

7TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SCREENPLAY COMPETITION

facing these soldiers allow room for poignant and meaningful moments.”

Dart and Swanson have been co-writers almost as long as they've been friends. The two wrote their first script while they were still in college. “It really took us getting together to get the projects moving,” Swanson says. “I’m really big on mood, dialogue and the poetry of a situation. Left to my own devices, I’d probably end up writing a really sprawling script, very loose and

structurally vague. But John is Mr. Structure. He provided the themes you have to hit in a project.”

Dart agrees. “We both have certain strengths as writers,” he says. “Jeff’s very good with dialogue and can turn out a lot of product. I’m strong in story and pacing: I was the disciplinarian, keeping us focused and on track.”

The winning script, however, didn’t happen without a fight. Swanson and Dart often disagreed on characters, dialogue and even entire scenes. Each would emphatically state his opinion, arguing and citing examples until a compromise would be reached.

“If you’re in love with a scene,” Dart says, “the other person can see things more objectively. Maybe it doesn’t fit, or it slows things down or takes the story on a different track. It helps to have another person say something’s great in certain aspects, but that it just doesn’t serve the story.”

“The Snowmen” took about three years to complete, and Swanson and Dart devoted much of that time to compiling in-depth research notes. Both say that taking the time to research the background of the characters and setting is key to a screenplay’s success.

After the research phase was complete, Swanson and Dart worked on nailing down a detailed, 40-page script outline. Swanson says that Robert McKee’s book *Story* (Regan) helped the most in plotting and planning.

“The first draft was like working without a net,” Swanson says. “The main thing we got out of the McKee book was the beat sheet, the step outline. We plotted out every beat that happened in the movie. Then it really started coming together.”

And while Dart focused on structure, Swanson made sure emotion and realistic dialogue didn’t get lost in the editing process. “A script without art and magic is like a skeleton without a body,” Swanson says. “A script has to play on a screen and say something to people. You can put together the formula, but you have to have something in it that speaks to people.”

The two friends attend pitch fests from time to time and are trying to complete two more solid scripts by the end of 2004. With this contest win under their belts, they’ll also start looking for an agent.

Dart—who, like Swanson, is 40—encourages other aspiring screenwriters not to give up. “Jeff and I aren’t fresh out of college any longer, so hopefully we’re inspiration for those who don’t think they have any chance because they’re getting older,” he says. “Even if we hadn’t won this competition, we still enjoy the process and we’d still stick with it. The more you write, the better you’re going to get.” **WD**

THE WINNING LINES

Grand Prize

“The Snowmen” by John Dart and Jeff Swanson

A battle-weary commander is assigned to an ice-locked WWII weather station in remote Greenland—but he and the scientists suddenly find themselves in over their heads when forced to take POWs from a crippled German submarine. (To read an excerpt, go to www.writersdigest.com/contests/internat_screenplay_winners03.asp.)

First Place

“The Black Box” by Paula Kim Sullivan

A woman and her son become immersed in the hidden world of psychic spies.

Second Place

“Hollow Crown” by Kaenan Oliver and Dominic Oliver

A dynamic tale of lust, ambition and the betrayal of Richard III. The king is portrayed as a gallant soldier unsuited for the deceit of politics, at the mercy of a wily betrayer desperate for power, and at the heart of a triangle that would change the course of a nation.

Third Place

“Streaming” by Michael Bucklin

An FBI agent’s hunt for eight missing girls leads him to a powerful Internet executive. But the only person who can link the corporate chieftain to the abductions is a teenage girl who runs a live porn site and has secrets of her own.

Fourth Place

“Van Diemen Downs” by Eoin J. O’Connor

Six everyday people struggle to survive against the elements and one another while stranded on a cattle station in the outback of Australia’s Northern Territory during the treacherous wet season.

Fifth Place

“Laddie World” by Courtenay Smith

When Clara Brooks, a talented but romantically jaded women’s magazine editor, lands her first high-level job at the soft-core magazine *STIFF!*, the frat-house atmosphere only confirms her worst fears about men. But when she