

START-UP YOUR STORY

Simple principles to develop
your story different

WRITTEN BY **DANNY ALEGI**


CINEMAHEAD

@cinemahead

WRITING

WITHOUT

WRITING:

**Simple principles to develop
your *story different***

This e-book is part of the **cinemahead resources** series that you can find here:

<http://cinemahead.com/resources/>

written by **Danny Alegi**
designed by **Juan Antonio Casaus**

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DEVELOP YOUR STORY,

MAKE IT **WELL TOLD**

(THAT'S EASY TO SAY, HUH?)

PREMISE

There are dozens of *how-to* script books on the market with loglines like “*sell your script to Hollywood*”, “*Write like a pro*”, “*How to take the industry by storm*”, “*create unforgettable characters*” and so on.

Most *how-to* books and manuals are written by industry gurus whose goal is for you to create and sell industry-ready scripts. Don't get me wrong. Screenplays are a business in more ways than one, and we all have stories to tell. This ebook is for those storytellers who struggle with the development process. It does not offer any algorithms or easy solutions for fame or fortune, but hopefully **it can make you curious about focusing on your own process**.

We live in a world that values appearance and is afraid of substance, flirts with beauty and is terrified of ugliness, aspires to heaven yet sometimes feels like hell. **Story different** alternates between these PLUS and MINUS extremes, not trying to label one or the other as a winner, but **looking at difference and alternation as a wave of energy**. These goals are dramatic objectives but also the essence of cinematic storytelling itself.

Try to tell your story and let it move towards growing, learning, surviving and sharing.

- **D. Alegi**

A night cityscape with a person silhouetted against a window. The person is looking out at a city with many lit-up buildings. The scene is dark, with the city lights providing the main illumination. The person's silhouette is dark against the lighter window. The city lights are out of focus, creating a bokeh effect.

1. YOU: STORY
PERSONAL



YOUR

EXPERIENCE

IS YOUR

VALUE

PERSONAL STORIES

GET MADE

- **DON'T COPY** ✓
- **SOURCE YOUR OWN** ✓

To make a story personal, assume that you are telling it to a one person audience, to a friend. Write and shoot for to inspire only that person, rather than imagining a large, strange and critical audience. A personal film whispers up close, showering your pov on the world. To me “personal” is not only about content, but about a quality relationship of trust and honesty established between a storyteller and a niche audience.

Source from your own experience, become the master of your own storytelling world, use your own original premises. What if I you were in a jam with no easy solution? Don't just make up crap you've never seen except in someone else's movies.



KEEP IT SIMPLE

“EVERYTHING SHOULD BE MADE
AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE.
BUT NO SIMPLER”


- ALBERT EINSTEIN

Harvest your experience and empower your **imagination**. Motivation, focus, dedication, perspiration make you a valuable storyteller.





**WHY TRASH
AN IDEA? RECYCLE IT!**



Top Down ideas are like “Ketchup”. We pour them on everything, no matter what the story really wants. Develop new ideas from the ground up. Use themes and ideas that already are in your story space like a new branch grows from a tree: Organic

ARE YOUR IDEAS

CINEMATIC?

**CINEMATIC IDEAS DON'T WANT TO BE BOOKS,
NOR PAINTINGS, NOR STATUES, NOR SONGS...
BUT FILMS.**

JUST FILMS.



2. DEVELOP

story development is...

...**what happens to humans who want things and try to get them,** humans who can only get what they are after by **making choices** and **taking action in the direction of their hopes and desires**. The story development process engages everything we know about life, what we learned about others from ourselves, and about ourselves from others. Story development **has the power to join the Outside world and the World Within**. We cannot separate the two, like Day and Night are bound together by the conflict of their natures. But we appreciate the transition moment, the Dawn and Sundown (**to be a witness to real-time transformation**, to practical change, makes our experience pretty deep-dish.)

WHAT IF? ...

Here is where it all starts, the what-if, the POTENTIAL, the possibility of story growth, the yeast of organic development.

The WHAT-IF is not just “Imaginary” or “FAKE” stuff. The WHAT-IF expresses the inherent nature and effects of **TIME**, **CHOICE** and **CHANGE** upon any character’s life.

BEEN WALKING ALL MORNING
BEEN WALKING ALL NIGHT
I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE DARK AND LIGHT
(ROBERT HUNTER)



BLUEPRINT THE BASICS:
WHEN DOES IT BEGIN, HOW DOES IT END,
WHAT DOES **THE MIDDLE** LOOK LIKE?



