

# The Budget List

The best low budget, unproduced screenplays of 2020

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2020 has certainly been a challenging year for everyone but hopefully things will start to get back to normal in 2021. We're proud to present this year's The Budget List, the best unproduced screenplays from 2020. For the purpose of this list, we're defining "low budget" as less than 1 million US dollars.

SYS's commitment to helping writers succeed continues with the 4th edition of The Budget List. This year we're expanding the list to include the Quarter-Finalists and up from SYS's Six-Figure Screenplay Contest, also scripts that could be produced for less than \$1M USD.

Running the contest this year, I interfaced with even more producers who were looking for low budget material, so we're hoping we can find more homes for more scripts this year. Many of the scripts on this list (and years past) have been optioned and some are close to production.

Both features and TV pilots were eligible. If you're a producer / agent / manager / director / development executive and would like to learn more about any of these projects, please email us at [info@sellingyourscreenplay.com](mailto:info@sellingyourscreenplay.com).

Congratulations to all the scripts that are being recognized on this year's list, and a big congratulations to all the Quarter-Finalists in SYS's Six-Figure Screenplay Contest.

If you would like to learn more about any of these writers or screenplays please contact us at [info@sellingyourscreenplay.com](mailto:info@sellingyourscreenplay.com).

So without further ado, here is the 4th annual The Budget List...

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## **Questionable** –Comedy

by Julia Koyfman

After losing all of its funding, a scrappy high school Drama Department bands together to save their theater program by producing an illegal, musical version, of the play “Doubt”.

## **The Race That Stops A Nation** –Comedy

by Nick Pollack

A rag-tag group of gambling addicts is about to even the odds and teach an unscrupulous betting company a lesson by pulling off a heist during the three minutes every eye in Australia is distracted - the running of the Melbourne Cup. A crime caper in the vein of THE STING & OCEAN'S ELEVEN.

## **Snow Creek Drive** –Horror

by Dan Topiol

A young couple plan a romantic weekend trip to a remote cabin in the desert in an attempt to repair a strained relationship, only to be terrorized by a group of sinister interlopers.

## **Mai's Mother** –Drama

by Kate Niemuller

An orphan evacuated from Vietnam during Operation Babylift is pulled into a custody battle between her adoptive family and the biological mother she doesn't remember.

## **Enemy** –Western

by Clint Williams

After one of there own murders a Comanche boy, a skirmish leaves a small group of Spanish cavalrymen stranded without horses deep in hostile territory, facing the dangers posed by vengeful warriors, nature and each other.

## **Light Warriors** –Sci-fi

by Scot Dietrich

In a Dystopian future, or orphan must save the world from a totalitarian Internet by battling an evil tech giant who murdered his parents.

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WINNER

## Friend Request –Thriller

by Richard Pierce

After a bitter high school journalist creates a fake social media profile using racy photographs of a girl found online to bait and expose cheating guys in her class, she struggles to keep her life from being picked apart by a mysterious new transfer student who looks suspiciously like the girl from the profile.

**About Richard:** *As a kid I filled notebook after notebook with silly comic strips, spending way more time on the dialogue bubbles than the drawings themselves. Later I realized that screenwriting would be a lot easier than that (plus I suck at drawing). After graduating film school, I sought screenwriting work on various low-budget indie films and managed to have a couple scripts produced, including one that was released on DVD through Lions Gate. My script “Friend Request” was written after watching way too many Lifetime thrillers with my wife and wanting to try my hand at writing a fun, creepy thriller myself.*



## Back to the Go-Go –Drama

by Travis Houze

After returning from jail, a man struggles to bring his family and gentrifying community together through the power of Go-Go music.

**About Travis:** *I got my first taste of the genre Go-Go music at the age of 10 from a close friend and they taught me the ins and outs of the music and how its become a staple in Washington DC culture. The more I learned about the genre, the more I realized how fun the music can be and how it brings people together in ways that no other genre can do. While it's often seen only within the Washington DC Metro Area, I wanted to tell a story that feels universal yet unique to the culture that influenced this story.*



FINALIST

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SEMI-FINALISTS

## Confessions –Thriller

by Stephen Hoover

When a priest is held hostage inside a confessional, he must convince a vengeful father that he is innocent of past crimes or be burned alive.

