OTTO (OS)
I do not understand the question.

JANE
Where are Fred, Bob, Helen, Joan and Peggy? Why can't I hear them?

OTTO (OS)
Fred, Bob, Helen and Joan are approaching your location. Peggy is off-line. You cannot hear the other participants because your communication channels to them are blocked.

JANE
I don't suppose they can hear me either.

OTTO (OS)
They cannot.

JANE
What about Ron and Cat?

OTTO (OS)
Ron and Cat are off-line.

JANE
But I can talk to you. Hm. Can you deliver a message to the others—other participants—from me?

OTTO (OS)
I cannot.

JANE
Damn! (she looks around)

OTTO (OS)
Profanity has no effect from this location.

JANE
(Exasperated) Can the other participants complete the game without me?

OTTO (OS)
They cannot.

JANE
Quit the game, then.

OTTO (OS)
The quit command is invalid from this location.

JANE

But there is a way out, or I wouldn't even be able to hear you, would I.

INT. JANE'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Jane removes her gear and leaves.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

Jane knocks on Peggy's door. No answer. Jane opens the door and peeks inside. The cubicle is empty. Jane rushes out of the suite.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

Fred, Bob, Helen and Joan are in a huddle.

FRED

It really pi-eeves me (he looks around but nothing happens) that we had to start over.

HELEN

Jane and Peggy have to be here somewhere.

JOAN

Something bad's happened to them, I just know it.

HELEN

Well, here goes nothing. Otto?

OTTO

Yes?

HELEN

Where are Jane and Peggy?

OTTO

Jane is inaccessible at this time. Peggy is off-line.

HELEN

That must mean Jane is still in the game.

OTTO

It does.

BOB

Let's finish the game without them.

OTTO

You cannot.

FRED
Well, sports fans, what do we do now?

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane pulls her ID badge from keeping the emergency door from shutting all the way and clips the badge on her blouse.

JANE
Locked. Everything in this place is locked. You can get in but you can't get out.

Jane hurries down the hall.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

Jane returns to her cubicle.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Peggy bolts out of the elevator, nearly colliding with Alice.

PEGGY
Where's Liz, Alice?

ALICE
Liz is not available at this time. If you'd like to leave a...

PEGGY
Forget it.

Alice continues her spiel until she beeps, but by this time Peggy is out of range.

INT. PEGGY'S CUBICLE. DAY.

Peggy's unit is turned off. She switches it back on and dons her gear.

INT. CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

Liz enters, walking more smoothly than usual. The two technicians are watching the monitors.

FEMALE TECH
There you are—lots of people have been looking for you.

LIZ
I had to get fitted for a new rig. Look.

She pulls up a pants leg. A grid of electrodes covers her leg and continues into her shoe.

FEMALE TECH

Nifty. Too bad our news isn't so pleasant.

LIZ

What's been going on?

MALE TECH

For starters, Ron and Cat have been very bad little children.

LIZ

Dad had better see this, too.

Liz picks up a telephone receiver as the technician pulls up the video.

INT. DESIGNER'S OFFICE. DAY.

Cat opens the door, waits for Ron to pass, and shuts the door behind them. The lights come on automatically.

RON

What is this place?

CAT

We call it God's Lair—it's the chief designer's office, but he's out of town this week.

Cat sets the Syquest drive and disks on the desk, hooks the Syquest up and boots up the two large Macintoshes on the console.

RON

Anything I can do to help?

CAT

Not really—keep me company?

RON

Can we access personnel files from these?

CAT

Sure.

Cat positions one chair in front of the Mac with the Syquest hooked to it, then puts another chair in front of the second Mac and motions for Ron to sit there.

CAT (Cont'd)

Have yourself a ball.

Cat comes around behind him and operates the mouse, helping him get into where he needs to be.

INT. GOLF COURSE CLUBHOUSE. DAY.

Reed Miller is on a courtesy phone and looking through the large window at Jack Mitchell waiting outside in a cart.

Miller frowns then hangs up the phone.

EXT. CLUBHOUSE. DAY.

Miller approaches Mitchell and extends his right hand.

MILLER

Jack? Darren Landing—sorry to keep you waiting so long.

JACK

I've been wanting to meet you for a long time, Darren.

Miller swings himself into position beside Jack. The caddy loads Miller's clubs and gets in the driver's seat.

MILLER

You certainly used an interesting method, sending over Lipman to get my attention.

JACK

I was afraid Ron's name would come up!

MILLER

You must be about the guiltiest SOB on the planet right now.

JACK

Make that definitely the guiltiest. I don't know what I was thinking when I gave Ron such a great reference.

MILLER

Sure you do—you were thinking Landing's so big, Lipman wouldn't even be noticed.

JACK

How did you know that?

MILLER

My company's bigger than yours, remember? A LOT bigger. Try as we do to avoid quarterback sneaks, one gets by us occasionally.

JACK

You know, your voice sounds different on the phone.

INT. SECRET ROOM. DAY.

Jane stares at the walls.

JANE
You're SURE this will work.

OTTO (OS)
It will work.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY HALLWAY. DAY.

A somewhat see-through Jane pops up at the seventh set of doors, startling the group assembled there.

JANE
It worked!

HELEN
What worked? You look strange, and what's that on your forehead?

JANE
I don't know—what's it look like?

PEGGY
Looks like an "M."

JANE
Oh, it's nothing, ignore it.

FRED
What does it mean, Jane?

They look suspiciously at her.

JANE
It means Ron trapped the REAL me in a secret room somewhere, and you're seeing a multiplex image of me.

PEGGY
That rat!