YOU ARE HERE

AND.. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

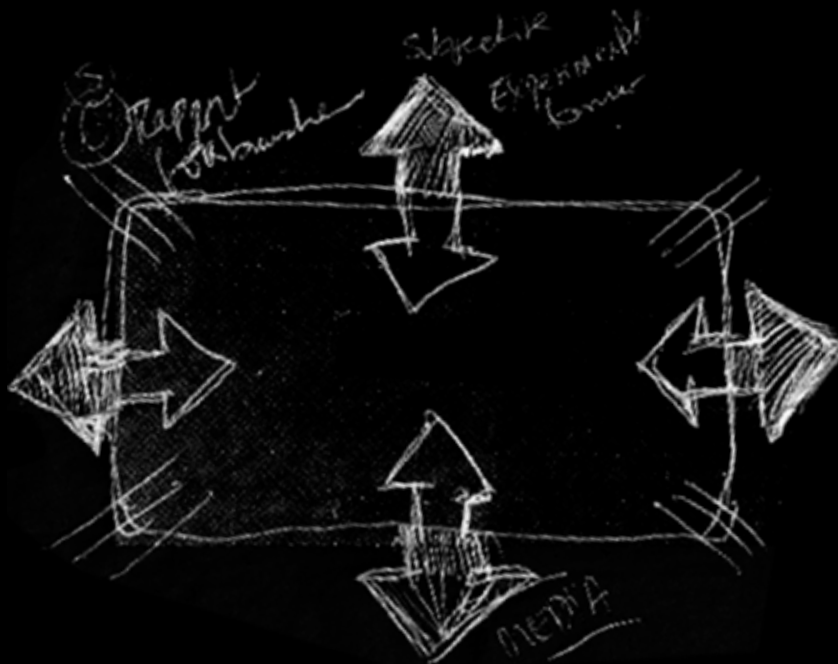
You want to go one way,
but the story pulls the other way:
Isn't it tempting to just guess?

why don't you try..

**WHAT IS S/HE TRYING
TO DO RIGHT NOW?**

BECAUSE.. CHARACTERS NEED CHOICES

A character without choices is like a bicycle without wheels. Transform disconnection and confusion into the texture of decision-making.



CHARACTERS WILL
DO NOTHING IF YOU
LET THEM.
LIKE PEOPLE,

AND A STORY NEEDS CHARACTERS, NOT PUPPETS

**IN THE WILD OF STORY, THERE ARE
NO STRINGS ATTACHED. NO PUPPETEERS.**

Puppets have no freedom to choose. You develop film characters by giving them freedom of choice but very limited time to make difficult decisions. If the process works, the character struggles but comes alive. No strings attached. and maybe a surprise or two for the writer! A Puppet, on the other hand, has no freedom at all. The puppeteer makes all the choices, the strings never come off . When you play the Puppeteer too much - and make everything happen your way - try and let go of your characters, give them a longer leash.



DON'T EXPLAIN.

REVEAL AND

AMBUSH THE GUT

INSTEAD



LEAVE BRAINY PLOTS
TO HITCHCOCK.
INTELLECTUAL SUDOKUS
ARE COLD AND
QUICKLY FORGOTTEN.

Multiple storylines, relationship dynamics and rapid changes can distract and disarm our intellectual defenses. A good story will fool the brain and **aim for the gut**. Good, because a film is more than a fact, or product, the substance hides inside the wrapping of surface, plots, places, events. Think of the knotty B side of a carpet, with its almost invisible textures of connected string.

For me, trying to “get the movie” requires a gutsy - scary, yet possible - **bunjee jump into unfamiliar different, personal territory**.

SPINACH IS GOOD FOR
TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE,
THOSE WHO LIKE IT
AND THOSE WHO DON'T.



4. STORY DESIGN

Think of an architect or an engineer, who build spaces for the comfort and enjoyment of those who will spend time there. For a filmmaker, designing a story can be a similar process, with a couple of differences. An architect creates an environment “as it is”, with visible tools.

A filmmaker can't, since viewers are never aware of the entire movie while they watch it. In architecture what you see is what you get, all at once. In story everything needs to be told with invisible tools, and the storyteller never reveals what the entire story space should feel like, just ways to discover it.

YOUR SCREENPLAY

IS ONE STORY,

FORGET PAGE

NUMBERS.

THE "CLOCKWORK ORANGE" SCRIPT WAS 67 PAGES LONG.

Script writers like to see the page count grow. **Pages are the currency of development.** More pages are **seen as** more commitment, progress, success.. But **“I am on page 40” (or 60, or 90) says little about how the story itself is developing.** Writing is not only pages upon pages of description and dialogue. **Story is a space** to structure with what happens, a landscape of choices to explore with quantum leaps.

