

Arts

computer programme collaborates with screenwriters

by Ira Glick

"Audiences don't know somebody sits down and writes a picture. They think the actors make it up as they go along."

Billy Wilder, *Sunset Blvd.*, 1949

Forty one years later, people know there's a typewriter and an ulcer behind every *bon mot*. They know somebody writes the film. But try and name your top-five screenwriters and it becomes obvious: the screenwriter has never been a star. He or she was at the low end of the studio totem pole and was screwed, and is screwed to this day, by power-brokers like Mike Eisner.

The earliest "photoplay scenarios," as they were known back in 1897, were moving photos of short, simple events like boxing and horse racing. These early cinematic experiments ran for about as long as today's commercial breaks. At first, it was the producers and directors who came up with the ideas. But it wasn't long before they found it a "nuisance" to have to "wait for inspiration to strike." And so, the world's first full-time screenwriter was hired, Ray McCardell, an ex-newspaperman from the *Biograph* office in New York.

Flashforward 100 years. It's 1997 and the idea of using a pen and paper sounds as modern as the quill and inkwell. We script on floppies. We test-market every plot point. The audience "push votes" on how the film climaxes. Meanwhile, the Japanese have evicted the rest of the world to the moon for falling behind with the rent. Yet, the Screenwriters' Col-



ony on the moon still "galactic-faxes" new screenplays to Sony-Studios, Culver City... because the Japanese could never figure out how to create fascinating characters.

Yes, times they are a changin', but in 1997 I'll bet on my self-lacing Nikes that we, as a hardcore leisure society, will still be watching movies and looking for our heroes in them.

Hollywood has always had its eye on the mercury because, "out there," knowing the cultural climate really does separate the bedwetters from the powerbrokers. Hollywood initiates attitudinal trends and it rides the waves of fascination already "out there." It succeeds because the Hollywood screenwriters are

even ahead of Madison Avenue when it comes to knowing the secret combination to the world's desires.

The common denominator, the big key: it hasn't changed since Aristotle's day. Simply, we go to movies to see characters; characters we want to cuddle up with and take home to meet mom, even if they are demented terrorists. Characters create empathy, make us care about the plot and actually determine its direction.

Characters should push the story forward, they are the narrative drive because they want or need something. They have goals. The writer's job is to discover what these are.

This is where Collaborator fits in. Collaborator is a new, interac-

tive computer programme from Santa Monica, California. It is made for screenwriters, story analysts or anyone else who needs to get into the highly specific world of story values.

Collaborator is not a just-add-water story formula. It asks you questions and you do all the rest. It is a cliché-crusher; it's unlikely you'll end up aping mega-hits because the programme makes you dig deeper, to examine your motives and intentions. You end up with a clear overview and a fresh perspective on the viability of your specific tale.

The Collaborator programme is based on the first guidebook on drama ever written, Aristotle's *Poetics*. And it also manages to incorporate the most up-to-date information on screenplay writing. The programme's companion guidebook gives examples from contemporary films to illustrate and explain why each question is being asked.

Collaborator is menu-driven, meaning that you are presented

with a group of choices from which you can make a selection. The selection ranges from character to plot to setting and audience. There are a total of 70 questions. When these have been fully answered, the user ends up with a "dialogue" (a progress log) and an outline, which one can then print out or clarify and append.

Collaborator is a development tool for the screenwriter who wants to design vivid, dimensionalized stories peopled with flesh-and-blood character.

Collaborator covers it all. You may find your screenwriting books, manual and guides collecting dust because you're glued to the word processor, involved in the specifics of your story.

Collaborator is the partner you don't have to split the profits with. All it demands of you is your time, willingness and creativity.

To find out more about Collaborator, call Michael at (213) 398-3771.

mud, blood, potatoes

by Paul Gazzola

On the poster advertising last Saturday's hardcore triple bill at the Soup Club, located ironically enough across the street from the Big Bop (the place where you wait half the night in line before they turn you away at the door because the place is already too full), are the words, "Your complete entertainment alternative."

Well, that's definitely one way to describe Mud, the first band that played Saturday. Chaos in human form with musical instruments and a high blood alcohol content would be another. Mud must be seen to be believed, and while they may not be overly musical, they're the most entertaining band I've seen in a while.

For starters, the band hung a homemade shark, painted in bright yellow and red, above the stage. At the end of their set, the two singers announce the shark is, in fact, a pinata and all the bandmembers, along with some audience participation, happily thrash it. That's not the end of the shark though. Various parts of its destroyed body, continued to make appearances throughout the rest of the night. In between this, the band blew a fuse, the one guitar player read from a prepared speech ("and remember: the right belongs to the active

aggressor") and basically did whatever the hell they wanted to. And I can't tell you what songs they played, because the singers never introduced them. The one I thought I recognized, the guitar player said they didn't do.

The Moshed Potatoes had the misfortune to be the band playing after Mud. Not really a bad band, the vocalist's gimmick of singing in a distorted demon voice wore thin after their first few songs. However, they did do a near version of "Frere Jacques" that Brian Mulroney and Robert Bourassa might consider using as proof in their "distinct society" debate. I don't think it was sung in French though. Another song, "Projectile Vomit," could easily become the theme song for Century Clubs all around the country.

The final band of the bill, One Blood, combined the best aspects of the two previous bands, without their shortcomings. Unlike Mud, One Blood's set was cohesive and, unlike the Moshed Potatoes, you could actually hear what the singers were screaming. Unfortunately, One Blood's set, which the Mud as well as the Moshed Potatoes' singers joined in on for a song or two (they tended to run together), was cut short just after one o'clock. The management, it seemed, was still a bit antsy after being busted the night before by Metro police.



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