

CANADIAN

CANADA \$7 FALL 2015 VOL.18, NO.1

# SCREENWRITER

FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

Not Getting Lost In  
Translation Is Key In  
Adapting Quebec Shows

Sci-Fi: Not Just  
For Nerdy Guys  
Anymore

Games And How  
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**Dennis Heaton:**  
Fired Up Over *Motive*

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## When A Relationship Ends

In this issue, one of the things we look at is the challenge of adapting shows written for one culture to another. Say, a French-language Quebec television series to a series for an English audience. What are the professional challenges there? We also look at a slightly similar situation, that of writers or showrunners being swapped in to a show to augment or replace other writers and/or showrunners. What are the professional and emotional challenges to that scenario?

There are a few reasons a series might be handed off to a new or partly new story department.

“It’s not you; it’s me” — The broadcaster, that is essentially paying for the series, has a different “vision” than the showrunner. It’s not necessarily a better vision. It’s not necessarily a more commercial vision (although that is more likely). It’s just a matter of a “different” vision.

Then there is the, “No, actually, it is you” — a matter of personalities. That situation is more like a marriage that seems like a great idea at the start and then one person starts complaining about the way the other flosses their teeth while they wander around the house. Notes start getting passed that are no longer romantic or funny but curt and sometimes cruel.

Sometimes it’s for a happy reason — the showrunner or head writer is moving on to bigger and better things (maybe even for the same broadcaster).

Other times it’s more like an amicable divorce, where the two parties separate and realize it’s not a failure on either side — they can still be friends, but they just don’t work well together.

And sometimes it’s not happy at all. I mean, what does she see in him anyway?

So you watch your show that someone else has taken over and try to be objective. I mean, maybe some people like that sort of thing.

You try really hard not to point out to your friends when something doesn’t work on the show. And your friends, while supportive, tell you it’s time to move on.

But you have, right? I mean maybe you miss the show, but seriously, you’re way happier now.

Look at all the other shows that have had successful transitions under new writers and showrunners. And the people who left those shows turned out ok, right?

All relationships improve us. Even if it’s only to make us a little tougher, like scar tissue on a prize fighter. The next one is always at least a little better. Every step you take makes you a little stronger and gets you closer to your goal. Sometimes the goal isn’t always in the direction you first set off, but it’s always where you end up.

Yeah. You’re fine and if they can’t deal with your art, your vision, that’s their problem. You’re moving on down the road. ■

— Tom Villemaire

### Spring 2015

**Michael Amo** has written Gemini-nominated TV movies. He also created the *The Listener*. Presently, he’s developing a project with Sony Pictures Television. He lives with his family in Nova Scotia.

**Cameron Archer** runs the Canadian television/media website Gloryosky (<http://www.sweetposer.com/>), and is also a freelance arts writer. He currently lives in Eastern Ontario.

A freelance arts and entertainment writer, **Katherine Brodsky** has written for *Variety*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Weekend*, *Mashable*, *Elle Canada*, *MovieMaker Magazine*, *The Independent*, *Stage Directions*, and many others. She has interviewed a diverse range of intriguing personalities, including Oscar, Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Pulitzer winners. In her spare time she wears sunglasses at night and runs her own cult, Katherineology. Follow her on Twitter @mysteriouskat

**Mark Dillon** is a Toronto-based freelance journalist and former editor of *Playback* magazine. He is author of the award-winning *Fifty Sides of The Beach Boys*.

**Matthew Hays** is a Montreal-based writer, author, and university and college instructor. His articles have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Vice*, *Maclean’s*, *The Walrus*, *Cineaste*,

POV, and *The Toronto Star*. He teaches courses in film studies at Marianopolis College and Concordia University. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award and he received the Concordia President's Award for Teaching Excellence for 2013-14.

After completing a commercial arts program in college, specifically taken for developing his photography, **Jeff Weddell** began working as a photographer over 30 years ago, covering all aspects of the field, from commercial, advertising, corporate portraiture and fine arts. Jeff also works in film and television capturing production stills, as well as gallery portraits for networks and studios from around the globe.

**Diane Wild** is a Vancouver-based writer and editor who runs the TV, eh? website ([www.tv-eh.com](http://www.tv-eh.com)) about Canadian television.

**Kendra Wong** is a journalist in Victoria, B.C. She has a bachelor of arts from Simon Fraser University and a certificate in journalism from Langara College. She has worked at newspapers in the Lower Mainland including *Metro Vancouver*, the *Tri-Cities NOW* and the *Smithers Interior News* in northern B.C. She currently works as a reporter with the *Victoria News*.



## Time To Start A Fire

*Michael Amo is the WGC councillor for the Atlantic region*

A chill has fallen on Nova Scotia's film and TV industry that's got nothing to do with the autumnal equinox. The mercury dropped in the spring, when our deficit-fighting provincial finance minister broke a Liberal election promise by announcing that our labour tax credit program was up for review. Things got positively polar on July 1, when the Liberals killed the credit and introduced their new incentive program.

They insist it will all work out just dandy — once the kinks get worked out. This is cold comfort — particularly after the disastrous three months we just had. What should have been a red-hot summer thanks to the weak dollar turned out to be a near-total bust with production fleeing to more welcoming jurisdictions.

Almost everyone I talk to seems to be contemplating exit strategies. Plenty have already left. The longer they're gone, the more likely it is they won't return.

I see the same freeze-out happening right across Canada as networks here try to cope with shrinking revenue. When it comes to original content, their strategy seems to be "Let's do what we've always done — only less."

The drastic drop in opportunity means we either move to L.A. or stay in Canada but sell our shows to American networks first. After all, why bother pitching anything here if a series order is contingent on U.S. financing?

Kind of like those White Walkers in *Game of Thrones*, winter is definitely coming for our broadcasters. Cord cutting. Netflix. A new generation who has no time for traditional appointment television.

So maybe, instead of trying to save a few bucks by turning down the thermostat, our politicians and networks should start a fire by creating an environment that encourages hiring Canadian writers to create more original programming. Before the lights go out for good. ■

— **Michael Amo**

In the last edition of Canadian Screenwriter Shelley Hoffman was incorrectly identified as Shirley Hoffman in the article "To Banff Or Not To Banff."

In "How Will You Leave Your Audience," an obituary for John Hunter, credits for *Hungry Hills* and *Curtains for Roy* were reversed. Gary Fisher wrote the screenplay *Hungry Hills*; Aaron Bushkowsky wrote the novel *Curtains for Roy*.

Canadian Screenwriter apologizes for any confusion this may have caused.

## The WGC Policy Decoder



Some relish discussions about exhibition requirements, simultaneous substitution, and documents beginning with words like “application” and “amendments.” Others, not so much. If you’re in the latter category, the “WGC Policy Decoder” is for you. Each issue of *Canadian Screenwriter* will include a “policy decoder,” breaking down issues that matter to screenwriters. This edition decodes “OTT.”

**What’s the Big Idea:** Over the Top (OTT) services (such as Netflix, Shomi, Crave etc.) transmit content — a.k.a. television shows — over the internet. And, in Canada, they are exempted from regulation.

**Why Care:** OTT services have no Canadian content requirements. In other words, no requirements to exhibit or produce Canadian programs. And some companies, such as Netflix, aren’t connected in any way to the Canadian television system. It could, should its executives choose to do so, provide 100% American content all the day long. Even though the Broadcasting Act does cover OTT, the CRTC has exempted it from the kinds of regulations that traditional broadcasters have. That means OTT services do not contribute to Canadian funding

bodies (such as the Canada Media Fund) that help to make Canadian shows. Yes, Netflix has partnered with Canadian broadcasters on a couple of instances of original programming. And yes, the WGC is very pleased for the writers of those shows! But that’s ad hoc program creation. Without some form of regulation to create a balanced, ongoing system, original Canadian programming could simply dry up. It’s not that the WGC suggests OTT should be regulated exactly the same way traditional broadcasters have been regulated. After all, OTT is not traditional broadcasting, being on-demand, non-linear etc. But there needs to be a new way of dealing with OTT, because we don’t, and you don’t, want to lose the voice of Canadian screenwriters living here at home in Canada.

**Where’s It Going:** At press time, sad to say, nowhere. The Conservative government made it clear that it was not about to regulate OTT. The CRTC said it’s not touching it. It’s also an unpopular idea with the public, many of whom do not understand the intricacies of funding Canadian production, and simply appreciate a service that is inexpensive. People may not realize that part of that cheap price tag is because Netflix has

no transmission and distribution infrastructure. It utilizes already existing systems. That’s why the WGC continues to lobby in Ottawa for meaningful recognition of the digital revolution and how it affects the screenwriting industry (a.k.a. a national digital strategy), and for regulation of OTT.

### It’s (Almost) a Wrap

The WGC is moving into the last session of the Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters program, with its final one week “bootcamp” taking place in Jan. 2016. There was an overwhelming response from applicants — eighty hopefuls for the eight available spots.