Practice this: jump to the end (do you see it?), then track back to the last page you wrote and start mapping the difference in between.

SEE THE DIFFERENCE?

STORY ELEMENTS ARE CONNECTED AND SEPARATE AT
THE SAME TIME. NARRATIVE SPACE IS AN ENVIROMENT OF
EVOLVING RELATIONSHIPS



MAP YOUR STORY



PROTOTYPE

(BUILD YOUR STORY IN
PRACTICE, TEST IT)*

*what forces glue your story together. ?
What can **break your story apart** ?



WAIT!

FRESH-SQUEEZED

DIALOGUE

WILL FLOW LATER

(WRITE ACTION BEFORE ONE LINERS)

**WE ALL LOVE QUENTIN,
BUT DON'T KILL IT WITH
DIALOGUE TOO EARLY.**

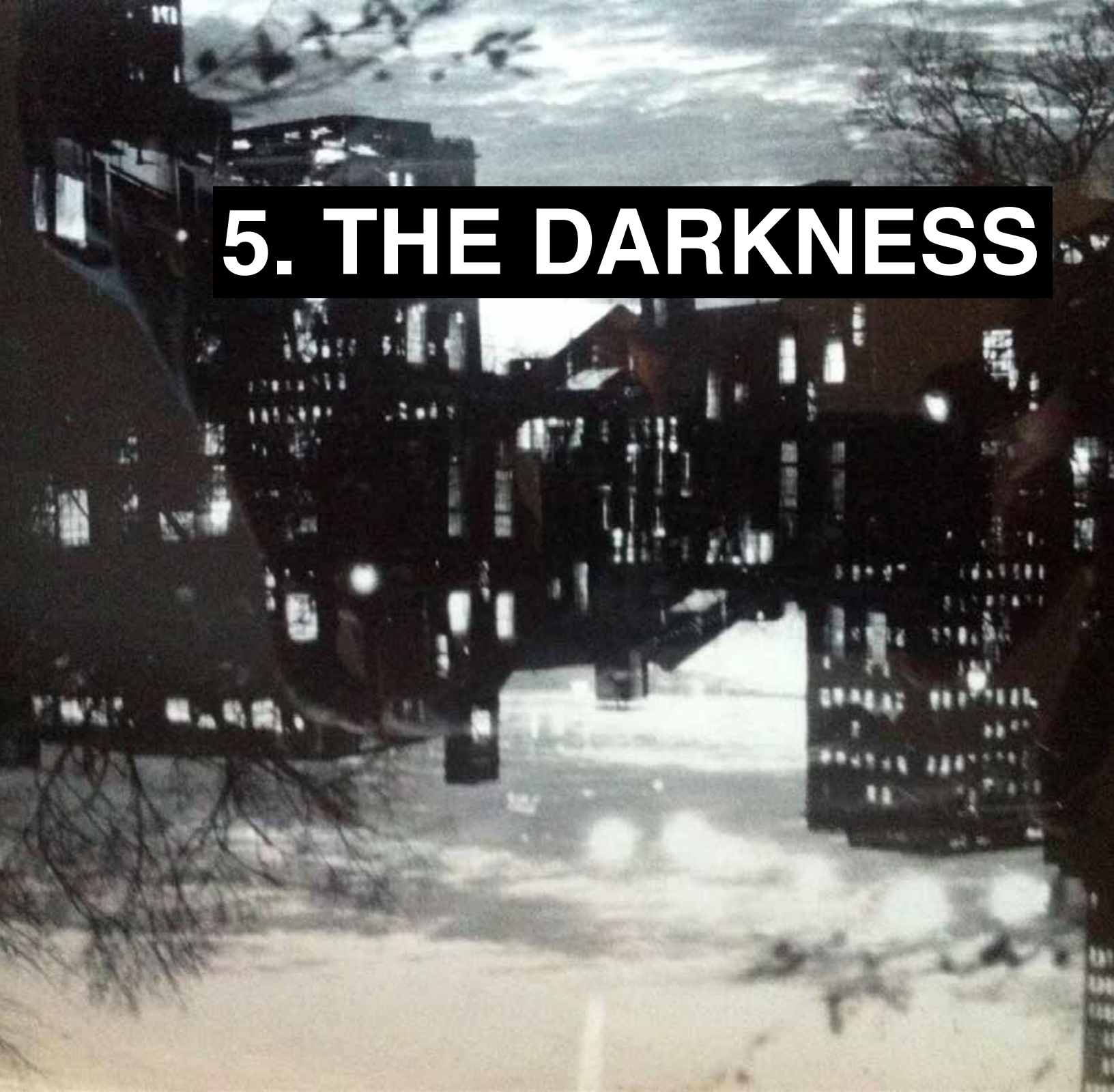
PRACTICE:

Watch a movie. What do you remember? what key elements stand out? Now try and connect them. **Map it.**

Key scenes first. Then storylines. A story, on a map, will take you places.



