

## COVER STORY: Page Views

Actors find that writing opens creative channels — and Hollywood is tuning in.

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If you're a performer — even an established and regularly working actor — who has thought about making the transition into screenplay writing, don't expect to garner immediate respect, let alone enthusiasm, within the industry. In a sense, however, actors are writers to begin with. Whenever they devise backstories or improvise on the life of a character during rehearsals, they are in essence collaborating with a playwright or screenwriter to flesh out a characterization.

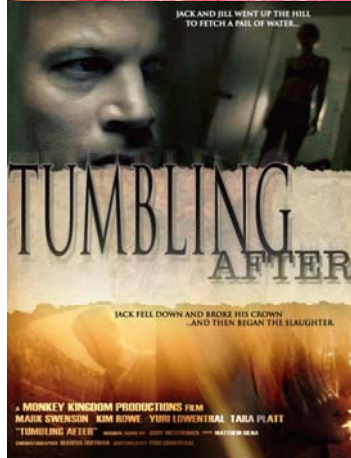
Some actors, take the next step and begin writing their own scripts, sometimes (but not always) because they want original material they can produce and/or play in. Back Stage recently spoke with such actors to find out how they moved into the world of scriptwriting and what challenges they faced.

## More Than Monkey Business

Tara Platt has been in the business of acting for most of her life; she started performing in plays at about age 9. Now she and her husband, Yuri Lowenthal, live in L.A., where they make a comfortable living at their chosen craft. But a few years ago, Platt suggested to Lowenthal that they try writing a screenplay together.

Lowenthal, who had been working on a film script of his own, was somewhat skeptical but agreed to the collaboration. A week later the team had a rough draft for a feature. While refining that script, they developed two other screenplays as a team and began work on solo efforts. In 2004 they formed a production company, Monkey Kingdom Productions.

To some extent, Platt admits, the pair invented the rules as they went along. The first Monkey Kingdom product, Lowenthal's thriller *Tumbling After* (now in postproduction), went into gear before the team could solicit much outside feedback on the script, because a suitably spooky location had become temporarily available and they had to move fast. For an upcoming horror script, which they plan to co-produce with another company, they will be more cautious. "We're making sure that script is solid and set before we try to go into production," Platt says.



One of the couple's intentions was to create acting work for themselves. They played only supporting roles in *Tumbling After*, however, because they knew they would be assuming various duties behind the camera and would not have time for leading parts. But they primarily identify themselves as actors as opposed to writers. Auditions and bookings dictate when they are available to sit at the computer to work on scenes. "We'll talk about it at the beginning of the week," Platt says, "and review our schedules and say, 'Looks like you've got a chunk there and I've got a chunk here. Do we want to try to get together during that time and work on something?'"

Platt's and Lowenthal's agents for on-camera work have been supportive of the couple's literary endeavors, and it seems there has been little impact on these reps, as the novice screenwriters have not reached the point of pitching scripts to outsiders. Platt says she and Lowenthal have deliberately avoided marketing their scripts to other filmmakers because they'd like to eventually produce the projects themselves. They know, however, that some of their plot lines require budgets beyond what Monkey Kingdom can currently afford. Meanwhile, their voiceover reps have become excited about the possibility that the pair will pitch an idea they've concocted for an animated TV series.

Platt says a positive side effect of screenwriting has been an enhanced ability to analyze scripts when she's wearing her actor hat. She finds she has developed a better sense of the big picture of a scenario. "Now when I pick up a script, I can dissect it a little better, a little faster, a little easier," she says. "And I can find my way into the character a little more smoothly."