Since 2010, the program has helped emerging and mid-career writers sharpen their skills and gain key contacts in the Canadian television industry. To date, the program has graduated 70-some writers, and nine participants have received paid internships in the writers’ rooms of television series including *19-2*, *Bitten*, *The Code*, *Degrassi*, *The Listener*, *Motive*, *Mr. D.*, and *Saving Hope*. The newest internship winner, Romeo Candido, will head to a room (TBA) in 2016.

Many thanks to the most recent squad of WGC screenwriters who mentored program participants: David Barlow, Richard Clark, Jennifer Cowan, Mark Farrell, Karen Hill, Marvin Kaye, Jonathan Lloyd Walker, and Karen Walton. And thanks to ALL of the WGC members who have given so much to new generations of writers over the past five years of the program, including our most recent internship jurors: Deborah Nathan, Skander Halim, and Steve Lucas. We look forward to working with more of our members in this final round.





Left: Kyle Muir, Doug Hadders, Amy Benham, Nicole Demerse, Ben Joseph at Writing Kids TV: A Bold New World of Opportunities;  
Right: Chloe van Keeken, Rachael Schaefer, Jordan Clark, and Jason Leaver, at Dance Driven Drama: Writing the Next Step.

## Watch and Listen: Fan Expo Panels

For the fifth straight year, WGC members rubbed shoulders with cosplayers (and other überfans) at Fan Expo Canada. Writer-producers Chloe van Keeken and Rachael Schaefer discussed their unique approach to creating *The Next Step*, on a panel that included cast member Jordan Clark, and was moderated by writer Jason Leaver. Amy Benham, Nicole Demerse, Doug Hadders, and Kyle Muir shared insider tips with moderator Ben Joseph at *Writing Kids TV: A Bold New World of Opportunities*. Other WGC members put in a Fan Expo appearance as well, including showrunner Michelle Lovretta, who joined “Innerspace Live with the Cast of *Killjoys*,” and Will Wennekers, who shared the spotlight at Adult Swim’s “*Fugget About It* Exclusive Season Three Peek & Cast.”

Video of the guild’s Fan Expo panels are on the WGC’s YouTube channel, and podcasts are available at the WGC website.

## Writers’ Insights

WGC members shared insights into writing and the

industry at this year’s Toronto and Vancouver International Film Festival industry conferences. At TIFF, speakers on the *So You Think You Want to Be a Showrunner* panel looked at the “nuances of the creator process.” WGC showrunners Tassie Cameron (*Rookie Blue*), and Jennifer Holness (*Shoot the Messenger*) were joined by Jake Amiel (*The Knick*), and Sam Esmail (*Mr. Robot*). At VIFF, Simon Davis Barry (*Continuum*) was joined by Christopher C. Rogers (*Halt and Catch Fire*), and Warren Littlefield (*Fargo*), for a panel called *Specific Voices*. Patricia Rozema was the featured guest at a talk called *The Art of the Arc*, and Rachel Langer (*This Life*), Raul Inglis (*Continuum*), and Jennica Harper (*Motive*), spoke about life *In the Writers’ Room*, with moderator Simon Davis Barry.

## 20th Annual WGC Screenwriting Awards

In 2016, the WGC celebrates 20 years of the WGC Screenwriting Awards, and 25 years of the guild itself. This year, the awards nomination categories have changed slightly, and the

new categories are as follows: Children, Documentary, Movies and Miniseries, Shorts and Webseries, TV Comedy, TV Drama, Tweens and Teens. Animation is now included across the board, and animation entries should be submitted to the appropriate category. The awards take place on May 2, 2016, at Koerner Hall in Toronto.

## Writers Talking TV

The WGC’s Writers Talking TV series — where one screenwriter interviews another in front of a live audience — is going strong. Recent editions featured *Sunnyside* co-showrunner Gary Pearson and head writer Jan Caruana in conversation with Simon Racioppa. Next, *The Next Step*, where host Nicole Demerse interviewed showrunner Frank van Keeken. The fall 2015 season kicked off with Bruce McCulloch interviewed by Matt Watts about *Young Drunk Punk*. The WGC will be putting on more WTTV events in the months to come. Keep an eye on the WGC website for updates, and listen to podcasts of past editions of WTTV on the website as well. ■

# HEAT'S ON

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By Diane Wild

With Dennis Heaton at the helm, *Motive*, CTV's whydunnit murder mystery is now filming its fourth season. Why are the *Motive* whydunnits so hot?







“I have a dark sense of humour,” says Dennis Heaton over ciders. “I can see the upside of homicide.”

It’s not the most comforting declaration coming from the person with the bushy beard sitting across the table, but it is the secret to making *Motive*, CTV’s whydunnit murder mystery now filming its fourth season.

Heaton has been a writer on the show since nearly the beginning, becoming co-showrunner with James Thorpe (*The Dark Corner*, *Sanctuary*) for season two and then doing solo duty for three and four. Though he’d had experience through his award winning *My Pal Satan* webseries, short films, and being Sheri Elwood’s second on *Call Me Fitz*, the gradual transition — as well as participation in showrunner training programs — made his coronation as solo showrunner relatively comfortable.

“Though if you ask Louise [Clark of Lark Productions, the co-producers], she’d probably say I looked like I was about to defuse a bomb,” he joked of the pressure of having the creative buck stop with him. He credits constant communication as crucial to the partnership, and a division of labour where Heaton would be on set while Thorpe was in the writing room, and vice versa.

Thorpe, who left the series to return home to Burbank where he and his wife live, compared the intensity and camaraderie of the writers’ room to being in a MASH unit and describes the co-showrunner partnership with Heaton a luxury; it was great to have “someone to share the load, someone you can trust to have your back. It really is a daunting task for an individual to take on. He has a great sense of story structure, a great sense of character, and his dialogue sings. He has a facility for working with actors on the floor and aside from all that, he’s just fun to be around. He has a fantastic sense of humour, I trust him completely and we had a good time,” says Thorpe. “Dennis and I gave each other free reign off the top. We’d already gone through season one together, so we knew the beast we were trying to tame.”

Leaving the series was difficult — “it felt like I was giving up on a baby” — but Thorpe now enjoys being a pure fan of what adoptive father Heaton and his small writing team put together each week, without experiencing the sweat of the “100 different versions of the story before it got to where it is.”

The series’ deceptively simple premise — reveal the killer in the teaser and then slowly unravel why the murder was committed — belies an intricate structure. Each episode contains four timelines: the killer’s flashback, the victim’s

“I have a dark sense of humour, I can see the upside of homicide.”

flashback, the current killer’s timeline, and the current investigation timeline. These must be woven together while ensuring the audience is never ahead of the investigators, and that when the timelines coincide in act five the final twist contains an element of surprise that illuminates what came before without making the audience feel they were cheated along the way. “You don’t want the audience thinking they were jerked around,” says Heaton.

Plus “you need seven ‘Oh shit’ moments,” he points out, since the structure is six acts plus a teaser.

Simple, right? So what was the draw?

For Heaton, who for years worked in Nova Scotia on *Call Me Fitz*, the initial appeal was the opportunity to work in Vancouver, where he and his wife make their home. But he now considers himself the proud adoptive parent of a show he didn’t birth but chose to raise as his own.

The series stemmed from a pilot script by Daniel Cerone (*Dexter*, *The Mentalist*) that had been kicking around for over a decade, generating buzz but no network bites. “Broadcasters were concerned you couldn’t keep the gag going in a series, episode after episode,” says Thorpe. “I was instantly attracted to the material. Daniel is a fantastic writer, and I’ve always been a fan of the mystery genre and the Columbo model where the game is more cat and mouse rather than pure procedural.”

He told the producers, Foundation Features, who brought the script to him, that he could see 100 episodes “no problem.” So they had him put his writing where his mouth was. After submitting a series bible and a second episode to go along with a newly Vancouverized pilot, they got a quick green light from CTV. “I figured all we needed was a team of crack writers to nail this down.”





*From left: Sarah Dodd, Matt MacLennan, Dennis Heaton,  
Damon Vignale, Jennica Harper, Julie Puckrin*





Heaton with *Motive* director Sturla Gunnarsson

Heaton was part of that crack team and recalls the early days of the season one writers' room as being full of great ideas: "And many times we'd end up saying if we didn't reveal who the f---ing killer was in the opening scene, this would be a great episode of television."

"The format requires a subversion of the standard procedural," he says. He'd worked on procedurals before — *Blood Ties* and *The Listener* — but *Motive* was his first without a supernatural bent. And even then, he found himself on a procedural that "can't rest on the standard tropes of the medium."

Because the motive is the key to each episode, the reason for the killing must be relatable, evoking empathy if not sympathy in the audience. Thorpe calls each episode an in-depth character study, making the roles sought-after guest spots. "We're obsessed with making sure the killer's compelling," says Heaton. "You rarely have a truly sympathetic

killer through revenge. In order for revenge to be a motive, the killer has to be traumatized and has to have faith in a justice system that fails them."

Thorpe says the killers can't simply be psychotic — "they're average people we can relate to who are pushed to the brink in that moment" — and notes personal arcs for the main cast offer both another complication and another opportunity for rich characterizations.