HELEN
Well, now that you're here, let's get this over with.

Helen gets in position at the lower PUSH ME button, and Bob reaches for the upper one at the down arrow door. They both push.

INT. DESIGNER'S OFFICE. DAY.

Cat is entering codes and commands while Ron scrolls through the list of personnel files.

RON

Here's Jane's!

He double clicks on her file. It opens. Under her name, her job title is given as Co-Director of Training. Ron positions the cursor before Director and types Assistant. Then he deletes it. He closes the file and drags it to the trash can, then pulls down the menu and highlights the empty trash command.

A prompt appears that says THE TRASH CONTAINS ONE ITEM THAT CONTAINS 906 Kb OF INFORMATION. ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO THROW IT AWAY?

Ron positions the arrow cursor over the OKAY and clicks his mouse.

Ron returns to the main menu and double clicks on his file. Under his name, his job title is Co-Director of Training. He highlights the CO- and hits the delete key. The pulls down the FILE menu and highlights SAVE.

He sits back and relaxes, putting his leather loafer-clad feet up on the table.

COMPUTER VOICE (OS)

Voice identification required.

Cat slams her hand down on the table. Ron drops his feet to the floor and sits forward.

RON

What's wrong?

CAT

The damn thing has an extra safeguard on it.

COMPUTER (OS)

Voice identification not accepted.

Cat calms herself, then types in OVERRIDE CODE DES666.

RON

That's an odd code.

CAT

This guy's VERY superstitious. It's taken me two weeks to get all his codes without him finding out what I was up to.

The screen flashes acceptance and brings up a new menu of files.

RON

He doesn't KNOW? Exactly what ARE you doing?

CAT

Just copying a few files, that's all.

RON

What kind of files?

CAT
Designs—the new stuff.

RON
Why?

CAT
Must you ask so many questions? There they are.

Cat highlights a large group of files and drags them over to the Syquest icon.

RON
People here don't need copies of this stuff—it's
ALREADY in the system. You're copying this
for somebody OUTSIDE Landing.

He stands abruptly and grabs Cat by the shoulders and pivots her toward him.

RON (Cont'd)
You're committing espionage!

CAT
Took you long enough.

Cat pushes away from Ron and checks the computer screen. A prompt indicates that the files are locked and cannot be copied.

INT. SEVENTH CLUE ROOM. DAY.

Jane and the rest watch the fireworks display.

FRED
That's the answer: "A man has to be good at heart to
work at Landing World"? How lame can you get?

The exit corridor opens, and they troop out.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SUITE. DAY.

Liz is there to greet everyone as they come out of their cubicles.

LIZ
That was very good, everyone. Just over two hours.

They look around. Ron's and Cat's doors are closed.

FRED
Are Ron and Cat still in there?

LIZ
No, they've already finished.

BOB

Then they won.

LIZ

Not exactly. But we don't have time to go into that now. I need to get each of you over to your assigned work areas. Follow me.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Liz stops outside the elevator.

LIZ

The rest of you wait here. Jane, come with me.

She leads an unhappy Jane to a door across from the orientation room.

INT. SMALL TRAINING OFFICE. DAY.

The lights are already on when Liz and Jane enter, and Alice waits by a desk equipped with a computer and flanked by file cabinets.

LIZ

She's all yours, Alice. Jane, someone will be back for you at lunchtime.

Liz pivots and exits. Jane watches her go, then looks at Alice.

JANE

This feels like death row.

INT. DESIGNER'S OFFICE. DAY.

Cat is intent on her monitor. Ron is pacing around the room.

CAT

There, that ought to do it.

She drags the list of file icons onto the Syquest icon again. The copying process begins.

RON

Think about what you're doing. I've been called a lot of things—sexist, macho, crude—even a cheat—and maybe I do cheat a little on unimportant things. But I'm NO thief, Cat, and neither are you.

CAT

You don't know anything about it.

RON

I know enough.

CAT

There's no other way.

RON

There's always another way! Whatever it is, we can solve it, if we work together.

CAT

Like we solved the game?

RON

That was nothing—you could go to JAIL for this, Cat.

The computer monitor bar graph shows that only a little of the copying has been done so far. Cat grabs the edge of the table, her knuckles whitening.

CAT

Come on, come on!

INT. SMALL TRAINING OFFICE. DAY.

Jane is sitting on the edge of the desk, facing the door.

ALICE

Please, Jane, sit in the chair.

Jane begins pacing.

JANE

This can't be happening to me—two days ago I had my life together—I was in CONTROL! What have I done to deserve this?

ALICE

I do not understand the question.

JANE

Of course, you don't. No offense, Alice, but I didn't go to college and work my way up so I could end up like this. NO job is worth the kind of aggravation I've been subjected to here.

Resolutely, Jane stops pacing, straightens her clothes and heads for the door.

ALICE

Where are you going, Jane?

JANE

I quit, Alice. I am finished, done, finito, outahere.

ALICE

I do not have the authority to accept a resignation.

JANE
 You don't, huh. Well, I know someone who does.
 And it's about time we met.

INT. DESIGNER'S OFFICE. DAY.

Cat is watching the graph fill, showing the copying process is nearly done. Ron begins rubbing the soles of his shoes on the carpet, like an angry bull.

LIZ
 Am I supposed to wave a red cape?

RON
 I'm not letting you do this, Cat.

Continuing to rub the carpet, Ron stretches his hand across the table toward the Syquest. Cat is so intent on him, she doesn't see the bomb message appear on the monitor. She starts to rise, trying to block Ron's hand, but he connects with the Syquest.

