

The Script Savant Newsletter

#001

HOW TO PITCH YOUR SCREENPLAY

When pitching your story, these are many of the questions you should prepare for...

- introduce yourself – share interesting information about yourself
- how did you come up with your story
- know something about the interviewer that connects with you (if possible)
- story title and why it's relevant
- what genre(s) does your story fit into
- does your story have a High-Concept
- what's the budget – what is your story similar to
- how do you see your story presented - as a feature or series
- why is your story important
- what's your story's logline
- what's your story's theme
- what taglines go with your story
- prepare a short 2 to 5 minute synopsis
- who do you envision as the character leads
- what have you done so far to advance your story
- what other stories have you created

Luck Favors the Prepared

when given an opportunity, don't waste it – when asked for other ideas and you don't have any, then like Keyser Söze your connection will disappear into the sunset - never to return - an opportunity wasted

For this pitching exercise, I will use one of my scripts, 'The Shadows,' with its link:

<https://thescriptsavant.com/pdf/theshadows.pdf>

Replace Responses With Your Own Words Related To Your Own Script

Below is a possible scenario between '**You**' and an '**Interviewer**' that answers the above questions.

Interviewer: *Introduce yourself?*

subtext: *what have you done? why are you interesting?*

You: *My name is Dallas Jones, and I'm originally a software developer and an athlete. I ran track in the Marine Corps. I recently wrote the remake of Stephen King's CUJO for the original distributor of Cujo, [Sunn Classic Pictures](#). And I have a website that is dedicated to screenwriting – <https://thescriptsavant.com>.*

Why: *give the interviewer a hook into who you are, which hopefully will make a personal connection, and lead to a positive exchange of dialogue.*

For this exercise let's have fun and take a well-established producer as the Interviewer: JJ Abrams

I choose him because he has a house in Santa Monica down the hill from where I live. I typed in JJ Abrams in google and found he was the Executive Producer on one of my favorite series, 'Person of Interest' and was soon coming out with a Sci-Fi series called Contraband. Both are innovative Sci-Fi series. Sci-Fi being something I believe he's interested in.

You: *I see you enjoy Sci-Fi. One of my favorite shows was the 'Person of Interest' series starring Jim Caviezel. The show sounds like it explored the first steps of the Singularity (the merging of humans with superhuman intelligence, changing the nature of man – I believe it will be the next step in evolution on this planet).*

Why: *find out what the interviewer might be interested in - connect with the interviewer on a personal level – they'll show a greater interest in you and your story – if you know who will be interviewing you, look them up on the internet.*

Interviewer: *How did you come up with the story?*

You: *Late at night I often listen to 'Coast to Coast'. The ultimate in conspiracies: Alien Invasions, The Hollow Earth, UFO's, Vampires and Monsters, and behind each, an expert who professes the dark secrets of each. I wanted to create a radio show, 'The Abyss' that searches out conspiracies and attracts believers. They uncover a real truth, the destruction of life on this planet by a new life form that moves through time. The problem is the leaders of the world don't believe them.*

Why: *show that you have a depth of knowledge or at least have thought a lot about what's related to your story.*

Interviewer: *Does your story have a title?*

You: *'The Shadows' - involves multi-dimensional creatures moving through the shadows of time.*

Why: *connect the title to the story – so the interviewer makes a connection – always give enough information to help the interviewer connect.*

Interviewer: *how do you envision your story being presented?*

You: *I've written what could be the pilot for a multiple film series or with minor modification a standalone feature.*

Why: *some investors/producers are looking for a film series while other's are looking only for feature films. The more flexible you've structured your story the greater chance you will match up with possible investors.*

Interviewer: *what genre(s) do your story fit into?*

You: *It's firmly a Sci-Fi/Horror story with an emphasis on Suspense and Drama because of character interaction.*

Why: *different producers specialize in different genres or combination of genres.*