The structural challenges of the series aren't so much limiting as the starting point for innovative ideas. "There's a difference between a formula and format," says Heaton, who cites the Coen brothers and Elmore Leonard as huge influences. "*Motive* has a very structured set-up and very defined parameters. But within that, we're always looking to tell stories in a different way."

What if the killer is working on flawed information? What if the writers play with the investigation timeline? What if they invert the killer

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“You always have your  
benchmarks and you hit that,  
and then you decide what the  
next benchmark will be”

and the victim? What if the dark humour comes from the post-rage realization that now the messy crime scene cleanup begins, (a logistical nightmare Heaton jokes is what would prevent him from acting on any homicidal impulses)? And what looked like a bad idea in week one has a way of coming back and morphing into something that works in week seven.

Heaton talks about seasons and episodes in terms of themes — season four he describes as “putting your best foot forward” — but thinks of those discussions as cohesion for the writers more than the audience. “An episode theme might be what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, but whether that remains the theme by the end is the question. Sometimes one of the storylines will be the dark negative of that theme, proving its opposite.”

And then there are network notes.

*Motive’s* story pitches to the network end up around five pages instead of the usual one, because there’s so little room for hand waving or restructuring just part of the plot in response to notes. “When one thread is pulled, the entire sweater unravels,” Heaton says. Thorpe likens it to a “Jenga tower of complications.”

The first two seasons aired on ABC as well, leading to two sets of opinions that had to be reconciled. And — pick your metaphor — sometimes the story does unravel, or the tower collapses, and the writers start over. When ABC picked up the series, Thorpe remembers “great celebration and copious amounts of alcohol” in the writers’ room. He’d left before ABC dropped it from their schedule, but bets there were equally copious amounts of alcohol then for different reasons.

Still, CTV has stuck with the show for two more seasons and the show Thorpe called “the best

gig in Canada” continues to be a source of pride for both men. Heaton has his head down as season four films, but acknowledges his next logical career step would be to showrun his own baby, a series he creates.

“You always have your benchmarks and you hit that, and then you decide what the next benchmark will be,” he says, agreeing that’s both a recipe for success and for persistent dissatisfaction. “Maybe it’s how I maintain a level of angst. I think writers tend to measure ourselves based on how long from when you finish a job to panic about the next job.”

He started his career producing animation, then started writing animation, then moved to writing live action and finally showrunning. He credits his producer’s mentality with preventing him from being too precious about his words and understanding the pressures of the production process — skills necessary for showrunning. He also credits the calm and talented presence of Sarah Dodd, his own second in the writers’ room, for helping shoulder the burden.

Despite Heaton’s appreciation of the merits of homicide, Thorpe saw in him the same nurturing qualities he himself valued in showrunning, as they managed a group of writers, over the years, that has included Dodd, Daegan Fryklind, Wil Zmak, Katherine Collins, Thomas Pound, Julie Puckrin and Derek Schreyer. “We were blessed with such talented writers. Everyone was confident they would be heard, there’s no fear, no bullshit, no hidden agenda, and we can create something we’re all proud of. When you give people that sort of environment they really do flourish and give you their best.” ■

# HOW WOMEN SAVED SCI-FI (SORT OF)

By Katherine Brodsky



Hannah John-Kamen in *Killjoys*

Not that long ago, sci-fi and fantasy series were relegated to the “ghetto” of Canadian television programming, looked down upon by networks

and writers alike, recalls Michelle Lovretta. “As a fan, I never understood that and didn’t quite get the memo at first,” she says.

It’s probably a good thing or else she might not have gone on to create the popular fantasy series *Lost Girl*, and, now, *Killjoys*. “It’s this really weird dichotomy that has now flipped,” she explains. “Many shows in

Canada are doing very well as genre and are getting more support from home — with more and more writers ‘coming out’ as genre writers and proud of it. But that has really been a 180 from when I started.”

So what accounts for the flip? According to Lovretta, things happen in cycles. “We happen to be in a cycle right now that is really embracing



everybody's inner nerd." That, and the popularity of video games and cosplay.

"One of the shifts that has happened in the last five years is the explosion of cosplay," says Mark Askwith, long-time SPACE special projects producer. "Cosplay has pointed out that 'real people' of different backgrounds and ages are interested in sci-fi." Coplaying involves dressing as a character in a story, television series, movie or even computer game. Cosplayers are a large attraction at events like comicons.

In the late 1970s, audiences for sci-fi were largely university-educated males with a passion for engineering, unlikely to see themselves as 'fans' or sport a *Star Trek* uniform to a convention. Today, says Askwith, we're at a critical mass; creators enjoy working with fans to build new universes. "To me, that is the golden age of sci-fi on television," he says. "We've never had anything like it, it's incredible."

With an audience in place, networks are taking more of a chance on sci-fi. "Sci-fi audiences are the most passionate and fiercely loyal, so they want to tap into that market," says *Stargate* and *Dark Matter* co-creator Joseph Mallozzi. "It's very nice to see."

For a time, says Mallozzi, there was a trend to get away from space — in the sense of hard sci-fi outer space — and rather into the space that's around us. "They tried to put sci-fi out there in a way that was more palatable for a general audience," he says. But lately the attitude has shifted to, "You know what? Sci-fi is sci-fi — let's embrace it."

2015 in particular, according to Askwith, saw the return of shows set in space with series like *Killjoys* and *Dark Matter*.

There's a real appetite for those kinds of stories. Lovretta refers to it as "intellectual tourism." Whether it's exploring the world of *Game of Thrones* or boarding a spaceship on *Killjoys*, there seems to be, more than ever, a desire to escape. "And we provide that for people," says Lovretta.

But does it really bode well for our world that we want to leave it so badly? Lovretta laughs: "Well maybe it's optimism. Maybe they are saying, 'Let's see where else we can go. But there's that appetite for fantasy right now no matter what form it comes in.'"

We are purging the things of our youth, says Lovretta: "There seem to be a lot of those superheroes again that we liked when we were ten and zombies which scared us when we were 12. You can say, yes, people are running (from something) that's quite dark, or you can say that there's almost this sort of innocence to it, people just trying to reclaim some of that."

But, says Lovretta, a large part of the rise in genre content is also due to the writers. When she was going

around pitching *Lost Girl*, Alan Ball had just created *True Blood* for HBO. A serious, Academy-Award winner doing a vampire show on a premium network was unheard of. "He kind of blew our minds," recalls Lovretta, "That gave people permission [to do genre]."

But the real explosion in sci-fi has been sparked by the inclusion of women, argues Askwith, who notes women now account for at least half of the audience — if not more. "I think that science fiction has always led the way with strong female characters," he says. There was always a place for women, agrees Lovretta, because genre has always been about playing with what could be, not just what is. "I think that women are having an increasing impact and that sort of changes the skin of the show and the stories that are told," she says. "I think things are becoming a little more accessible to a broader audience ... there's more variety in story [and characters]."

As TV grows up, says Mallozzi, "it does a better job of reflecting society." Last time he checked, women made up approximately fifty percent of that society. Even 15 years ago, with *SG-1*, the audience was predominantly women.

Women as national leaders or captains of ships may have been exotic novelties in sci-fi originally, but over time they opened up how we tell stories. "It's not about who's at the helm, it's where the journey takes you," says Lovretta.

Not only have sci-fi and fantasy gained popularity, they've seen an evolution of sorts as well. Shows that were more episodic and concept-focused have become increasingly character driven and serialized. "Not too long ago, you couldn't sell serialized shows to anybody and now it's what everybody seems to want," says *Dark Matter* co-creator Paul Mullie, who also worked on *Stargate*. "It's much more popular than it used to be." The cable sensibility has changed.

It's hard to pin-point the exact reason as to why Canada seems to be doing so well within genre television as of late, but it's safe to assume that it may have something to do with all the years of catering to big Hollywood productions and series like *The X-Files* where crews got a chance to soak up specialized knowledge — ranging from knocking out a sword or a monster mask to writing and directing. Then there's the great infrastructures, tax credits, and the favourable value of the Canadian dollar.

Another key factor that has fuelled the rise of science fiction is Canada's booming VFX industry, decreased costs of special effects, and overall technological progress. That impact is significant.

"Visual effects have changed how we can tell stories quite a bit," says Mullie. "The ability to do more, cheaper, has probably opened up a lot more



storytelling avenues that weren't around in a way that would have been considered acceptable or of broadcast quality." Previously, it was prohibitively difficult to produce much of the comic book and genre end of sci-fi, which meant that advances in VFX also opened a lot of doors into different ways of telling a story. "People began to expect a lot more from that kind of storytelling and [creators and networks] noticed there was a demand for it and started to cater to that demand."

