



Writer-director-producer Colleen Patrick's screenplay *The Director* was a quarter-finalist in this year's CineStory competition; last year her screenplay *The Lucky Penny* finished in the top 10% of Austin's Heart of the Film competition, and she was a finalist in the Disney script-writing competition with a "Frasier" script, *The Hero*.

Colleen's feature script *Into Thin Air* was optioned by Landis Productions (US) in 1998. Colleen is a former president and international liaison for the Seattle chapter of Women In Film.

Colleen's short film, which she wrote, directed and produced, *Life As Art* was an official 1997 Academy Award submission. She has written, produced and directed four short films, the most recent a pilot for the series, *Behind The Movie Screen*, a mockumentary associated with her feature, *The Director*. The pilot can be seen at <www.director3.com>.

She is currently in development as writer/director with her feature, *The Director*. Colleen is a successful on-camera acting coach who also successfully coaches writers. One of her writers was recently picked up by a major New York agent; 12 publishers are interested in the writer's book. Colleen will be writing the screenplay based on the book.

She is the author of two published books, *Mind Over Media*, (CHEF Publishing) and *The 100% Solution* (Meadow Brook Publications).

She has received awards for writing, directing and journalism. A former journalist, Colleen was featured in the 1985 *World Who's Who* of Women published from Cambridge, England.



"While there are times screenwriting seems a rather trivial activity in the face of tragedy, for me, this is not one of those times. I feel a strong drive to help elucidate this moment, to aid in the healing process in my way—by writing. To me, writing seems to be a job for an everyday hero. Persons so many New Yorkers have given us such a profound desire to be."

— John Frizzell

Multiple-award winning Canadian writer/director

It looked Like A Movie

By Colleen Patrick
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Pens the world over were laid motionless.

Fingers abandoned keyboards.

Voices strangled in silence.

Tears replaced deadline sweat—and continue to surface involuntarily months after.

"It's hard to come in and write something funny. Or to write anything," Jeff Arch (*Sleepless In Seattle*) told me days after the catastrophe. "... until now there has been nothing—nothing that has penetrated my ability to come in and do a full day's work. Whether we knew anyone or not, this was a death in the family."

No matter what nation you call home, terrorist attacks on New York City, one of the planet's primary creative centers, hurt *every one* of us.

What got to you?

Was it the cruel slaughter of some 6,000 innocent people from more than 80 countries, including several hundred

Muslims? The agony of injured and maimed survivors? The desperation of men, women and children clutching photos, searching frantically, then hopelessly, for missing relatives and friends? Perhaps you are grieving the loss of someone you knew; or humbled by the unspeakable courage of more than 600 firefighters, police officers and emergency medical service providers killed in the inferno attempting to save those trapped inside.

Whatever makes your gut ache from this satanic act, writers and artists everywhere have been shaken.

Praise it, revel in it, ridicule or curse it, life is what consumes us. It's what we write about—even if the subject is death. When so much life is senselessly and quickly destroyed by hate—a hate that will strike again—reality is redefined for us.

So is story telling.

As writers, it is our job to decipher its meaning and to define the new world left behind for a public yearning to hear

innovative voices and witness ingenious visions so they can find reason in the irrational. Make sense of the senseless. Inspire. And yes, even comfort, reassure and prepare them for things to come.

Pundits aplenty will pontificate perceptions, argue the abstract, delineate data and lay out the logistics of this ceaseless, evolving news story.

Screenwriters, however, must meet the human condition head on. Drawing us in to see not numbers but faces close enough to smell their breath, inviting us to experience the feelings of characters as if we know them—as if we *are* them. Summoning us to witness behavior that will somehow give this New World—and us—meaning and purpose in a tsunami of ubiquitous confusion.

Only screenwriters now need to invent stories that reflect a radical shift in perception.

“It’s a changed world,” says multiple-award winning Canadian writer and director John Frizzell. “And that has to be reflected in our scripts. Before, if you showed a scene of a cop chasing a man with a briefcase at an airport, everyone would just stand around.”

“Not today. I’m afraid if I saw that, I’d find myself in the middle of pandemonium.”

Redefining our heroes and villains is necessary, at least to some degree, because not only has the world changed—so have we.

We have seen hundreds of real heroes, men, women and dogs, day after day. And they aren’t athletes. They aren’t movie stars. They aren’t tycoons, media barons or religious proselytizers. They are *us*. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things, just because it’s the right thing to do.

One volunteer sifting through the debris at ground zero of the disaster said he worked with dozens of people who did not speak his language. But as they labored in silence, these strangers knew exactly what to do, how to help one another, and how to get the job done.

So what sort of heroes will audiences want to see, now that they’ve seen the real deal—who don’t look like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Gwyneth Paltrow?