The static charge sends his hand and him flying backward. Cat SCREAMS.

The machine shuts down. Both computers do the same.

An ALARM sounds.

Cat looks at the computer, then at Ron now lying half on the floor and half against the wall, rubbing his hand.

CAT
 You could have killed yourself!

RON
 I'd RATHER be dead than see you in jail.

She kneels beside him.

CAT
 You did that for me?

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane is at the elevator inserting her ID card into the control panel. Alice rolls up behind her.

ALICE
 Please return to your work area, Jane.

JANE
 I told you—I QUIT!

Alice extends a skinny metallic arm toward the control panel and inserts a "finger" into the slot. The sign flashes that the elevator is disabled. Jane tries her card, but

nothing happens.

Alice retreats. Jane rushes after her, grabbing the offending arm and pulling it.

JANE

Come back here, you, you...

The alarm sounds. Jane drops Alice's arm, then grabs it again and resumes trying to drag Alice back to the elevator controls.

EXT. GOLF COURSE. DAY.

Reed and Jack are on a green. Reed is setting up a very long putt to the cup.

JACK

The way Ron talked, it sounded like his mother got him the job.

MILLER

His mother may have gotten him the interview, but his award-winning designs and your glowing reference got him the job, Jack.

JACK

His mother was a powerful woman, Darren—I didn't want to get on her bad side.

MILLER

Now THERE'S a convenient excuse.

He sinks his putt perfectly.

JACK

What do you want me to say, Darren?

Miller walks up until he's nose to nose with Jack.

MILLER

I want your promise, Jack, face to face, that you'll NEVER pass a Ron off on anyone ever again.

JACK

I promise, I promise.

Miller shakes Jack's hand, belly to belly. Jack steps back.

JACK (Cont'd)

You're going to make me take him back, aren't you.

MILLER

No, no. We have plans for Ron. He won't be a problem.

JACK
How'd you manage that?

MILLER
Trade secret.

A strong WIND kicks up, and a loud thwumping noise fills the air. Jack ducks, but Miller sees the cause and waves.

A Landing World helicopter lands a few yards away. A crewman leans out.

CREWMAN
There's an emergency back at the office.

Miller pulls Jack up, and they shake hands again.

MILLER
Looks like the game is up.

Jack watches in awe as "Darren" boards and the copter lifts off.

INT. HELICOPTER. DAY.

MILLER
Couldn't Darren handle it?

CREWMAN
He thought you'd like to be there for the big finish—
besides, he knows how much you love a grand exit.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Jane is dragging Alice by an arm back to the elevator despite little outriggers Alice is using to block Jane's progress. The alarm is still blaring.

Jane pulls Alice to the right, then to the left, trying to outrun the outriggers that pop out and retract to counter her moves. About the time Jane finally gets the advantage, Alice emits an electric shock. Jane lets go, backing off and circling the little robot.

Down the hall, the emergency door opens with a soft whoosh.

OTTO (OS)
Alice, are you giving Jane a hard time?

Jane whirls toward the voice.

JANE
Otto? Otto! Is it really you?

Jane runs toward him.

OTTO

Most certainly.

She grabs his shoulders and squeezes, then runs her hands down his arms, finally clasping and shaking his hands.

JANE

It IS you. For a second, I thought you were another illusion.

OTTO

Illusions are what we make them, Jane.

JANE

Oh, Otto—I don't know why you'd come back to this wacky place, but am I glad to see you.

OTTO

Trying to leave?

JANE

I WAS going to just run out of here and never look back, but that's only because I couldn't figure out a way to get upstairs so I could tell that Darren Landing exactly what I think of him and his house of horrors.

OTTO

That bad, huh?

JANE

They've made me a secretary, Otto, after putting me through orientation hell. What IS that noise?

OTTO

I was just headed upstairs to find out. So if you're serious about telling off the president of Landing World, now's your chance.

JANE

Aren't you afraid of him? Everyone else seems to be.

OTTO

There's only three things I fear, Jane: Almighty God, a ghost, and a woman with a .38 who's had too much to drink.

Jane can't suppress a smile. Otto starts for the elevator.

JANE

Wait! I'm coming with you.

INT. DESIGNERS' FLOOR HALLWAY. DAY.

Ron is struggling to pull Cat away from the designer's office.

CAT
The Syquest—I have to get it.

RON
Leave it, Cat!

He yanks her toward the emergency exit door.

INT. NINTH FLOOR. DAY.

Jane follows Otto off the elevator into a plush lobby area. The receptionist starts to say something, but Otto winks at her, and she returns to her work. He leads Jane through the lobby, walking quickly.

JANE
I mean, why would ANYBODY want to work here?

OTTO
It has its compensations.

JANE
I'm surprised at you, Otto. They couldn't pay me enough to stay here another minute. They play such mind games—after only one DAY here, I was doubting myself, my marriage, my whole life!

OTTO
To experience self-doubt can be good for you.

JANE
Always the philosopher, eh, Otto?

They reach a massive pair of double doors, a control panel beside them.

OTTO
This is it.

JANE
I'll bet he's never touched the ground in his entire life. He's too busy up here in his ivory tower thinking up ways to torture people.

Otto punches in the code.

JANE (Cont'd)
Landing World must use your services a lot.

OTTO
You might say that.

INT. EMERGENCY STAIRWELL. DAY.

Ron and Cat burst through the doorway and toward the stairs only to be greeted by a loud whirring sound that accompanies a large panel dropping in front of them. Before they can react, the emergency door shuts behind them, and the panel cuts them off from the stairway. They are boxed in.

Cat shakes herself loose from Ron's grip and stands with her back to him.