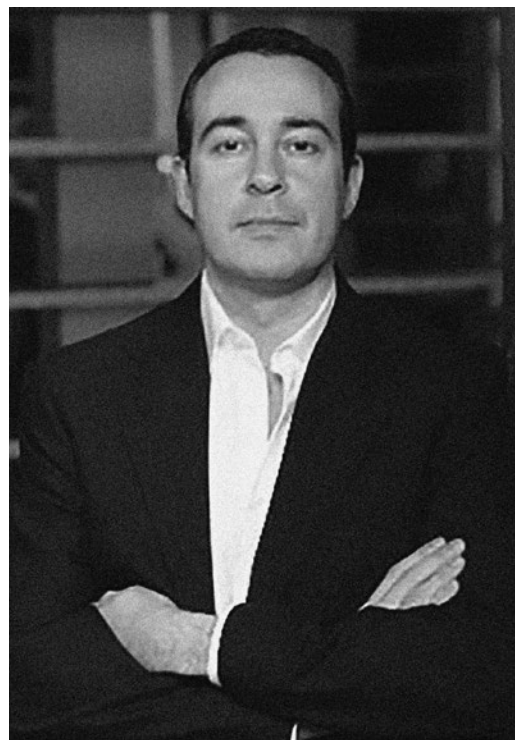
For their new series, *Dark Matter*, Mallozzi and Mullie took a slightly different approach by creating a graphic novel first. "A graphic novel is essentially a storyboard," says Mullie. "You never know how people are going to read a script; they might not see or imagine it as you do, whereas with a graphic novel, it's all laid out." It was a great tool for selling the show. "When we did sell it, the note was: 'Make it like the graphic novel and it will be great.'"

It was a helpful tool to have, particularly for a ship show since producing a pilot isn't exactly a viable option — something that may explain the shortage of shows set in space. It's one thing to set a sci-fi show within a contemporary setting on earth, and an entirely different ordeal to put it out in space. For

starters, it is prohibitively expensive to build a ship, so you'd need a 13-episode order from the get-go, to do it. "There are a lot of challenges that a lot of people just don't want to bother with," says Mullie. "I like to have a mix [of genres] and I think there's a place for flying through space as part of the science fiction lexicon; I think that science fiction fans will always want that."

Neither Mallozzi nor Mullie, of course, are strangers to ship shows, having *Stargate* run in some reincarnation or other for 17 seasons. "We've been doing sci-fi for so long that we've built an audience and a lot of that audience has followed us on to *Dark Matter*," says Mallozzi. And they've learned some things along the way. For starters, the key is to produce on the page in order to avoid surprises. "You write to what you know you can do," explains Mullie. At the same time, "we were pushing the boundaries of what we could do on the money that we had, but we were always mindful of it." You can do a lot on a budget that isn't huge, so long as everything is planned in advance: "You do it that way and you can actually put most of the money on the screen." Where it belongs.

To Mullie and the crews who worked for years on *Stargate*, it was a tremendous learning



From left: Michelle Lovretta; Mark Askwith; Paul Mullie; Joseph Mallozzi

experience. “We just did so many different things and I’ve learned how all of that was done.” They shot under water, flooded sets, used green screen and prosthetics, set off massive explosions, created 2D characters, and unleashed incredible stunts. “We had our stunt guy jump off of a 60-foot tower into the water once,” muses Mullie. “So you learned what you could and couldn’t do. There is no other show where I could have learned all of those things in that time; there was just nothing else like that out there, so it was amazing.”

The more you do, the more you’re capable of doing, explains Mullie. “It’s kind of a snowball effect, especially with crews.”

Another lesson that Mallozzi brought over from *Stargate* was that you have to have a sense of humour. “I find that the humour goes such a long way towards humanizing the characters and helping viewers to connect with them,” he says. “You sell a show and it’s all about the hook and they’ll tune in for the hook, but the audiences stay for the characters and their interrelations; these are the core and the heart of any show.”

Mullie agrees: “What makes the story unique is the characters and how they interact with each

other.” Any story you’ve seen before can become original if you have a fresh character making their way through it.

But as everyone knows, there are no limits in sci-fi or fantasy. You can boldly go where no man or woman has gone before. If the budget lets you, that is. “You get great ideas and then you have to come down to earth — that is a challenge,” points out Lovretta. “[But] the job of a genre writer is not to say ‘why not’ or ‘it can’t be’ — it’s how CAN we tell this story, how can we make it enjoyable?”

For her, coming up with the basic universe and rules are like “candy” and one of the joys of sci-fi and fantasy is that, under the surface, you sometimes get to discuss other things, too.

“I think it’s a great approach to storytelling because when you’re dealing with metaphors you can tackle all kinds of issues that you can’t necessarily tackle in mainstream television,” says Askwith.

The shift towards genre represents “the perfect storm of events” for Lovretta. “As long as these things are drawing eyeballs and making money for the people who make them, it’s a trend that will hopefully continue,” she says. ■



# GAME ON

By Matthew Hays

*While film and TV writing can seem precarious, many writers are turning to writing games, a booming industry*

As if readers of this publication needed any more reminders, writing is a precarious business. And while further cuts at the CBC don't bode well for TV and film continues to be dodgy (see Simon Hout's piece, published in *The Globe & Mail*, July 20, 2015, "CBC urged to find new funding models"), there is a sector that is growing — rapidly.

For Matt MacLennan, the shift came after years of writing for theatre, film, and TV. "I was curious, and would just cruise the boards of the game studios," he recalls. "I was into Dungeons and Dragons. I hit up people in the industry, just to see what interest there was."

At first, game writers say the task may seem daunting. And it is, as successful game writers confirm, an entirely different beast in terms of what's required and what the expectations for the job are. "TV or film writing is generally linear," says Elize Morgan, who has written a broad range of games, including *Saber's Edge*. "Not everything in a game is necessarily going to be found by the player — someone could get lost in the middle. With TV, you're assuming people will stay to the end. People generally go from point A to B. In a game, you could go from point A to Z and then back to B."

"You have to be mindful of your audience in a different way," adds MacLennan. "The gamer has agency; they're not watching characters, they are the characters. There's a real emotional charge for them. And you have to try not to disrupt that immersion.

If the dialogue is off, even for a moment, that could throw someone off. I obsessively check everything out, that every bit of dialogue seems real."

And with game writing, writers have to be keenly aware of where they are on the food chain. "A TV writer is a prominent position. Game writers are more of a face in a crowd. Coders are king, designers are important, writers are even lower on the ladder," MacLennan says.

"What a writer ends up doing could be very different from what they had originally envisioned," warns Morgan. "You take your barking orders and run with them. You're writing in a team-based environment."

Part of the excitement of game writing, says Morgan, is also one of its primary challenges. "You can see all of these different possibilities play out, and each one will be entirely different. You have so many possible worlds, and some players will explore all of them. If you're the only writer on a game, you have to write all of it which can be freeing, but it's also a lot of work — you may be writing 150 location descriptions and 300 weapon designs. For one game I had to write out 300 weapon descriptions. I had to do it in a week, which was so stressful. I don't know that much about pistols from the 1800s."

"The branching narrative is one of the coolest things for a writer," says MacLennan. "The writer is creating a whole new world as they go. *The Walking Dead* game, which was a huge seller, was about a series



*Matt MacLennan*

“Game writers are more of a face in a crowd. Coders are king, designers are important, writers are even lower on the ladder”

“With TV, you’re assuming people will stay to the end. People generally go from point A to B. In a game, you could go from point A to Z and then back to B.”



*Elize Morgan*

“Game writing allows you to think very big, there are such budget restrictions with TV or film. You’re often having to think, ‘We can’t do that – too expensive.’”



Cameron Labine

of quick decisions, big decisions. And if the player paused, the decision was made for them.”

The process, says MacLennan, can be “exhausting.”

“I wrote a 1,400-page script for one video game. You’re building an entire world. If you walk by 30 or 40 people in a game who are having conversations, as you walk by them, all of those interactions have to be scripted. Everything needs to be created – which is so incredible, but so much work. It’s a pretty massive undertaking.”

Morgan says since making the shift into game writing, she’s been pretty immersed in it. “People usually want to hire you full-time.”

For Cameron Labine, however, gaming is something he manages to do in between film projects. His second feature, *Mountain Men*, took its bow at TIFF in September; he made the film after spending most of 2013 writing a game for Ubisoft. “I think the main difference for me is that the writing is done later in the process with gaming. You’re often being asked to find a narrative justification for something that’s already been designed – which is the opposite of film or TV, where the script comes first.”

Labine loves it. “I wasn’t sure how much I would

like it when I first got into it, but it’s super interesting. I hope traditional stories aren’t going to disappear, obviously, but there’s a huge rise in interest in game writing, and if people have any interest in games, they should look into it.”

Labine says he “can feel the influence the game writing is having on my other writing.”

“The next feature film I write, I’d like to make it less linear, and more interactive. Audiences are being influenced by the reach of games, just as writers are.”

And another difference won’t be lost on Canadian writers struggling in the fields of TV and film. “The first game I did at Ubisoft ended up selling huge amounts, like seven million. That’s a lot more people than most indie films are reaching. It was cool to know you’re reaching an audience that big. You’re also reaching a huge international market,” said Labine.

“Game writing allows you to think very big,” adds MacLennan. “There are such budget restrictions with TV or film. You’re often having to think, ‘We can’t do that – too expensive.’ With games, it’s often the opposite: you can write something that in a film would be hugely costly. You can think along the lines of a Michael Bay budget.”