Interviewer: *does your story have a High-Concept?*

You: *what lies in shadows have always scared people – shadows represent conjured fears brought up by one's imagination when facing the unknown. – 'The Shadows' threatens ALL life on Earth – because of this it will appeal to hardcore Sci-Fi/Horror fans while personal conflicts between characters grappling with beliefs of who we are as a unique person will appeal to those that love Suspense and Drama.*

High-Concept: *is a unique original idea with mass appeal.*

Why: *the larger the potential audience, the more people will be inclined to invest in your story. Also, people are looking for a breakout story that captures an audience's imagination.*

Interviewer: *what would you say your story's similar to? What's the budget for your story?*

You: *I feel it's a lot like 'Oblivion'. I don't know about the budget.*

Why: *Holy bat droppings! Oblivion had a budget of \$120,000,000. Few Producers make movies with this budget. One of the reasons they ask what story it might be similar to is they know you wouldn't probably know how to cost out a film. So, you should take into account the possible budget range the Producer has done in the past. Most Sci-Fi has special effects which raise the budget and expansive sets. Notice English drama has no special effects. And most Horror movies have minimum special effects and often takes place in a single location.*

Interviewer: *why is this story relevant to you?*

You: *The Universe is complicated. I believe life exists that's utterly alien to our biological existence. And I've always been interested in the interaction between the PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE. My story gives a fresh look at what **non-biological life** might be like in the universe and what dangers await its discovery if this life could move through time.*

Why: *if your story resonates with you emotionally, it has a good chance it will with your interviewer – your job is to make it resonate with the interviewer through your passion for your story.*

Interviewer: *Non-biological life – sounds intriguing – can you expand on this?*

You: *I encapsulate this idea which our astrophysicist protagonist gives in a talk on his brother's radio show 'The Abyss.' He states that all of reality... our reality... is really an 8-dimensional crystal projected as a quasi-crystal on our world forming the substrate of all that exists. We know the PAST affects the PRESENT and the FUTURE – but the Non-biological life in my story has the ability through a theory called QUANTUM GRAVITY to have our PRESENT or FUTURE change our PAST.*

Why: *become an expert on every aspect of your story – remember luck favors the prepared. Show your knowledge of the story? The richer more detailed picture you can paint the better the chances your enthusiasm will rub off.*

Interviewer: *give me your story's logline – or in one or two sentences what's the essence of your story*

You: *Humanities' fate depends on one's willingness to risk all to unravel the deadly secrets of an alien malevolence which hunts from the shadows of time.*

Why: *shows if you can encapsulate the essence of your story into one or two sentences that captures one's imagination – a logline is ~20-30 words that encapsulates the heart of the story.*

Interviewer: *I'm intrigued, tell me more – you have a synopsis?*

You: *Our story begins when a shower of deadly crystal meteors strikes remote areas across the world. Soon, mysterious deaths from stepping into projected shadows raise tensions between superpowers mistaking the incidents as hostile acts with a new weapon created by global enemies.*

At California's Griffith Park Observatory, mixed race Caucasian/Native American, Phoenix Cota (26), discovers a bizarre crystal fragment dangling from a sundial and a haunting note in a child's handwriting - 'We Are Alive!' At this time, he meets Emma (10), a bright and endearing girl on the autism spectrum who sees the future through visions she doesn't understand.

Phoenix agrees to appear on his half-brother Tuc's (28), radio show, 'The Abyss', a program dedicated to the supernatural. Tuc has the gift of prophecy but cursed in not believing in his own predictions.

On the show, Phoenix expounds on an outlandish theory about the quantum emergence of non-biological life, which endangers all life on Earth. His talk jeopardizes his degree program and his work at the observatory.

Mentoring as a Big Brother, he brings a young student to a children's book reading being given by Olympic cyclist Piper Spencer (24), unknowingly, Emma's older sister.

Sparks fly. But under pressure from his Doctoral board to drop his outlandish theory or face being cut from the program, he ends their affair without explanation. He resumes his studies in astrophysics at the University of Hawaii.

A year later, he returns to California and takes a troop of young boy scouts on a camping excursion into the Santa Monica mountains, where he runs into Emma and an angry Piper.