Ron grips the emergency door knob and rattles it, but the lock is tight. He moves around pressing his hands against the walls, beating his fist, feeling for openings.

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. DAY.

Jane stops just inside the door, but Otto scurries over to the president's desk. The room is dark. Otto looks at the ceiling and shakes his head.

JANE

Are you sure we should be in here? He could return any second.

Otto goes behind the desk and drops into the chair.

JANE (OS)

Otto! You're going to get yourself in big trouble. This guy is a tyrant.

He touches something and a computer control console rises out of the desk-side credenza.

JANE

How come you know how to do that?

Otto grins at her.

OTTO

They don't call me Suntan Superman for nothing.

JANE

This isn't funny, Otto. I haven't heard that alarm since we got off the elevator anyway. Maybe the problem's fixed.

Otto is pressing keys on the keyboard and intently watching the monitors.

OTTO

You can't hear that alarm up here. It was something Joe cooked up for fun—I told him it was stupid and unnecessary, but I guess he was right after all.

Jane steps closer to the desk and the totally absorbed Otto. Over the desk on the wall is a framed quotation from Woodrow Wilson written in black calligraphy on parchment: "One cool judgment is worth a thousand hasty counsels." Jane looks at Otto, then back at the quotation.

COMPUTER (OS)
Voice identification required.

OTTO
Joe, you stinker.

Reed Miller rushes into the room. Jane does a double-take. He passes Jane and joins Otto at the credenza.

MILLER
Everything under control?

OTTO
Not quite yet. Joe's been busy. Enjoy your exit?

MILLER
Lovely. Now use your override. Whatever cascade effect he's been playing with has been activated—it's knocking out systems all over the building.

OTTO
I could tell, and now that you're here, I will.

Otto looks at Jane, watching her face carefully as he speaks: She's staring at Miller.

OTTO (Cont'd)
Voice code override: DARREN ONE. CEASE
CASCADE.

For long seconds, nothing happens. Then the lights come on. Miller smiles and pats Otto/Darren on the back. They both stare at Jane. She stumbles over to a chair and collapses into it.

JANE
I don't like to be confused. Life's confusing enough.

DARREN
Hey, that's good. Can I quote you sometime?

JANE
I don't know whether to be angry or what.

DARREN
Choose the "or what." Now let's see who led us on this merry chase.

INT. EMERGENCY STAIRWELL TRAP. DAY.

Ron is pressed up against Cat's back, his hands gripping her shoulders.

RON
Darren's your friend. How could you STEAL from him?

CAT

You wouldn't understand.

RON

My last girlfriend called me a chauvinistic prick, but ever since I met you, something has kept urging me to be better than myself. I figured that something was coming from you.

CAT

I'm desperate, Ron. My ex has taken away my children, my money and now he wants my house. Darren gave me a job, paying me top secretarial scale, even though I'm not even an AVERAGE secretary--and the others here know it--Darren just couldn't help me any more. And when this man offered me a quarter million just to let him see what Landing World's working on these days, I didn't see the harm.

RON

All this is about money?

CAT

I'm not beautiful any more, I'll never get another rich husband, and I'm too old to start over.

Cat bursts into tears.

RON

Who says? I'm rich, I think you're more than beautiful, and if you'd have me, I'd become your husband right now.

CAT

You are? You do? You would? Oh, Ron!

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. DAY.

DARREN

Computer, what was the cause of the cascade I just aborted?

COMPUTER (OS)

Unauthorized voice identification for level one file access and copying.

DARREN

What files?

COMPUTER (OS)

Program design and personnel.

DARREN

State the voice identification used and the source's current location.

COMPUTER (OS)

Voice identification Catherine MacMillan. Location: her office.

Darren enters a command and watches a monitor. The camera shows Cat's empty office with something hanging from her plant.

DARREN

Zoom in on the potted plant.

Cat's badge on the upper branch has drooped so that it now rests on Ron's badge hanging on a lower branch.

MILLER

If they've left their badges behind, we'll have to hunt for them the old-fashioned way.

INT. SECURITY OFFICE. DAY.

Two security officers face a wall of monitors. One officer is on the phone.

FIRST OFFICER

Which office? They can't have gotten far, then. He has that floor rigged like Fort Knox.

The officer hangs up the phone.

FIRST OFFICER (Cont'd)

We got two badgeless runaways somewhere on or near the fifth floor. They're probably—yep, there they are.

SECOND OFFICER

That Joe—he's a devil.

INT. EMERGENCY STAIRWELL TRAP. DAY.

A quick series of whirring, clicking noises cause Ron and Cat to look up. A security camera is focusing on them.

INT. DARREN LANDING'S OFFICE. DAY.

Miller has sat next to Jane who eyes him suspiciously. Darren is talking on the phone.

JANE

None of this was real, was it. Except that you do exist. The whole mental breakdown thing, it was fake. And Melissa, Peggy, the others—they were ALL in on it.

MILLER

Even the employees in the dining room.

JANE

But you also hired Ron for the same job. Why?

Darren has hung up the phone.

DARREN

To put it simply, I hate jerks. When I first started this company, I knew what type of people and working environment I wanted. But among those I hired, I had my share of blamers, shirkers and liars. Of course I weeded them out, but that took time, and the damage they could do was so avoidable.

MILLER

Have you ever had a job where the employees were unhappy, the management was insensitive—sometimes even incompetent—and everyone was complaining? You won't see that here.

JANE

Because you came up with this orientation gimmick.