But writing the epic games for big companies can also be a drawback, cautions Labine. “In some cases, there is so much money involved, the stakes are very high. You can be asked to make sweeping changes midway through the process. In film and TV you couldn’t afford to throw a bunch of stuff away that you’ve already shot. But in games, you can throw away months and months of work. That can be heartbreaking for a writer. So you have to prepare yourself; you may have to let go of a lot of work and not feel too attached to it.”

All three game writers have the same advice for writers interested in breaking into the game writing market: hit play. “Play as many games as you can,” suggests Labine. “Often, writers who come in from film, TV or novels just don’t play a lot of games. They think they can apply their own crafts to it, but writing games really is its own art form. You can learn to appreciate games, even if you haven’t played them much before. Now, I play them a lot and it’s improving my game writing.”

And game writing is covered by the WGC. “Members should be aware that the Independent Production Agreement covers their writing for games, too — to their benefit,” says Laurie Channer, director of industrial relations at the WGC. “It falls under our digital production sector, which is flexible for the game producer becoming signatory, with negotiable terms for the contract. A game writer can negotiate your fair pay, get insurance and retirement contributions on your fee, and have the protection of the WGC in case of a dispute or default.”

Writers might want to consider looking into game writing as an option, for the obvious reason that the industry is burgeoning. Games continue to sell well, there are many game companies in Canada and any hit show or movie almost always has game tie-ins. “Look at how many people are consuming games,” notes MacLennan. “And if you look at the demographics, games are hugely popular with younger people. It’s only going to grow.”

Melissa MacCoubrey, assistant narrative director of Ubisoft Quebec, confirms the hiring of game writers is expanding. “There’s a lot of growth in the game industry,” she says. “There is a fundamental difference in writing games and writing TV, film or plays. I would urge people to play a lot of games so they get an understanding of what they are. And not just play, but analyze: what went into the decisions in writing that game?”

MacCoubrey says it’s surprisingly easy to take a trial run at writing your own game. “You can get technical experience by downloading Twine, which allows you to write and design a game. There are many elements that are the same — plot, characters, crazy deadlines — but games really are a world of their own.” ■

## Get connected: the new, improved WGC directory

For writers, getting connected to possible employers can be one of the most frustrating and lonely tasks. The WGC is now working to significantly upgrade its member directory, with a redesign adding considerable functionality. The launch of the redesign is timed to coincide with the WGC’s 25th anniversary. It will make it easier for members to publicize their skills, while also making it easier for producers to locate and hire them.

“The new directory is being launched during a time when writers are facing some turbulence in our industry and we want to provide them with every opportunity to promote their work and distinct skills,” says Terry Mark, the WGC’s assistant executive director, operations, and the driving force behind the revamp. “Producers will find the new directory has enhanced search capabilities and some invaluable time-saving tools like being able to save search criteria, short-listing writers they want to employ, and being able to email shortlists to others.”

These advanced options will be available to members of the WGC and producers who register on the WGC web site. “We’re also expanding the number of fields for writers to fill in for their profiles. This means they can discuss a broader range of talents and experience. We’re going to be promoting the directory with domestic producers but also international ones, so writers will have greater exposure in and access to writing in other national markets,” says Mark.

The revitalized directory will allow writers to upload personal headshots to give their profiles a more personal and intimate dimension. Stay tuned for more details! ■

# L'ADAPTATION

By Mark Dillon

*English-Canadian broadcasters want to remake hit Quebec shows, but must accommodate audiences accustomed to American-style TV.*

A tenet of the TV biz is that a proven concept is safer than an unproven one. In that spirit, broadcasters are increasingly ordering English-language adaptations of popular French shows from Quebec in hopes of repeating their success in the Rest of Canada.

Indeed, reimagining its French hits has become part of the business model at Montreal's Sphere Media Plus, which produces both the French and English versions of cop drama *19-2* (along with Echo Media) and is adapting its Radio-Canada drama *Nouvelle adresse* for a fall timeslot on CBC under the title *This Life*.

But, as witnessed globally, recreating a show for another culture can be tricky. In the U.S., Fox adapted acclaimed U.K. crime drama *Broadchurch* as *Gracepoint*, bringing over the original writer, director, and star, but it met with low ratings and cancellation. More positively, Showtime's buzzy political thriller *Homeland*, transposed from Israeli drama *Hatufim*, is heading into its fifth season.

*Nouvelle adresse* creator Richard Blaimert knows the pitfalls, having adapted his Radio-Canada/Sphere series *Les hauts et les bas de Sophie Paquin* (2006-2009) into *Sophie* for CBC. The pubcaster had Blaimert reshape the original — a one-hour comedy-drama about a single mother who runs a talent agency — into a half-hour sitcom, a format familiar to English-Canadian viewers from American TV. It couldn't match the original's success in its two seasons (2008-2009).

"CBC needed a 30-minute show, which is so different," Blaimert says from Montreal, where he's writing season four of *Nouvelle adresse*. "*Sophie* was constructed so you have a 'straight woman' surrounded by crazy characters. In an hour you have the room to make them both funny and touching. In a sitcom, where it's one punch line after another, you don't feel that as much. The soul of the show was different."

*This Life* follows newspaper columnist Natalie and her family and friends, who must cope with her

grim cancer prognosis. (Torri Higginson takes over the lead role originated in Quebec by Macha Grenon.) Blaimert serves as executive producer and story consultant on *This Life* and embraces the changes he's seen.

"The point is to go somewhere else with it, because if you want to see *Nouvelle adresse* you can just watch that," he says. "I'm trying to share my experiences but also stay detached. Every writer brings something unique, and I'm open to seeing what they are going to do."

In 2013, Michael MacLennan (*Bomb Girls*) was brought in to write the bible and first two scripts. Six more scripts were ordered, involving writers Joseph Kay (*Living in Your Car*), Rachel Langer (*The Drive*), and Shelley Eriksen (*Continuum*). The scripts were contracted as adaptations until episode seven, at which point they are considered original teleplays.

MacLennan felt certain things that worked in the French version — which draws more than one million viewers — would not work for English-Canadian and international audiences.

"*Nouvelle adresse* is more about taking a lens into the struggle this woman has when she's hit with cancer, and how it affects her family," says MacLennan from Los Angeles.

"I felt we needed something pivoting more positively, so it became more about how this woman's death sentence transforms everyone around her for the better. It felt like a dolorous trip through cancer struggles wasn't going to land where we wanted in an English-speaking marketplace. It was about a slight nudge of the theme that ends up changing much of the storytelling."

He adds that the English version has a zippier pace for audiences reared on U.S. shows. "We talked about shifting that up and adding more humour and visceral energy. We also talked more about a visual style in the scripting that wasn't in the original," he says.



Torri Higginson plays Natalie Lawson in *This Life*, the English adaptation of *Nouvelle Adresse*

While MacLennan was tailoring the show for a different culture, he also had to address the particular demands of a different broadcaster. For example, CBC wanted to change the career of Natalie's sister Maggie (Lauren Lee Smith). In the original, her sibling Magalie (Monia Chokri) is an assistant to a fashion designer.

"CBC felt that was a slight job for her, and there was a sense there might not be a lot of story engine there," MacLennan recalls. "We wanted her to still be somebody's assistant, but with some autonomy. So I came up with the idea of making her a paralegal, which also had the benefit of allowing us to explore the genre of legal storytelling."

In February, after a long period of development on *This Life*, MacLennan accepted the offer to run the writers' room on the ABC Family drama *The Fosters*. CBC subsequently ordered a 10-episode season of *This Life* and assigned Joseph Kay as showrunner.

When the series was announced, it bore the title *New Address* — a straight translation. But in a sign the English version eventually found its footing, it soon got its own moniker.

"We knew we were going to change the title," Kay says. "In the context it's used in Richard's show, *Nouvelle adresse* means something along the lines of 'a clean slate' or 'starting over.'" It also references Nathalie's profession as a journalist: every column she writes is a "new address" to her readers.

"We knew the translation didn't make sense, but we didn't know what else to call it until a week before shooting," Kay adds. Character names were Anglicized, so that "Nathalie Lapointe" became "Natalie Lawson."

Kay has worked closely with Blaimert, benefitting from the latter's hindsight, although nobody feels beholden to the original, and the English version charts its own course in terms of story focus.

"Both shows go to lots of different places because the ensembles are so big," Kay notes. "*Nouvelle adresse* goes into a workplace drama in some plots that we don't do. It has an effect on the tone. Ours are almost entirely personal, emotional stories woven into what's happening in people's lives."

He and Blaimert agree that Quebec and the ROC have distinct senses of humour. The French, apparently, like it wilder. In *Nouvelle adresse*, Nathalie's friend Macha is broadly played by Danielle Bergeron. She drinks too much, cries rivers, and puts her abandoning husband's collectible dish in the garburator.

"She's comic relief in the French show, and everybody wanted her to be comic relief in the English, but our version is different," Kay says. "Some of the same things happen to our character, who's named Danielle (Rachael Crawford), but it's toned down. She's not as 'big.' We just see funny differently."