Piper manages a troop of girl scouts at a nearby campsite. The two camping troops quickly clash.

While rescuing Emma and Piper in the mountains, Phoenix discovers an ancient Indian ancestral cave with cryptic pictographs of crystal travelers.

That evening around the campfire, a second wave of meteorites strike, giving Phoenix firsthand support of his theory. The world again misinterprets them as hostile acts from global superpowers.

The world teeters on the edge of nuclear annihilation as world leaders escalate threats and accusations of weaponizing space.

Phoenix logs into ATLAS (Asteroid Terrestrial Impact Last Alert System) out of Hawaii to analyze possible global meteor strikes.

His non-biological life's theory strikes home when Emma and Piper are attacked and vanish in the shadows.

The meaning of the child's note, 'We Are Alive!' along with the mysterious ancient Indian pictographs strike home. Phoenix takes a leap of faith that Piper and Emma are still alive, and he risks everything to enter the crystal world. Inside, he reunites with the two women as they struggle to avoid the terrible creatures that roam the passages of time.

Piper loses her life helping Phoenix and Emma escape a time shifting guardian that can't be destroyed. They find themselves in Earth's desolate near future, a world destroyed in a nuclear conflagration.

Videos taken by Emma inside the crystal brings forth the knowledge to escape their fate by re-entering the crystal world and rescuing Piper before she was killed.

The trio returns to the day the meteorites first struck Earth to unite the world against 'The Shadows.'

Why: *your Synopsis for a pitch should be 2 to 5 minutes unfolding the story from beginning to end – it shows you can tell a story that resonates with people and that makes sense – point out interesting twists in the story - this would usually translate to about 1 to 2 pages of writing.*

Interviewer: *What's the Theme of your story?*

You: *commitment – how a person must sometimes step into the fearful unknown to reach their dreams – the words of Robert Browning resonates – "a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what are dreams for?" Any dream worthwhile often requires a one-hundred percent commitment. The different characters represent various aspects of commitment.*

Why: Theme – *what is the message you hope the story conveys – the thread that runs through your story – the hidden meaning behind the dialogue and action - if conveyed well, the theme should be figured out by the audience and not shoved down their throat by the writer.*

Interviewer: *Have you thought of any tagline?*

You: *several comes to mind - Stay out of the shadows! - A Quiet Place meets The Shadows!*

Why: Taglines – *they are usually 3-10+ words – catchy phrases that captures the imagination*
Examples: 'I'll be back' - Terminator 'Just Do It' – Nike 'In space no one can hear you scream' – Alien 'Who you going to call' – Ghostbusters 'You'll Never Go In The Water Again' – Jaws 'Be Afraid. Be very afraid' – The Fly 'Size Does Matter' – Godzilla 'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...' – Star Wars)

Interviewer: *Who do you envision as the leads in the story?*

You: *I see a young Tom Cruise would be perfect as the protagonist. His portrayal of Jack Harper in 'Oblivion' captures the concept of total commitment when he sacrifices himself after he gives his great speech at the end, "And how can man die better than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his Gods?" The very essence of commitment.*

Why: *the producer will visualize the person in the part and may know someone that comes to mind.*

Interviewer: *In what stage is your story?*

You: *I've created a pilot script, logline, taglines, theme and put together the first half dozen story lines of a possible series.*

Interviewer: *What other stories have you done?*

You: *I've got over a dozen other story scripts that range from horror to comedy, from Bollywood to English drama and everything in-between.*

Why: *Often the interviewer is looking for something other than what you are putting forward. Here's where 'luck favors the prepared' really means something. When given the opportunity don't waste it. If you say you don't have anything else, then like Keyser Söze the interview will end, and your connection will disappear into the sunset - never to return – you will have wasted an opportunity.*

Above, I covered everything from a 30 second elevator pitch (title & logline) to a 15-30 minute grilling.

A final comment – practice answering these questions and others that you think an interviewer might come up with. Have passion for your project – for passion helps convince people your project is worth producing.

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