How about the deceitful, despicable villains we create? For instance, before they could be recognized. But terrorists are sleeper agents—taught to blend in with average neighborhoods for up to ten years before receiving orders to strike.

Now that audiences see antagonists who have neither a conscience nor the will to live ... how do we portray them? How can we characterize, then subdue and capture or kill them? The world has learned the power of modern technology is limited; the lion’s share of the work tracking and capturing the bad guys must be done by humans—individuals who must risk their lives for the greater good.

Fabricating that ‘easily described gizmo’ to *trail* and *trap* them won’t cut it any more. We need to get down and dirty and have heroes outwit and outsmart them.

Or figure out how to help them destroy themselves. The original U.S. television series “Mission: Impossible” used this as a primary plot.

As for using terrorists as antagonists, many, if not most, writers will not want to “get in the heads” of men whose only purpose is to destroy revered structures and kill as many people as possible.

There is no need to. We can create characters who symbolize the greater world. Shakespeare’s *Romeo And Juliet* was about warring factions—how continued fighting, no matter the reason or the tradition, will always end tragically.

Tragedy occurs when there is the possibility or reality of love, peace, goodness and happiness for our heroes, which is stripped away—by others or themselves.

The tragic events of the attacks may spur many writers to focus on tragedies; but the studios will probably be looking for comedies first.

Andrew Horton, award-winning international screenwriter, author, columnist and now professor at the University of Oklahoma’s film department, has seen the tragedies of war torn Bosnia, Russia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and other Balkan states. He says that the most successful films from those areas have been comedies, citing Slobodan Sijan’s *Who’s That Singing Over There?* as a prime example. “It

takes place in 1941, during the last 24 hours before the Nazi’s bombed Belgrade (Yugoslavia), killing 65,000 people. Believe me, it is a very important film, but you find yourself laughing from beginning to end.”

“People there believe “film is the most important art,” so films are made and seen, even under the most stressful conditions.”

“Filmmakers there believe they have a social, political and cultural obligation to say something about what’s going on,” he says. “That is war, hatred and destruction.”

Does that mean their films are nothing but one big battle scene?

Not at all.

“They don’t have war scenes with explosions and special effects,” explains Horton. There’s no action-adventure or escapist films just for the sake of entertainment.”

One concern I’ve had about Hollywood films is that they reflect a throwaway society. Like blowing your nose in a tissue and throwing it away, rather than using a reusable resource—a handkerchief. That is, the hero comes in, blows everything up, where human lives are cavalierly destroyed and then walks away, leaving someone else to clean up the mess.

“Showing someone cleaning up the mess isn’t conducive to good story telling technique,” says action-adventure screenwriter Simon Barry.

Maybe so, but perhaps that technique will be revisited now.

Another is the never ending, impacting images pounded into audiences by action-adventure productions. With all the onscreen destruction beating at them frame after frame, viewers don’t have a chance to think about what they’re seeing.

OK, maybe the audiences don’t want to think. Maybe they’re there just experiencing the numbing adrenaline rush.

On the other hand, if Horton’s experiences are indicative, where there is war and destruction, people don’t want to see life discarded so easily, so thoughtlessly.

“I think that the kind of escape movies offer is not going to be needed any less in this new and more horrible world. We have a hunger to sit in the dark—a bunch of us together—and look at this flickering light. Just like when we were cavemen—and see a story that has more logic than life has. And that has a happier ending. We seem to need that on some deep, tribal level. I don’t think that’s going to change. That’s why some of the greatest movies were made during WWII and during the Depression. It’s not simply a matter of escape, it’s also that we want surrogate champions to go out and fight evil for us and defeat it. We draw reassurance from that.”

— Ted Tally
Academy Award® Winner
Silence Of The Lambs

MUSLIM FILMS

Unfortunately, the U.S., whose second largest export is its culture, does not return the favor. There are few films imported and shown in the US from other nations.

It is difficult for many, if not most, Americans to be aware of important films that are not made in the USA (including Canadian work), so impressions of other people are too often based on Hollywood's representation.

The notorious Arab, understood to be Muslim, has been a popular villain for Hollywood. They are terrorists in *The Siege*, *True Lies*, and *Executive Decision*; the evil guys in *The Mummy Returns*, *Not Without My Daughter*, *Father Of The Bride II*, *The Adventures Of Baron Munchausen*, *My Beautiful Launderette* and *Ghandi*.

The truth is that there are Arab terrorists. But their numbers are miniscule compared to the general Arab population. There's only a shred of balance.

Sympathetic Muslim roles include the freedom fighters of *The Living Daylights*, *The Battle For Algiers* and *Three Kings*; positive representation appears in *The 13th Warrior* and *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves* as well as the namesake for *The Jewel Of The Nile*. *The Hurricane*, *South Central*, *Malcom X*, *The Message*, *Jinnah* and *The Lion Of The Desert* are others.