*Clockwise from top left:  
Michael MacLennan;  
Richard Blaimert;  
Bruce Smith;  
Joseph Kay.*



## Keeping it “French” on *19-2*

Bruce Smith is familiar with the process of deciding what to keep and what to change in a French-to-English adaptation. The showrunner on Bravo’s *19-2* is in production on the series’ third season.

The Radio-Canada original was created by actors Claude Legault and Réal Bossé, who star as flawed Montreal police partners who fight crime on the streets and corruption within their ranks. The series’ three seasons were directed by Podz (a.k.a. Daniel Grou), the de facto showrunner. The gritty drama went to air in 2011 to critical applause and reported audiences of 1.3 million to 1.5 million.

Sphere president Jocelyn Deschênes saw the potential for the English market and brought the idea to CBC. Tom Hastings, the pubcaster’s then-creative head of drama, subsequently called in native Montrealer Smith (*Cracked*) to take charge of development. There was initially talk of moving the location to Vancouver.

“But it was very much of Montreal, so setting it somewhere else would have changed its soul,” Smith says. “I thought it would translate well as long as we could get around the language barrier.”

To do that, he kept the characters French-Canadian, even though the actors speak English, just as Hollywood World War II movies have German characters speaking in English so the audience understands them without subtitles. But why not simply

# SERVING AS SERIES “MIDWIFE”

Bruce Smith recalls the challenges of taking over as showrunner on *Cracked*.

To successfully adapt a show for another territory, a showrunner must be allowed to tear down the original and build something new. But what about when one showrunner replaces another on an existing series — essentially functioning as a creative midwife?

That’s where Bruce Smith found himself a couple of years ago on the White Pine Pictures/CBC police procedural *Cracked*. A writer on the first season, he was promoted to showrunner for season two. (Co-creator Tracey Forbes and Janet MacLean previously had assumed that role.) The first season drew mild ratings in the 500,000s.

This called for somewhat of a reboot. There was a sense the chemistry wasn’t working between lead characters Detective Aidan Black (David Sutcliffe) and psychiatrist officer Dr. Daniella Ridley (Stefanie von Pfetten), and that a new actress would positively shake up storylines. Ridley was written out of the series and replaced by Dr. Clara Malone (Brooke Nevins).

Greater emphasis was placed on guest-star parts in the second season, and reviewers noted a lighter tone, swifter pace, and more episodic structure.

“The challenge was to build on the strengths. CBC renewed the show, so there were things worth renewing,” recalls Smith, currently showrunner on *19-2*. “And yet they brought me in as a new showrunner, so there were things that needed to be changed. Your job is to navigate that and solve whatever the problems are and not throw out the baby with the bathwater.

“It’s a lot like *19-2*, because much of the job is being confident enough not to need to show that you’re smarter than the people you’re replacing or whose work you’re adapting — to have the humility to try to make what they did well keep working.”

While the new-look *Cracked* attracted an improved 809,000 viewers to its season two premiere, the series was cancelled after seven more episodes, attributed to CBC funding cuts. ■

transform the characters into Anglo Montrealers?

“This was a way to allow viewers outside Montreal to experience the French part of the city, which they couldn’t otherwise do unless they speak French,” Smith explains. “It’s an opportunity to get rid of that language barrier and focus on universal elements of the story, such as country cop vs. city cop and blue-collar vs. white-collar, as well as take you into the specific reality of Montreal.”

The show went to pilot with Adrian Holmes starring as Nick Barron and Jared Keeso as Ben Chartier, both of whom are younger than their French equivalents. And while Bossé’s Nick is white, Holmes is black, which brings a different culture into the mix.

“Nick comes with a lot of related characters,

including a son, sister, and cousin, so we ended up with a very diverse cast,” Smith explains. “And once you’ve cast the part, the part is the actor who’s playing them, and certainly my process is to follow that.”

CBC ultimately passed on the series, but Bravo scooped it up. Smith had written four scripts in advance and feels the series began moving in its own direction with the fifth. In season two, only two of 10 episodes were labeled adaptations.

Of season three, Smith says, “We’ve really gone a different road from the original show, partly because they were wrapping it up and took a deliberate path to end it.”

So Smith wants to keep storylines open in hopes *19-2* will outlive its predecessor? His response is an unequivocal “Absolutely!” ■



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# Know Your Target, Know Your Story

By Cameron Archer

**A**s a musician, Amy Cole is a member of Juno-nominated band Rural Alberta Advantage. Cole first transitioned to screenwriting on the first season of Fresh TV's *Grojband*, eventually becoming a story editor for the third season of Temple Street Productions' *The Next Step*, Family Channel's current flagship series. Cole is now working on the fourth season of *The Next Step*, and the first season of the spinoff, *Lost & Found Music Studios*. Both *The Next Step*'s fourth season and *Lost & Found Music Studios* premiere will air on Family sometime in 2016.

***You worked in public relations before your screenwriting career. What skills from public relations do you use as a screenwriter? How does it help in marketing your work to prospective television clients?***

In one of my first jobs out of school, I was hired by a tech start-up to get them in papers and on TV with zero budget. I still use two steps today when I'm pitching shows: know your target, and know your story.

Do as much research as possible about the network or producer you're pitching. You should go into the room knowing all the rules in the world of your show, and exactly what each character

would do or say in a given situation. If you're living and breathing your story and are excited by it, I've found excitement is infectious.

***How does your music career with Rural Alberta Advantage inform your television work? What similarities exist between music writing and screenwriting?***

I help write the music on *Lost & Found Music Studios*, as well as throw in some band-related storylines that have more authenticity to them than they otherwise might. It's fun writing song lyrics from 'inside the heads' of characters on L&FMS and *Grojband*. I also have input on selecting songs for *The Next Step*'s dances in order to help express a theme and/or story point in the show.

Being in a band, I've learned how to express ideas clearly and sell them, how and when to shut up and listen, and how to take a good idea and help make it better. When everyone in the room is passionate about making the best thing possible, things can get heated. Knowing that we all have the same goal in mind makes it easier to not die on too many hills.

***How longstanding was your goal to work in screenwriting? What disciplines did you learn/possibly***

***re-learn at the Canadian Film Centre before breaking into the industry?***

I knew I wanted to be a TV writer when I was in high school. I didn't think I would get into Ryerson University's Radio and Television Arts program. I knew it was really competitive, and my high school didn't have any courses remotely related to screenwriting or production. Somehow I did get in, and that's where I learned how to write for television. Rural Alberta Advantage signed to a record label not too long after I graduated, and we spent the next several years on the road.

One evening in 2011, we were in the basement 'green room' of the Beachland Tavern in Cleveland. I came across a friend's Facebook post about CFC's CBC Prime Time Television Program. I wrote my sample scripts from the road in our tour van, getting my package in just before deadline. The CFC program doesn't teach you how to write, but it simulates a writing room and introduces you to pretty much everyone in the industry. Within a couple of weeks after leaving the CFC, I had an agent, and I'd optioned a pilot. Without the CFC, I almost certainly wouldn't be in the industry today. ■

# Unfair Engagers

The guild has declared the following engagers “unfair” for failing to abide by grievance procedures or the decision of a joint standing committee. The WGC’s working rules prohibit members from working with unfair engagers.

**All I Want Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Battered Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Christmas Town Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**FOTP Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Richard Rapkowski*

**Guardian Films Inc./  
En Garge Films Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**H & S Films**

*Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis*

**Hiding Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.**

*Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin*

**Ice Planet (1) Canada Ltd.**

*Principal: Philip Jackson*

**Justice Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.**

*Principal: Robin Payne*

**Les Productions les Plus Belles Routes du Monde Inc.**

*Principal: Andre Belanger  
(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)*

**Lester Beach Entertainment**

*Principal: Jeff Lester*

**Mikisew Keemiwan Productions, Ltd.**

*Principal: Norman Champagne*

**Nikolai Productions**

*Principal: Cindy Lamb*

**Norfolk International Ltd.**

*Principal: William Macadam*

**Numb Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Perfect Stranger Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Prospero Entertainment Group Inc.**

*Principal: John Lambert*

**Richard Lowry Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Richard Lowry*

**She Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Spiritual Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**System Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**T Man Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Zolar Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

## Please Help Us Find These Writers!

The CSCS is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for writers

The Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for a number of writers and uncredited productions. As CSCS does not have a current address for these writers or the productions do not have complete credit information we have not been able to forward any monies to the entitled writers. The complete list of writers and productions is available on the CSCS website at:

**[www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot\\_news/index.html](http://www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot_news/index.html)**

If you have any information that would allow us to contact any of these writers or their agents, or if you are a credited writer on the listed production, please contact:

**Marisa King at [m.king@wgc.ca](mailto:m.king@wgc.ca)**

or call (416) 979.7907 ext. 5231 or  
1.800.567.9974 ext. 5231.