5. THE DARKNESS



**FACE THE DARKNESS,
IT'S NOT GOING AWAY.**

(BE BRAVE)



**DON'T CRY
WOLF.**

THE DARK SIDE


(AN INSIDE SPACE WE CAN'T SEE)

(This powerful energy will try
and fill every frame of your story
whether you like it or not).

Story like other life forms, wants to rise above the ground. Plants will always reach for light, organisms will struggle to stand. In most religions Up is good. Warmth comes from the sky, where the gods hang out. Drama wants characters, defeat gravity and be in light. The Dark Side pushes heroes underground, in the negative, dark, remain dead, cold of unanswered questions and ugliness.

When we write to support our character we have the illusion of doing the right thing. It feels natural, after all we are creating a script and we want our hero to win in the end. But helping our characters overcome obstacles and conflicts is the opposite of our mission. We should be writing from the dark side and blowing a storm against the inhabitants of our stories. Like a sailboat needs wind to sail, so does a character get energy from the dark side's antagonism. The sailboat cannot sail directly against the wind, and is forced to tack in lateral directions in order to move forward its goal.

Yet, without your wind, it wouldn't move at all.



PAIN

(THE ENGINE
OF DRAMA.

FOLLOW IT)

We, humans, love to watch from a distance as other humans struggle, risk it all to try and find solutions to survive, learn, grow. But the rules may be changing for good. Has story done wild?



6. PROCESS

KNOW YOUR OWN

Observe your habit and become the master of your comfort zone. **What slows you down? What propels you into consistent output?** For me it's all about focus and interruptions. I work best at 6 AM- and I never write full sentences. It's like taking notes from your favorite teacher, but she talks too fast so **you only sketch the key points:** When I come from the dark of sleep where dreams drive with images in flow.

Later in the day, **the pollution of real-life banality** and traffic get in the way, so writing late at night has stopped working. I use the day as research, pack in the resources, and only release them on paper after dreaming on it morning.

(MISTAKES WON'T KILL YOU,
UNLESS YOU IGNORE THEM)

What matters is the recovery,
and the creative action space
that separates you from the
next try. Go ahead. **Try again.**

3 BAD SCRIPTS LEAD TO 1 GOOD SCREENPLAY

(BAD WRITING IS GOOD PRACTICE)

In my experience with film-making, **process is transformative** - in the most concrete and practical sense. Process is **your work**, what you do, what happens, what you want, what you try and make. **Process is what you encounter along the way**. And what you - the hero as storyteller - can do about it right now.

To know your Process makes you stop being so afraid of making mistakes, an an ebb and flow of intention and result. Process moves toward a general direction: **completion, satisfaction, self-confidence, recognition**. Don't expect to hit your moving target on the first shot. Process is practice. **Spend a lot of time with your movie.**



EACH SCENE
IS A SEPARATE
MINI-STORY



STORY JAZZ

Some people like songs with **melodies** that you can whistle easily. Others prefer **complex forms** like jazz.

Story can be played like music: linear, circular, patterned. Exploring unexpressed tonalities like John Cage.

Try **looking at a screenplay like a song written on a pentagram**, or even hummed as an improv. **Jazz players can return to the core IT** of a piece off and on, without ever playing “on the nose” or getting lost.

In story, the **core meaning** is hidden below the surface. What does a song like “Yellow” by ColdPlay or a film like “*Stalker*” mean?

The answer is always different.



WHAT'S IN A HAPPY ENDING?

IS IT THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER
OR IS IT THE HERO DEFEATS THE VILLAIN
OR IS IT LEARNING, GROWING, SURVIVING..