DARREN

It all boils down to two things, Jane: Honor and consideration for others. We set out to prove that even the largest corporation could have a cohesive atmosphere where the employees are free to trust and be genuine. And we came up with—shall we say—special hiring practices.

JANE

That's very ambitious AND clever.

DARREN

I needed to be both for good reason.

Liz rolls in sitting in a wheelchair.

JANE

You're HIS daughter? But you're, you're, you're...

LIZ

White? I'm adopted!

DARREN

All of this has been for her. She wanted to be like the other kids—able to walk and join in. Landing World made that happen. And since this place is home to me and to my child, I hope you can understand—you don't let just ANYBODY into your home.

LIZ

Speaking of family, there are some people who want to see you.

Jane is puzzled. Peggy, Fred, Bob, Helen and Joan enter and surround her.

PEGGY

We won't blame you if you're angry at us, Jane.

JANE

For what, pulling off a president-said-so fantasy? I just feel stupid for not figuring it out—none of it SEEMED right, but I couldn't believe it.

LIZ

That's what we wanted, Jane—someone who's basically trusting.

JANE

Did Ron catch on?

LIZ

Almost too quickly, yet he never said anything—he thought he could use it to his advantage.

JANE

Well, Ron's beaten me at every turn, so he gets the job.

DARREN

Not even if you don't want it.

EXT. LANDING WORLD ROOFTOP. DAY.

Darren and Ron survey the horizon.

DARREN

There it is, Ron—St. Louis, Illinois, our beautiful country. Lots of people out there, living, loving, working, and, finally, dying—like us, everywhere the same.

RON

I can't believe you're Darren Landing.

DARREN

Why, because I'm black?

RON

I remember seeing you at Mitchell's—in a maintenance uniform. I have to tell you, I'm impressed.

DARREN

You're a good talker, Ron—you put up a good front.

RON

It's all part of the game, isn't it?

DARREN

Life is no game, Ron, and there's no room in my company for phonies.

RON

What are you telling me, Darren?

DARREN

I'm telling you that right now you're not Landing World management material—you didn't see a thing wrong with the inefficiency, disorganization and bullying we portrayed—you thought it was okay. You cheated on the virtual reality game and tried your damndest to make Jane look bad—you even took the SODA money—and you NEVER, Ron, not once, gave a thought to doing your best purely for the sake of it.

RON

I think I see what you mean.

DARREN

It should be clear to you by now that, at least at Landing World, cheaters never win. However, since you DID stop Cat, I'm going to give you another chance.

RON

I appreciate it.

DARREN

There are only two ways to become a manager at Landing, Ron. One is to pass the orientation scenario, and you've obviously failed that.

RON

What's the other way?

DARREN

To work your way up, from the very bottom. So it's your choice: the door or (he points downward).

INT. CAT'S OFFICE. DAY.

Darren sits behind Cat's desk, Liz is in her wheelchair, and Cat sits opposite the desk.

DARREN

The police were happy to hear from us, and since you've agreed to testify, we're treating this like it was our plan all along.

CAT

Thank you, both of you.

LIZ

But you know you can't stay.

CAT

Don't worry—it's all working out for the best. I've already had a better offer.

INT. JACK MITCHELL'S OFFICE. DAY.

Ron charges into the room, Jack's secretary right behind grabbing for him.

SUSIE

Stop, Ron!

JACK

It's okay, Susie.

Susie gives Ron a dirty look and leaves, shutting the door.

RON

Jack, you have to help me—I want my job back.

JACK

Landing World not to your liking?

RON

Let's just say the job isn't what I thought it would be.

JACK

No hard feelings, Ron, but your replacement took over the day you left, and I'm very pleased with her work.

RON

HER? You gave my job to a WOMAN?

JACK

Don't let the door hit your you-know-what on your way out, Ron.

INT. JANE'S NEW OFFICE. DAY.

Helping Jane unpack two boxes in a large windowed office, Peggy unpacks two of the Alice in Wonderland figures and stares at them in her hands.

JANE

It's a good thing I kept this stuff in my trunk—I almost took it out last night.

PEGGY

Well, I gotta get back to MY desk--I got some catching up to do. Glad you're with us.

Peggy sets down the figures and leaves. Jane picks up the telephone receiver.

JANE

Hello yourself, Meg. Guess what? I get to hire my own secretary, IF I know somebody who's suitable. And guess who that might be?

Jane has her back to the door when Darren enters. He waits until she hangs up the phone and notices him.

DARREN

Still want to tell me off?

JANE

I'm thinking about it. First I have to get used to calling you Darren. It's been a weird few days. I'll be glad to actually get to work.

DARREN

But not today—take the rest of the day off. We'll make a fresh start tomorrow.

JANE

I haven't seen Ron anywhere—is he still...around?

DARREN

He's getting settled right now.

INT. LANDING WORLD MAILROOM. DAY.

Ron is listening attentively to HARRY JONES, the mailroom manager.

RON

Why can't the computer do that?

HARRY

Until it learns to read, we'll keep sorting by hand. Any other questions?

RON

Can I go out to my car for a minute? I left someone waiting there for me.

HARRY

Don't be gone long.

EXT. LANDING WORLD ALLEY. DAY.

Cat is sitting in Ron's car filing a nail. She has the car running so she can stay cool. Ron raps on the window.

CAT
How's the mailroom?

RON
It's a mailroom all right.

CAT
Well, it's only a matter of time till they recognize your talents and move you up the ladder.

RON
You know, sweetheart—I don't really care about moving up any time soon, that is as long as you can keep coming back at five and picking me up.

She smiles and nods, and he kisses her. She scoots over and drives off.

INT. KAVANAUGH TV ROOM. NIGHT.