And change is coming. Already shooting in Montreal, Canada, Paramount dropped Arab villains from *The Sum Of All Fears*, based on the Tom Clancy best-seller. The techno-thriller featured Muslim terrorists as the villains. They've been replaced by neo-Nazis.

Here's a list of films with positive Muslim roles, recommended by Muslim film reviewer Omer Mozaffar:

- *The Color Of Paradise*—director Majid Majidi
- *Pitch Black*—director David Twohy
- *Vertical Limit*—director Martin Campbell
- *My Son The Fanatic*—director Udayan Prasad

What are producers, studios and distributors looking for now?

They don't know. They're waiting until audiences process all that's happened first.

Producer Brian Glazer (*Apollo 13*, *Liar Liar*) told the New York Times he's dumping a couple of projects he would not even describe. "They're arenas I just don't want to be in," he said. "Anything that involves explosions. Anything where a person's life is at stake." He believes all mainstream film and television producers will follow suit, adding, "I think people will look toward more escapism, more comedies, more dramas about family love."

"There are some, just some, movies that you can't make from here on in," Walter Parkes, with Dreamworks' motion picture unit told the NYT. The finale for *Men In Black 2*, which he is producing, is changing its last act. Originally, shards of the moon were to fall on New York City.

Sherry Lansing, Paramount studio chief, says avoiding violence all together would be dishonest. "Violence is a part of the world," she told the NYT. "But it's our responsibility not to trivialize violence, not to glamorize violence, not to make it look cartoony."

Not all studios share that sense of responsibility. "Is 20th Century Fox out of its fucking mind?!" ranted <www.Salon.com> film reviewer Charles Taylor, referring to the Fox thriller, *Don't Say A Word*, released within days of the attacks. Unhappy critics described objectionable scenes so audiences could be prepared or avoid it. What happens: a car bomb explodes in the opening scene and a man is buried alive under dirt and debris when a structure collapses.

"... it was impossible not to be sickened," said Taylor.

NEW SCRIPT IDEAS

The carnage of the attack is so vast, so traumatizing, it's impossible for anyone to take it in all at once. But we can deal with our feelings a bit at a time, in our own way. And it's important that we do.

One of the best ways to process the experience is to write about your feelings. Your reactions. Your imagined revenge. How you want to help the children affected by the attacks. How you wish you were in New York City working on a clean up crew or rescuing stranded or orphaned animals. How you knew something like this would happen.

Be honest, don't spare your anger or your anguish. Out of that can come some incredible stories, characters and clever twists.

"I don't like the person I've become," admits John Frizzell. "I find myself racially profiling people. If they have a darker skin I wonder if they're up to something. It's terrible."

That is a journey worth taking with a character disappointed that he is reacting to a devastating event this way. It will take research—like meeting the type of people she or he currently fears. You may have no idea what you'll encounter, or how this character will grow and solve his problem, but I bet it's something we would all enjoy reading or seeing on the screen.

See? Your thoughts can lead to some incredible stories, characters and clever twists.

What issues do you have with any aspect of the catastrophe? What do you need to do for yourself? Frizzell notes, "whenever I've looked at what I needed to do for myself, I found an audience that needed it, too."

My beef is with the Taliban.

So I did some research and came up with some story ideas not about the Taliban, but about men who have the same problem in a different culture.

I found that even though the name means "student," these guys are actually weak, frightened and unimaginably ignorant.

At their deepest core, the thing that keeps them enraged is a deep-seated hatred of women.

Afghani women were doctors, lawyers, teachers and professionals before the Taliban assumed power. That was just a few years ago. Today the Taliban stone and shoot women if a man merely complains about them. They bury Taliban widows while they are still alive. They forbid women to show *any* part of their body or face in public and they can only be in the company of men outside the home; they forbid women to be educated or to see male doctors. Since only men can be doctors, many remain ill.

Mohamed Atta, one of the terrorists attacking the WTC, gave orders in his will that "no women be present" to "defile" his funeral.

In short, these men are so frightened of women they do not want them to have an identity, individuality or sexuality.

Identity, individuality, sexuality. All the things that make us human.

All the things we write about.

SOME POST-ATTACK SCRIPT CONCEPTS

Here are some script concepts I conjured up after some writers e-mailed me that they were having trouble getting their creative juices percolating again. As distressed and depressed as I was by the horrific events, seeing those firefighters, cops, emergency crews, volunteers and search and rescue dogs continue to work under those most difficult circumstances kept me working, too.

When someone speaks on behalf of God, as if he is God, does that make him Godless?

Dating Service business in North America is booming. People want to be close to someone.

