

A primer for our American cousins

By Paul Mather

So, American TV or movie writer, you've taken the plunge and moved to Canada to escape Trump. Welcome to your new home! As a newcomer you should be aware of the subtle yet important differences in the Canadian industry. Let's dig in!

Let's go over some terminology. The WGC is the Writer's Guild of Canada. They're responsible for the magazine you're holding in your hands, *Canadian Screenwriter*, which they publish so that when you don't have a job you can look at pictures of other writers who are working.

The CRTC is the agency responsible for ensuring the integrity of Canada's airwaves by making sure citizens have access to American Super Bowl commercials. Periodically the CRTC holds public hearings to determine the future of television. You might think these are sort of like professional wrestling: lots of posturing, people get hit with chairs, and the outcome's worked out in advance. CRTC hearings would make a good game show, but the CRTC hasn't mandated a game show quota so Canadian broadcasters don't make any.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or CBC, is an important cultural institution. It was founded in 1936 to unite Canadians coast-to-coast by providing them with a common enemy. Note that it's technically incorrect to refer to CBC as "the CBC." Incorrect: "Did you hear about the stupid goddamn thing the CBC did?" Correct: "Why

is this guy alienating CBC with a gratuitous joke?"

But let's talk about production. As in the United States, Canada has purpose-built soundstages full of state-of-the-art technology. As a Canadian writer, you won't be getting near any of them. Instead, you'll be shooting in a repurposed industrial building which may not have the gyms, commissaries, and frozen yogurt places you're used to, but which *does* have asbestos and, if you're lucky, a forgotten room with a dead body!

You should also be familiar with a few key formatting differences between Canadian and American screenplays. In the U.S. one would script an action sequence like this:

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

GARY'S supercharged McClaren CAREENS through the crowd of supermodels, JUMPS over a fountain, and CRASHES into a pile of money.

In Canada the same sequence would be scripted like this:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Gary enters.

GARY

I just got in an offscreen car accident.

Also, remember your Canadian spelling. Here "favour" has a "u", "defence" can be spelled with a "c," and "residual check" is spelled "residual cheque" except it's not because they don't exist.

As in the U.S., Canada celebrates excellence. You have a walk of fame, honoring those who came to Hollywood and made a name for themselves in the arts. Toronto also has a walk of fame, which does the exact same thing.

Trump often rails against "Hollywood elites" and accuses them of living in a bubble. The good news is as a TV professional in Canada, you will never hear a politician refer to you ever again. Yes, life as a screenwriter north of the 49th parallel may seem daunting. Yet, in spite of the obstacles, Canadians make TV and film that's enjoyed around the world. If you thought being a liberal in Trump's America felt like being held hostage in a country that desperately needs you but can at times feel indifferent or even hostile, you will be well-prepared for life as a Canadian arts professional. ■