Sam is engrossed in a game of Nintendo. Jane lumbers into the room buried in several layers of shirts, sweaters, a jacket, pants and socks, and has her bedroom slippers pulled awkwardly on over her shoes. She is carrying a cooler with two beer mugs propped on its top.

SAM
Now there's a flattering get-up. What's the occasion?

JANE
Strip Nintendo, anyone?

FADE OUT.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Although I have taught fiction writing techniques for several years to other adults and have written numerous short stories and one other screenplay (but it was based on a factual event), I had never attempted a longer work of fiction. And as a teacher of writing, I had unrealistically high expectations of myself. I wanted my screenplay to be the best ever written, or I didn't feel I could devote myself to producing it.

That hurdle ate up about the first two weeks of my summer break. I had advised countless students not to let their expectations or their perfectionism stop them from writing, yet I was doing exactly that. If there is always something good in everything bad that happens, the good in this delay turned out to be my then being able to handle more smoothly all the subsequent hurdles I knew would put themselves in my path.

Writing is a process of creation, or some would say invention, that requires the writer to make countless decisions. What is the central question? Who is the main character and what does she want? Who opposes her? Why? What is at stake? Why should anyone care what happens to these people? And after the situation is set up, what is going to happen next and next and next to carry the story and hopefully the interested viewer all the way to the end?

Two elements probably held me up more than any of the others: the central question and how to organize and keep track of all the details that make up a longer fictional work. The first act had practically written itself. I had expected the second and third to do the same. When they did not, when I found myself mired in not knowing WHAT to do specifically through the second act especially, I was thrown so far off balance, I did not know how to recover.

Writing has always been a quick process for me. To find myself involved in trying to write a piece of fiction that just wasn't cooperating was a totally new experience. For about six weeks, I read books, talked to fellow writers and worked on creating outlines. I must have watched Jurassic Park and Dances with Wolves dozens of times because they are such impressive films with such tight construction. I even outlined both of them to see what their structure, action points and timing would look like on paper.

But when I would try outlining my story, I kept running into too many unknowns. That was the problem: I really didn't KNOW what my character was supposed to face, what her opponent was going to do to try to defeat her, or what the real issue in my story was.

Nevertheless, I had actually worked at a company that was disorganized and autocratic in its management. I wanted to turn these faults into deliberate deception. I

needed Jane to have something negative from her past that would be triggered by this scenario.

I rewrote my first act and wrote to page 90 only to find I'd opened up too many possible problems from the past and in the present to resolve within 120 pages. Added to that, Ron had become uncooperative: Every time I tried to create a scene with conflict involving him with Jane, he would leave. He had taken control. I have heard many writers complain about characters taking over, but this was another first for me. What I came to realize at that point probably was the only thing that allowed me to finish the screenplay: I was going to have to struggle through the same setbacks, moods, disappointments, self-doubts, wrong turns and other phases of writing fiction that I had coached many a student through. I just had to listen to my own advice: Keep writing.

I rewrote my first act again, this time focusing on the conflict between Ron and Jane as two people hired by one company for the same job and thrust into competition with each other to keep the job. By this time, the first act felt completely drained of its energy and interest for me. I realized that my original version had contained certain elements of humor, romance and suspense while remaining upbeat.

In waiting one year and nine months after writing my original treatment and first act, I had lost contact with the feelings I wanted to convey and the purpose I wanted this story to have. I had let the situation take dominance when really Jane's character was my original focal point. I had thought I needed to balance Ron's presentation to the viewer with Jane's, giving each of them equal exposure, but after studying my stock of films again, I realized many main characters and villains are not introduced at all until well into the second act.

This realization freed me to return to my original first act and re-examine its dynamics. I removed three or four scenes that either repeated information already contained elsewhere or served no useful purpose except to maintain the mood, and replaced them with telling scenes about Ron and Landing World.

When I did this, the first act suddenly led to the second. I had seen what I liked and what interested me in many other films, and I realized I had to put these kinds of elements into my own. I have a number of favorite images I wanted to include that also turned out to be useful (helicopters, wheelchairs, fantasy figures).

By now I also realized I wanted Landing World to be the world leader in producing computer technology. I wanted Jane to have worked her way up the corporate ladder from the bottom and to fear ending up being sent back down. I wanted Ron to be flawed but redeemable, and I wanted him to become romantically involved with an older

woman I named Cat who had severe money and related identity problems. I wanted Jane's secretary Meg from the first act to be replaced in the second act by an orientation participant, Peggy, and then Meg to become Jane's secretary again at the end. More and more details flowed forth.

I wanted Landing World's technology focus to be based on a humanitarian purpose, so I made Liz a paraplegic. I wanted to have a black maintenance man be Jane's chief ally, but gradually his character became so strong and attractive to me, I realized he embodied Darren Landing, so Otto became Darren's "alter ego."

I wanted the film to be visually interesting as well as technologically intriguing. One of my graduate course instructors develops virtual reality technology, and I wanted to incorporate a virtual reality environment into the film in some way. I needed to pit Jane against Ron, but I decided everyone else in the orientation scenario could be Landing World employees just pretending to be newcomers. The idea of illusions and how people believe them began to crystallize in my thoughts and become interwoven in the story.

In order for the Landing World scenario to work as a device geared to test Jane and Ron, I decided it needed to be slick looking but amateurishly handled. A person like Jane going for what she thought was a better job at an exemplary corporation would be frustrated by disorganization, inefficiency and tyranny. I wanted to undermine Jane, to make her think she'd made a mistake. A person like Ron would not see these things as much out of the ordinary. I wanted this difference, between Ron and Jane, to be obvious.