Families want to be together, so they're watching TV (viewership is up) and want to see family films. Dreamworks' *Shrek*, an animated family film with an edge, took in huge box office numbers. Watch *Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone* break all box office records—adults and kids are waiting for this one, and good (mostly) triumphs over evil.

I'd look for modern fairy tales. I bet audiences would love a 2001 version of *Pretty Woman*.

A preacher has so little faith in his religion, he is afraid that his followers will succumb to the evils of excess if he permits them to experience another way of life. So he keeps them captive, through the use of fear, then sends them out to kill people who have different beliefs. Oh, right ... that story's being shot right now.



How about a story with a valiant search and rescue dog? These pups are amazing, and I bet millions of television viewers would love to see a film about them. They are so skilled, and they put their lives on the line, without question, every time they are called to duty. This is a family film with an edge, because working dogs, whether with police, military, search and rescue, or pulling sleds, are often in jeopardy.

In the end, common citizens will be the key to blow the whistle on sleeper agents in all threatened nations to preempt terrorist attacks. After so much publicity, ordinary folks will be able to recognize someone doing something they shouldn't—and report them. It would be a great story to be told through the eyes of two kids—one Jewish, one Muslim.

Following a child, deal with the death of one or both parents in the WTC; helping children cope with the general anxiety that exists in a nation that has been warned it will be the target for more terrorist attacks.

Domestic violence has increased dramatically after the September 11 attacks. Police say it's because people feel powerless and are striking out. Follow a family dealing with this.

Here's a *way-dark* comedy, that I hope does not offend, but I like the concept. Suicidal "soldiers" are a non-renewable resource. If they keep killing themselves, soon there will be no army to execute orders and protect the Big Cheese and—well, you get the idea. A comedy of fatal errors.

Last, but not least—at least two American television networks have Westerns in development. I'm not sure what type, but it's Westerns they're going to be airing, probably next year.

Your concept. Even if it doesn't fit any of the genres that appear to be in the next wave, write about whatever ignites your passion. Start a trend.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT WRITERS, PRODUCERS AND ACTORS?

Every writer I know or have encountered says the

events of September 11 will change their writing.

"How could it not?" asked Tom Fontana, executive producer, "Oz."

A/A writer Simon Barry (*Story Of My Life*—which he is also directing, *51st State*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer III*) says his immediate work will center more on individuals than big action. "Following more the European model," he says, which focuses more on personal interaction. "I think most people just won't want to write action/adventure right now. I think that gradually, over the period of a year or so, things will go back to 'normal.' But there will still be a sensitivity; a reverence, recalling this event."

He also believes that there is a growing awareness of the need for more positive roles for Arab characters.

He predicts comedies, romantic comedy and fan-

tasy/Sci-Fi "alternate universe" films will probably be the fare studios and audiences will seek to begin with.

Will writers become more judicious about the assignments they take? According to the writers I know, they will.

Will actors be more sensitive about their choice of roles and projects? My guess is yes.

High profile personalities may follow the example of Angelina Jolie, who was appointed Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, working to assist displaced peoples all over the world as well as remove and ban land mines. After visiting refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran following the attacks, she donated \$1 million/USD to the organization. She is making talk show appearances, using videos of her visits to educate audiences and gain political clout to remove and outlaw land mines.

Casts and crews may not want to travel as much for shoots.

Security costs on productions and at studios will increase noticeably.

U.S. film distributors will have more pressure to show films from other nations.

Hollywood will be on hold with the rest of the world, as the US conducts military actions in the Middle East.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Right after the attacks, many people commented that the World Trade Center explosions and collapse looked "just like a movie." Hollywood special effects have become so effective, we now seem to be living our own movie. Only this time the bodies won't hear the word, "cut."

We're all on alert.

But there is one unflinching way we can beat them. Write.

Write as if your life depends on it. ■

WHAT'S NEXT?

"Obviously the studios are going to be interested in more family oriented fare, stories that bolster 'traditional values'. Think *Mr. Hobbs Builds His Dream House*, not *American Beauty*."

"Movies about government corruption won't have many takers, not when the Chinese are working overtime to keep up with the demand for American flags. Mr. Smith doesn't have to go to Washington to rally troops. Nevertheless, think about writing parts for John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart and any actress who would look bodacious in a nurse's uniform."

"I'm guessing that films celebrating the individual's triumph over evil corporations would be welcomed with open arms. (And) the triumph of the individual over all odds."

"Slapstick comedies to keep up morale. *American Pie* will instead be about a boy's relationship with his mother. Preferably in the form of a soldier's letters home."

"Am I being cynical? Well, that's definitely taboo. Jaded post-modernism is out. Capra-corn is in."

"Looking at the world through jaundiced eyes, out. Rose-colored glasses, in."

"The Hollywood Canteen might just be open for business. Lots of romantic potential, nice ensemble cast."

—Rita Kempley
Film Critic, Washington Post