*Please note that CSCS may require writers to furnish contracts in support of their claim. According to CSCS regulations, if a writer does not claim his or her monies within two years of being posted on our website these monies revert to the operating expenses of CSCS.*



# Andrew De Angelis Is Mining Comedy Gold In Sudbury

By Kendra Wong

It seems nothing can stop Andrew De Angelis when he sets his mind. The Canadian screenwriter recently picked up the 2015 WGC Screenwriting Award for TV comedy for his work on the CBC comedy *Mr. D* and has worked on shows such as *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and the animated sitcom *Fugget About it*. Now, the Toronto writer has set his sights on Sudbury, the location of his newest show, *What Would Sal Do?*, airing on Superchannel next spring.

**So first of all, how did you get a new show in this economic climate?**

I think it came from a lot of hard work on the end of myself and the producers at New Metric Media. Really, I think the credit goes to them because they pushed and didn't take no for an answer. Also, because they were willing to find ways to do this show as economically as possible and we've done that. It hasn't been easy — it's been a challenge, but we're really making that dollar stretch.

***What was it about the show that made you want to push so hard for it?***

The key is we love this show. We've loved it for a long time and the network did too, otherwise they wouldn't have taken a chance on it. It's an idea that people really gravitated towards. The scripts were good and really solid. It's a show worth making.

**Writing comedy is difficult, it's probably the toughest thing you can do while laughing. What are some of the key elements to writing good comedy?**

I think the absolute key is good drama. It's conflict. It's really great stories. Comedy is not about jokes, in my opinion. Jokes are the last part of it. First, you have to have good characters and stories that really work and make sense and, have really genuine stories with great conflict.

**How are you able to find that balance between comedy and drama?**

It's really just allowing for the balance and by that I mean, not bombarding people with jokes.

Letting the drama come in and letting a scene happen with no jokes, or a scene or two that are really designed to set up one joke that's coming at the end of the script.

**You've worked for some big shows, what advice would you give to young writers who are just learning their chops?**

Work on anything you can and also work hard. I think a lot of young writers, even current writers, we're all doing the job that we love, but it's still a job. People are paying you to do this job.

**How are you adapting your writing and story to work with the local talent?**

I thought why not, let's make it somewhere in Canada and be proud of it. It was about going and getting a sense of Sudbury, seeing it, understanding what they do and learning as much as you can about it. It's just seeing everything that's there and finding ways to work that into the script. It's visually quite an interesting place. It's a blue-collar town. I could not imagine the show being anywhere else. ■



# News from WGC Members



**Dennis Heaton** has returned as showrunner on season four of CTV's hit drama series *Motive*. His writing staff includes: **Sarah Dodd**, **Matt MacLennan**, **Damon Vignale**, **Jennica Harper**, and **Julie Puckrin**.

**Anna Bourque** is currently supervising producer and mentor at The Moving Visuals Co. in Singapore, overseeing six reality and documentary series (two in Malay!) — with more on the horizon.

**Ian Barr** is currently missing sleep as supervising producer/writer on Jen Holness/Sudz Sutherland's TV series, *Shoot the Messenger*, a new political thriller for CBC, having finished as consulting producer/writer on Mosaic Entertainment's APTN sitcom *Delmer and Marta*.

**Nathaniel Moher** is currently working as a co-producer/writer on the third season of the YTV/Netflix series *Some Assembly Required*.



**Emma Campbell** was a story editor on Frank van Keeken's newest series, *Lost & Found Music Studios*. She also returns to *The Next Step* for its fourth season as executive story editor.

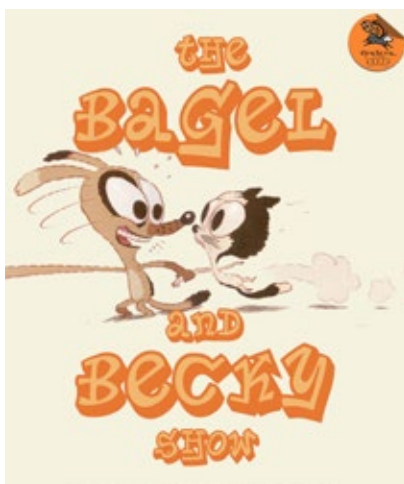
**Adrian Colussi** will tour the U.S. festival circuit with his psychological thriller *Landmine Goes Click...* (Sarke Studios). He wrote and exec-produced the award winning feature. It also screened in N.Y., L.A., and Austen, before release through Gravitas Ventures in November.

**Celine LaFreniere's BreaKAWay** is a novel and screenplay set in Québec in the late '60s. It's a story of scarce opportunities for bright young French Québécois like Isabelle and her boyfriend Pierre, and of disaffected youths rebelling at the imperialistic attitude with which the English run their country.

**Mark Leiren-Young** is underwater. He's shooting the short *The Hundred Year Old Whale* courtesy of BravoFactual, editing his feature doc *The Last Killer Whale: The Legend and Legacy of Moby Doll*, and polishing his upcoming book on Moby.



Writer/Director **Mina Shum's Ninth Floor** premiered across the country on the festival circuit, from TIFF to VIFF to FNC in Montreal. She's preparing her next feature, *Meditation Park*, to shoot late spring 2016.



**Josh Sager & Jerome Simpson** are story editing the digital shorts for animated comedy *The Bagel and Becky Show*. They're also writing a feature comedy about someone who faces an uphill battle, tentatively titled *working title*.

**Johanna Stein** was nominated for a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Short-Format Animated Program for *Wander Over Yonder*, on which she was a staff writer.

The feature documentary *Pistons, Passions, Pleasures: A Sicilian Dream*, written by **Carolyn Saunders**, premiered at theatres in the U.K. in October. Carolyn also directs the feature horror she

wrote, *The Wasting*, in November. Following two years on CTV's *Motive*, **Thomas Pound** is currently developing two original series with Shaw and Bell Media.

**Matt MacLennan** returned to his fall gig as writer/producer on ABC/CTV's murder cop procedural, *Motive*, for its fourth season.

**Jude Klassen's** debut feature, the "enviromantic" musical comedy, *Love in the Sixth*, is having its world premiere at the Whistler Film Festival. Written, produced, directed by and starring Klassen, it looks at love and activist kids in the "sixth extinction."

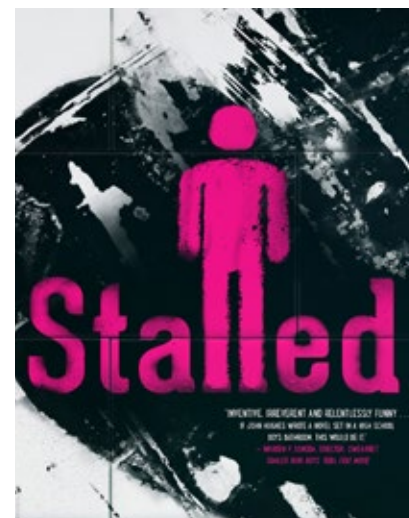
**Garner Haines** is crowdfunding a proof of concept, a short version of his pilot script for a science fiction television series called *The Time Is Right*. If all goes well he'll be shooting the short in November in Vancouver.

**Donald Martin** has optioned the coming-of-age novel *Bear Season*, written by Bernie Hafeli, and is now in development with Davis Entertainment (Fox) to adapt it as a feature film.

**Tom Mason** is writing and consulting on a new series from

Guru Studios and Netflix while writing the 16th *Captain Awesome* book for Simon & Schuster. He's also waiting for the greenlight on one or two or three shows in development because that's the job description...

**Louise Moon** is writing for Nelvana's new animated preschool series, *Ranger Rob*.



Atlantic screenwriter, **C.R. Bruce**, turned his most popular yet unproduced screenplay, *Stalled*, into a novel. A high school reunion comedy set primarily in the men's bathroom, *Stalled* is now available wherever eBooks are sold. ■

## Welcome

**Tara Armstrong** Victoria BC  
**Kacey Arnold** West Hollywood CA  
**Rob Baker** Toronto ON  
**Mike Bell** Winnipeg MB  
**Tom Berger** Toronto ON  
**Katie Boland** Toronto ON  
**Max Burnett** Sherman Oaks CA  
**Adam Cawley** Toronto ON  
**Nazrin Choudhury** Encino CA  
**Adrian Cunningham** Vancouver BC  
**Harper Dill** Venice CA  
**Tim Doiron** Toronto ON  
**Xavier Dolan** Montreal QC  
**Shelley Evans** Cambridge MA  
**Lisa Gabriele** Toronto ON  
**Noelle Girard** Toronto ON  
**Ryan P. Guida** Los Angeles CA  
**Robyn Harding** Vancouver BC  
**Monica Heisey** Toronto ON  
**Brandy Hewitt** Toronto ON  
**Zoe Hopkins** Ohsweken ON  
**Carl Johann** Peterborough ON

**Bethany Kaster** Toronto ON  
**Robert Kotyk** Toronto ON  
**T.W. Linton** Etobicoke ON  
**Jillian Locke** Toronto ON  
**Kayla Lorette** Toronto ON  
**Darcy Michael** Delta BC  
**Brad Mirman** Beverly Hills CA  
**Stuart Reid** Toronto ON  
**Jeff Sager** Toronto ON  
**David Samuels** Brooklyn NY  
**William J. Schneider** Altadena CA  
**Charlie Shahnaian** Los Angeles CA  
**John Scott Shepherd** Westlake Village CA  
**Natalie Renee Shepherd** Los Angeles CA  
**Shari Simpson** Hoboken NJ  
**Ryan W. Smith** Vancouver BC  
**Sindy Boveda Spackman** Burbank CA  
**Sarah Spillane** Los Angeles CA  
**Robert Taylor** Los Angeles CA  
**Dawn Whitwell** Toronto ON  
**Amy Wolfram** Burbank CA  
**Shebli Zarghami** Toronto ON



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## Money for Missing Writers

The Writers Guild of Canada is holding monies for the writers listed below. The WGC has been unable to locate the writers and forward the money to them. If you have any information that would help us reach these writers (or their agents or estates), please contact the staff member indicated below. These writers would thank you.