However, I wanted Ron to have a vulnerability, since he comes across as so cocky but is redeemed in the end, so I killed off his mother, his mainstay. I also had this clear picture of Jane getting the management job and Ron ending up in the mailroom at the bottom of the manager trainee program.

More than anything else, though, I wanted to maintain a sense of playfulness. I wanted the viewer to enjoy the ride, be intrigued and ultimately like Jane and still be satisfied with what happens to Ron. When I completed the screenplay, I felt I had accomplished these goals.

Throughout the writing process, I experienced direct proof of the many complaints my students have made about life getting in the way of writing, about equipment failures, about losing interest, about getting mired in the insignificant and missing the obvious. If I learned nothing else it is that each writing project is a new gamble, and one success carries no guarantee of another, but learning the process, facing the difficulties and challenges, and persevering will lead to future successes.

There's another important thing I know about writing: No piece of writing is ever

perfect by everyone's standards. A sentence can always be worded a little differently, additional ideas can be developed, little mistakes in typing and spelling escape even the most-practiced eye. And even when an article is accepted for publication, there is the risk that a typesetting error will mar it. There is always room for improvement. No fiction writer, whether of short stories, novels, plays or screenplays, ever feels a story is completely finished even after it's published/produced. There are always the "I should have," "I could have" and "Why didn't you/I...?" comments.

No matter how tightly I revise Hard Feelings, if it should sell to Hollywood, it will be changed, maybe drastically. Everyone changes scripts all the way through actual filming—the producers, the director, the cinematographer, the actors, the relatives who visit the set and get an idea about how some scene could be done better. No screenplay is safe from being altered. Even an auteur who writes, produces, directs and acts in his/her own film is swayed into making changes.

For now, what I would do differently with Hard Feelings can be accomplished during the rewriting process. I want to combine the two scenes between Jane and husband Sam in the first act into one scene at the first one's location. I need to move the Strip Nintendo reference from the second act back to the first act. I want to make what Sam says in the second act to be more confrontive, so Jane's anger and sense of alienation are more complete.

I want Darren to explain why both Ron and Jane were hired: Darren believes competition is good for everyone, and he liked what he had seen of both Ron and Jane when he worked at their former companies as Otto. For Darren, this was "all in fun." He plays Otto, his alter ego, because doing so gives him the opportunity to stay in touch with the realities of life. He allows the "funhouse" atmosphere at Landing World both as an outlet for the creative geniuses he employs and as a vehicle for weeding out undesirables. Darren also believes that people aren't really their true selves until put under pressure. I tried to let some of this be inferred through subtext, but I'm considering having Darren, Liz or Miller offer some more-direct explanations.

Another weakness I want to repair is an empty set up I put in place but did not use later. It occurs when Liz hands out the forms that need to be signed regarding rights. I had intended to later have Ron avoid signing the forms at all so he could help Cat steal technology, but then I had second thoughts and decided not to make Ron a thief. Unfortunately, I left in the form-signing scene, and it serves no purpose but to take up space.

I'm tempted to make the opening more vivid. The image that appeals to me would involve the two Landing World technicians testing the dragon in the virtual reality

program as a new feature. It could mock the Jurassic Park opening. But somehow I feel this would be too much.

Some of the action, however, is not direct enough, and as a result tension and conflict remain lacking. One suggestion I've received is to avoid letting the audience in so soon on the fact that the orientation is rigged. In an earlier draft, I held off revealing this truth until the midpoint, but I was unhappy with the action until then—it just seemed to be filling space without really serving any other purpose. I decided the only way to keep the audience truly interested in such a standard situation (orientation for a new job) was to put them in what Hollywood calls a “superior position”—the audience knows something the characters don't know. I also needed to introduce Cat as an insider. However, I might be able to retain the comic elements of the technicians watching and commenting while holding off on the Landing World executive scenes until later.

There also really isn't a moment where Ron and Jane come head-to-head, and whether or not to create one remains a question in my mind. Ron is like Jane in that both have similar education, qualifications and experience, and both want the job. Yet when Ron tricks Jane, she does nothing but cry out in protest. I want to set up the situation so she has an opportunity to trick him, too, in such a way that lands her the job and makes her triumph over him. I want to place them in a face-to-face confrontation that is much stronger than what I currently have them doing.

Since I “know” Jane and probably favor her, Ron is the character who has given me the most trouble. When I originally conceived of him, he was so obviously negative, he was completely unreal. In addition to being a woman-hater, a playboy, a momma's boy and a shirker—all the qualities that in the third act Darren lists as despicable—Ron started out as a total racist, and he heard and had visions of his dead mother. He also, though, was the character who refused to cooperate, who literally took control briefly. But even though I managed to subdue him, I still need to work on him. I don't quite have his dialogue right yet which indicates to me that I don't know him as well as I need to.

The trouble with Ron is I want him to lose, I know he loses, and I have trouble almost letting him win. Still, in order to make this screenplay have the tension and conflict it really needs, I must let Ron get a lot closer to almost getting the job, defeating Jane. In this current draft, Ron does not come close enough. The difficulty is in my having created the parameters for Landing World which in turn forced me to keep Ron at a certain level of acceptability. I could not make Ron more devious, showing one side to the Landing World people but really being exactly the opposite, because when

Darren found out, he wouldn't even put Ron in the mailroom then. One suggestion has been to show his home life. It might help to make Ron less exaggerated, not a momma's boy at all.

