

January 2011

# Monkey Business

Animated musings from  
Emmy-winning screenwriter...

...Jeffrey Scott

Lessons from the trenches of HOLLYWOOD

## I BELIEVE IN EXECUTION!

No, not the capital kind. The writing kind. As in the good execution of character, theme and plot which results in a well-written screenplay.

When I tell people I write animation scripts the most common question I'm asked is "Where do you get all your ideas?" This is a fascinating question. It reveals that most people think that the *idea* for a story is its most important element. But it's not the idea, it's the *execution* of the idea that is important.

We've all heard that old cliché, "Good ideas are a dime a dozen". The reason ideas are so cheap is that good ones are easy to come up with but turning them into good products is very, very difficult.

If the idea was the most important element of a hit feature then we should be able to analyze this and find out what makes a good idea. But this process breaks down very quickly when you examine hit animated features. Take Pixar's *UP* for example. Who would think a story about an irascible old widower floating off in his house to South America with a pudgy young scout is a terrific idea and would make a successful feature? Would you have bought that idea? I wouldn't have. And

I don't think we would have been wrong not to because I think the only studio in the world who could turn that idea into a blockbuster is Pixar. Why? Execution! The writers and directors at Pixar know how to develop raw ideas into rich characters, emotional themes and interesting plots.

Regrettably, pitches are a dime a dozen, too. After all, what is a pitch? It's when a writer tries to sell you his "great idea" for a movie. But beware! It's much easier to write a good pitch than to write a good screenplay. And a pitch only has to "sound" good. But there is one vital question to be asked after you've heard that great pitch: Can the writer who pitched it *execute* it?

So the next time you're taking pitches for animated features, don't make the mistake of buying the best pitch. Always buy the best *writer*. You can develop any idea into a good story with the good writer. But even the best idea can't be developed into a good story with a bad writer.

Moral of the story: Don't waste your time looking for a great idea. Look for a writer who can turn *any* idea into a great screenplay.

## The Latest Monkey Business...

Well, it's 2011 and Jeffrey's ghostwriter, Hunter N. Pecker (pictured at right on the 19th hole at Pebble Beach), has made some important New Year's resolutions.

First, he plans to do a lot more golfing. He's been working on several big projects lately and needs a break from the keyboard. Besides, his pal, Tiger, asked for some advice to get his game back in shape (no, not *that* Tiger, the one on the cereal box).

Second, he's going to shave his legs. Everyone knows the babes around the pool at the Beverly Hills Hotel dig guys with smooth thighs.

And finally, he's going to fire Jeffrey and come out of the closet. Hollywood is big on diversity, and Hunter is sure that Pixar and Dream-Works are ready to hire writers who type with their toes.

Happy New Year! *Ook, ook!*