The story is energy. The story is just a give and take of plus and minus. **The happy ending it's passed the dark side.** The moment you know the cause of the problem, that's the only happy ending you'll be allowed: **Understand what was the problem in the first place.**



7. TELL YOUR STORY

NOW

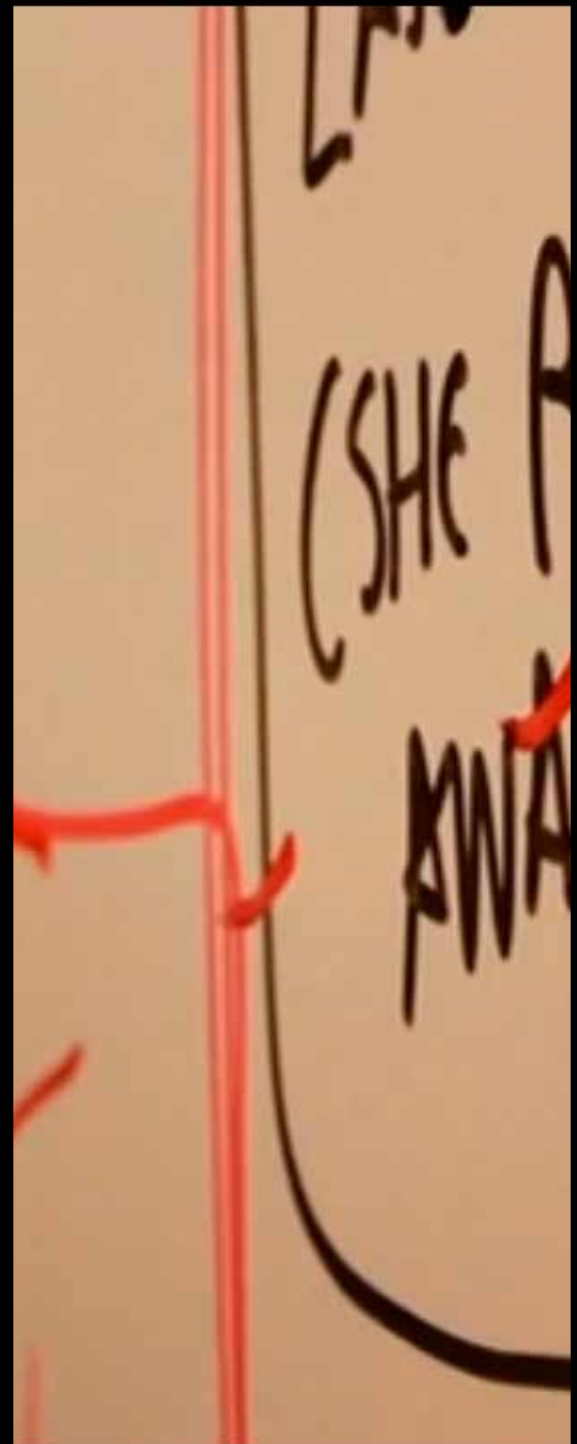
STOP WAITING FOR A PERFECT SCRIPT

(IT'S NOT COMING.
GO FOR A RUN INSTEAD)

When I run or ride my bike my muscles focus on keeping my body coordinated my brain's other side is free to be more creative, with less self-censorship.

Feed the left side of your brain a mechanical decoy, a management task, and pull your story out of the freezer.





i QUICK !

(HOW DOES IT END?

WHEN DOES IT START?)

You see it, you grab it. You take a quick note of the idea, before you forget. Your head is busy living and leaving behind. What if your baggage of impressions, sounds, faces, receipts, ideas were useful? Skip the details, re:imagine it later. **When does it start?**



FIND YOUR CROWD

When your original film engages, your audience becomes a crowd. **A crowd** can't wait to spread Word of Mouth about your film.

development


**TAKE YOUR STORY OUT FOR
AIR AGAIN AND AGAIN**

NO ONE WILL STEAL YOUR
IDEA ONCE YOU START TO
DEVELOP IT.

MOVIES WITHOUT CAMERAS

(WITNESS THE SCENE, OBSERVE YOUR CHARACTERS, BE THE "FLY ON THE WALL")





I have studied the masters of storytelling and their genial methods. As insightful as they are, most story methods are more theory than practice. A how-to writing manual may point to the “right way” to write a script, which is useful like a lighthouse getting you into a port at night. Yet **theory is of little help.**

when you make mistakes in development that you cannot track or identify. When you are in the dark of your story development, and you feel like you cannot recover from a series of one wrong turns after another, then theory is of little use. The lighthouse goes out, you sail by the light of the stars, you look for imaginative solutions, and you try to **survive your mission, to tell a story worth telling.**

Analysis of famous screenplay is less important than practice. To learn to become a strong footballer, play! Watching great games may not be enough,

“You love great stories. You study screenwriting. In the end it’s still you, your Big Idea, theories about structure and plot, and a whole lot of white pages.. Your screenplay needs a solution, and so does your way of writing. It’s that kind of a process.”

- Daniel Alegi

A handwritten signature in white ink on a black background. The signature is stylized and cursive, appearing to read 'Daniel Alegi'.