Ron's relationship with his dead mother is one I've wrestled with throughout this project. The money needs to remain an element, but there's no need to make Ron's mother so incredibly controlling. I never do mention Ron's father, and adding an explanation about his being an alcoholic or some other type of bum would set up the reason for Ron's being required to work even though he's rich.

Interestingly enough, the original Cat was quite different from the one I ended up with, too. She started out as a much older woman, past retirement age, who had lied about her age so she could keep working, and that was only one of the many lies she told. Nobody liked her at Landing World, and she was put into the orientation scenario in order to remove her from her job where her subordinates were on the verge of mutiny. She also was to serve as Ron's mother surrogate.

Cat's one remaining exaggeration is about having to "jump start" her mother's heart, and I only kept that one because it allowed her to get Ron's attention—his catching her in the lie helps him figure out she's in on it all. But since Jane was already securely in a relationship, I needed a love interest of some sort, and I decided to make it involve Ron and Cat. This solved the problem of what to do with Cat as well. In my earlier version, she ended up in the mailroom with Ron, and they hated each other but needed each other.

But the original Cat was too loony, and all the dynamics of setting her up as so much older, a habitual liar and a woman with many underlying problems took too many pages. I soon lost interest in her as a character. She was just too negative. That's when I decided to make her older than Ron but close enough in age so they could get involved romantically.

In putting them together as the love interest, however, I still do not feel the dynamics between them are on solid ground. They are attracted to each other almost too quickly, and I am continuing to evaluate ways to slow things down. One idea that strikes me as a possibility is to have Ron and Cat accidentally discover an interest in each other but fight it. I could make their current chummy scenes not quite the opposite but a great deal less cooperative. Another possibility is having Cat pursue her attempt at espionage on her own while Ron and Jane are in direct conflict, having their confrontation, and then have Ron collide with Cat for their big moment. As it stands, Cat's removing Ron from the virtual reality game in order to go with her only succeeds in flattening the conflict between Ron and Jane.

In the end, when Peggy is helping Jane unpack and holds Jane's Alice in Wonderland figures, Peggy doesn't make any comment about them. I thought letting the figures appear without comment would provide some interesting subtext. Perhaps this would be more solidly cemented if I had Jane pick up the figures and smile at them after Peggy sets them down unceremoniously and leaves.

Another change I want to make is to remove any overused words (I know I used "just" a lot) and tighten wastefully wordy dialogue.

Beyond those changes, I am still considering other options. I'd still like to find a way to have Ron and Jane together at the climax. I may have Jane say something about why can't the good guys just win because they're the good guys. I intend to go through the Rewrite and Evaluation sections of the Story Line Pro program and go back through the other development sections so I can look for ways to heighten the visuals, drama and meaning. But I also want to stick to my primary goal which is to keep the film fun and playful, yet purposeful.

There is an agent in Hollywood waiting to see Hard Feelings as soon as I am finished with it. I would love to sell it, but if there's one thing a writer should not focus on during the creative process it's money. Or fame. Or formula.

Another debilitating factor to overcome is criticism. My rule of thumb about criticism is if those who are qualified to read the work have different opinions about what's working and what isn't, the work is probably okay as is. If there's a consensus, however, the writer should look closely at addressing the problems identified and fix them. But if formulas and critics ruled the world, many great films would never get made. Out of Africa would be too personal and slow-moving; The Piano would also be too personal and much too dark; Buckaroo Bonzai would be too absurd and trivial; and the list could go on indefinitely.

The writer must stay true to his or her own vision and sense of what is strongly appealing to him/herself and others. The writer must do his/her best. And along the way, the writer must learn to savor and appreciate every small step accomplished, including getting an interesting idea, completing an outline, completing a scene, completing a first draft, being brave enough to show the work to anybody else—these small triumphs add up in the end to great joy.

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VITA AUCTORIS

Barbara Stewart Sachs Kremer was born in Nuremburg, Germany, on October 13, 1948. After graduating from Hampton High School, Hampton, Virginia, in 1966, she attended Madison College, Harrisonburg, Virginia, from September 1966 to April 1967 for her freshman year. She spent her sophomore year at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington from September 1972 to May 1973. In 1975, she attended College of Lake County, Deerfield, Illinois, from September to December for one philosophy course. She completed her bachelor of science degree with a comprehensive major in communications at Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU), Springfield, Missouri, where she attended from August 1979 to May 1981. Her coursework was split equally among three disciplines: broadcasting, film studies and writing.

Kremer began her writing career during her final semester at SMSU when a magazine-writing class assignment resulted in her having an article published in SPRINGFIELD! Magazine. After graduation in 1981, she was employed full-time by Vernon Publishing Company of Versailles, Missouri, as a feature writer for two newspapers: The Versailles Leader-Statesman and The Morgan County Press. After expanding her duties to include sportswriting, society newswriting and investigative reporting, she was promoted to editor-in-chief of The Leader-Statesman and subsequently to managing editor of another Vernon newspaper, The Highway Five Beacon.

Upon leaving Vernon Publishing in December 1983, Kremer worked as the special sections writer for the Overland Park Sun in Overland Park, Kansas, through January 1984. At that time she moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and for the next ten years she pursued her writing career as a freelancer, editor and educator with Pride Magazine of Jefferson County, Baldwin Publishing in Eureka, Missouri, and St. Louis Community College at Forest Park and at Florissant Valley, respectively, except for four months (January through April 1987) in Hollywood, California. In Hollywood, she worked as part of a script analysis team affiliated with Paramount Pictures.

Kremer has been serving since September 1994 in the dual capacity of adjunct faculty and coordinator of student publications at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida. She continues to read, analyze and edit fiction manuscripts on a freelance basis.