**IPA** - contact Paul Caston at p.caston@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5248

**Dawn Cumberbatch** — *Top Cops*  
**Elana Devine** — *Student Bodies*  
**Warren Easton** — *Odyssey II*  
**Gerald Fourier** — *Littlest Hobo*  
**John Hollard** — *Littlest Hobo*

**NFB** - contact Paul Caston at p.caston@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5248

**Peter Bierman** — *Twice Upon a Time*  
**Mariette Cooke** — *Happiness Is Loving Your Teacher*  
**Gordon Fisher** — *Wild in the City*  
**Ian Ferguson** — *Canada's Capital* — *Behind the Scenes*  
**Laszlo Gefin** — *Revolution's Orphans*  
**William Maylon** — *Journey of the Blob*  
**Daniel Prouty** — *For Angela*  
**Josef Reeve** — *Canada Vignettes-NFLD*  
**Inger Smith** — *Wood Mountain Poems*  
**Janos Szanyi** — *Revolution's Orphans*  
**Gilles Toupin** — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*  
**Peter Vogler** — *Ernie's Idea*

**CBC-TV** - contact Mary Young at m.young@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5236

**Fred Adams** — *King of Kensington*  
**Peter Churchill** — *20/20: Yorkville Feb 16, 1967*  
**Robert Cooper** — *This Land*  
**Ronald Dunn** — *Wojeck*  
**Donald Ettlinger** — *G.M. Theatre: Billy Budd*  
**Mary Fowler** — *The Man at the Window*  
**Lindsay Galloway** — *Wojeck*  
**Geoffrey Gilbert (estate)** — *Sidestreet*

**Robin Herman** — *King of Kensington*  
**Paul Jodoin** — *Chez Hélène*  
**Arthur Murphy** — *G.M. Theatre: The Death Around Us*  
**Gordon Myers** — *Dr. Zonk and the Zunkins*  
**Irving Gaynor Neiman (estate)** — *The Greatest Man in the World*  
**James Taylor** — *Man Alive*  
**Robert Windsor** — *King of Kensington*  
**Unknown writer** — *The Nature of Things* (Dutch Elm Disease)  
**Unknown writer** — *Hand & Eye* (Glorious Mud)  
**Five unknown writers** — *CAPAC 50th Anniversary Show*

**CBC - RADIO** - contact Mary Young at m.young@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5236

**Andrew Allan (estate)** — *Snow Queen, A Sense of Sin*  
**Ernst Behrendt** — *Quirks & Quarks*  
**Tony Bell** — *Nightfall*  
**Janet Bonellie** — *Nightfall*  
**Martin Bronstein** — *Royal Canadian Air Farce*  
**Neil Copeland** — *Between Ourselves: The Titanic*  
**Norman Corwin** — *Theatre of Freedom*  
**Dorothy Davis** — *Sign Unseen*  
**Frank Deaville** — *Woodhouse & Hawkins*  
**Ira Dilworth (estate)** — *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*  
**Ted Ferguson** — *A Perfectly Happy Life*  
**Harry E. Foster (estate)** — *The German World*  
**Howard Griffen** — *The Duel*  
**Hugh Kemp** — *Stage 47: Two Solitudes*  
**Peter Lee** — *Nightfall*  
**David Leicester** — *Nightfall*  
**Joseph MacEastern** — *Much Ado about Ronnie*  
**Art McGregor** — *Woodhouse and Hawkins*  
**Samuel Selvon (estate)** — *Vanishing Point*  
**Henry Sobotka (estate)** — *Johnny Chase*  
**Frederick Spoerly** — *The Cable Car Incident*

# “Oh Great Scribe...”

## advice for the scriptlorn

By Harrington Gordonson

*Noting that Canadian screenwriters were underserved despite the current proliferation in popular media of advice columns — and never one to let a bandwagon pass — Canadian Screenwriter has commissioned eminent screenwriter Harrington Gordonson as our own sage for seekers: sort of like Dan Savage for the folks who don't get out as much.*

*Send questions to “Oh Great Scribe,” c/o Canadian Screenwriter (editor@wgc.ca)*

*Harrison Gordonson is Canada's Greatest Living Screenwriter. An accomplished ice fisherman by the age of three and shortstop for Montreal Expos by age 14, his seminal audiobook, Give 'er, was adapted in 1994 into the constitution for an unnamed Central American country. He recently accepted 14,000 refugees into his own home, but you don't hear him kicking up a fuss about it. He built a replacement for Canada's aging CF-18 fleet out of old Mirvish programs and pulped copies of Garth Drabinsky's autobiography. He solves problems.*

**Oh Great Scribe,  
Can you explain the CRTC's  
“quality not quantity” argument?**

A: The chairman of the CRTC, JP Blais, has hit upon a simple but elegant solution to the continuing challenges of making quality Canadian TV in a changing world. He's directed the networks and producers to focus on making only quality shows. So, instead of making a lot of shows that fail, (or, you know, six...) from now on, our industry should just put their money into making programs that everyone likes.

Picture yourself going through your ex's vinyl collection. Really visualize it. Got it? Every record is awesome, right? Yes! Because that's a thing that

happens! It's also like when you go to the fruit market and pick a random five apples out of the bin, because you know they'll be the best ones. It also reflects the real world, where cops are all great because they only hire good people. And cleverly, it even mirrors where the industry was going anyway, because, as we all know, since the number of outlets to sell shows to shrank from six to four to three, that quality just bubbled to the top like so much rendered porcine goodness.

Thanks for that quality question. I'm only reading the good questions now and it's made me much happier. Thanks, JP!

**Oh Great Scribe,  
What the heck is going on with  
Telefilm?**

A: Ah yes, Telefilm, the place where the magic of film meets the lyricism of accounting. Years ago, over cocktails and fondue, Greatest Living Canadian Director and I pondered how to fix Telefilm. A good many plans involved elemental change. Specifically, the application of the element of fire. But instead, Telefilm came up with its own solution: it redefined success. The New Strategic Plan, which had many glossy brochures made of hand-dusted artisanal resins, pooh-poohed box office for a combo of festival exposure, clicks

on a website, social media mentions, and the number of times a project was able to move a cursed monkey's paw in Telefilm's Montreal HQ. At the same time, they cut all support for writer programs and declared the script was the most important thing. There was something new with *secret envelopes* too, each of which contained free samples of “Bureau-crut!” — a new fragrance that evokes the delicate sweat of waiting to see if your film gets into TIFF.

This “re-definition” proved very “successful.” So taking a cue from Hollywood (natch), Telefilm is producing a reboot! *“ReMatrixing the Acclomplometer: The Synergistic Sapporodom of Supplicating Succotash: A Telefilm Joint for 2016”* (it's even longer in French) comes into effect January 1, 2016. There's a whole bunch of market rationalizations and things but I'll cut to the chase: Under the new plan, “success” is defined as “that thing that used to be failure.” Sheer genius.

I'm sure all those fine non-union scripts that Telefilm now favours will continue to be made into incredibly successful Canadian films. Sorry, “Artisanal Digital Video Narrative Structure Matrixes.” See you at the press conference!

**Can we talk about tax credits?**

A: Absolutely. But first, pass me that Hemlock Smoothie. ■

## November

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**2** — *Deadline* — **OMDC Film Fund** [omdc.ca](http://omdc.ca)

**5-15** — **Reel Asian Film Festival** [reelasian.com](http://reelasian.com)

**12-22** — **Montreal International Film Festival** [ridm.qc.ca/en](http://ridm.qc.ca/en)

**17** — **Writers Talking TV** [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

**17-22** — **Canadian International TV Festival** [citf15.tv](http://citf15.tv)

## December

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**1** — *Deadline* — **WGC Screenwriting Awards nominations** [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

## February

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**2** — *Deadline* — **Bell Fund, Production** [bellfund.ca](http://bellfund.ca)

**2** — *Deadline* — **Bell Fund, Development** [bellfund.ca](http://bellfund.ca)

**3-5** — **Prime Time in Ottawa** [primetimeinottawa.ca](http://primetimeinottawa.ca)

**9** — **Writers Talking TV** [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

## March

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**13** — **Canadian Screen Awards Broadcast Gala, CBC** [academy.ca](http://academy.ca)

**22** — **Writers Talking TV** [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)



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