**About Stephen:** Stephen Hoover is a recovering attorney and currently an M.F.A. candidate at the University of Georgia, Grady College (home of the Peabody Awards). Stephen's first feature film credit TINKER' was a crowdsourced indie sci-fi family film that's available on Amazon. Multiple Emmy-winning 30 Rock director Don Scardino is attached to direct Stephen's screenplay HORROR COMIC. Stephen has several other scripts optioned and currently in development. CONFESSIONS was inspired by a friend who was a victim of clergy abuse. The combination of robbing a victim of their innocence and faith made it a topic to explore in the context of a contained thriller.



## Enterting Karman County –Thriller

by Douglas Raine

A DEA agent out to avenge her partners' deaths in a drug bust gone bad becomes stranded in an unearthly place that appears only to those who must confront their karma to escape.

**About Douglas:** I wrote the script after seeing a 'county sign,' where letters no longer reflected headlights. Then, I drove past a deserted town... and my mind raced with possibilities.

## What We Leave Behind –Drama

by David Duty

After returning home from duty in Iraq, a troubled veteran is visited by the ghost of an Army staff sergeant and is tasked with looking after the dead man's widow and young child.

**About David:** Before pursuing his screenwriting career, David proudly served fifteen years in the United States Air Force as a Security Forces Military Working Dog Handler. When he was medically retired in 2011, he returned to his passion by choosing to attend Full Sail University where he would go on to earn his BFA in Creative Writing for Entertainment in 2016. It wasn't long after that David worked tirelessly



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on his first feature length script; a military family drama titled, *What We Leave Behind*. He wrote this script to show the effects of combat deployments not only on our service members but their families as well. The harrowing effects of grief and the ability to rebuild one's life through love and understanding is also prevalent through out the story while using the holidays as a nice backdrop to bring it all together.

## **Where Daylight Dies** –Thriller

by David Quiroz

Ten years after being rescued by her boyfriend from a serial killer's attack, a young woman - now married to the man who rescued her - must reconcile her failing marriage during an anniversary retreat as a copycat killer targets them.



**About David:** David Quiroz Jr. is a writer and filmmaker whose screenplays and TV pilots have placed on *The Blood List*, the Austin Film Festival, and the Tracking Board Launch Pad Top 50 competition. David had the idea for *Where Daylight Dies* while imagining the lives of a couple who survived a horror movie, and wondered how those events would affect their relationship in the following years - especially if that relationship was built off their shared trauma. When he realized the conflict would be mostly between the two leads as their marriage unravelled, the story unfolded as a contained thriller using a minimal cast that could be filmed for a very low budget. David is a college faculty member in Phoenix, Arizona, where he lives with his wife, children, and rescued pit bull.

## **Edgewater** –Thriller

by Matthew Sorvillo

A devoted husband experiences a fracture in reality, repeatedly transitioning between two existences, and is forced to discover which life is real, which is the hallucination, and whether he can save the woman he loves in either.

**About Matthew:** Matthew Sorvillo is a self-taught screenwriter from Queens, New York. He lives and works in Las Vegas, Nevada. He penned his festival winning psychological thriller, *EDGEWATER*, in an attempt to prove that thrills, surprises, and mind-bending twists can be achieved on an indie film budget. His first produced feature, the Horror/Thriller, *SOUVENIRS*, is currently available for streaming on both Redbox.com and Amazon Prime. His mother is very proud.



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## **Rage Against the Night** –Crime Thriller

by Akiva Cohen

MANUEL a Latino literature professor seeking tenure to remain in the USA agrees to do a poetry workshop in a prison. But when ANTWAN, an African American inmate on death row secretly communicates to him through his poetry that he's innocent, the professor sacrifices everything to stop the inmate's fast-approaching execution.



**About Akiva:** *I have a Ph.D. from Tel Aviv University, Israel. I love poetry, screenwriting, and film. My vision is to bring the transcendent into the mundane through great stories that reflect the human condition, and to entertain, move, and inspire people! I wrote this film to highlight the beauty of poetry in the darkness of prison, to let the world know about the Jon Burge torture scandal, and to motivate people to engage in social transformation.*

**QUARTER FINALISTS**

## **The Last Truth of Solomon Hutson** –Drama

Don Mousted

A homeless, traumatized Black veteran who has “ping-ponged” for 23 years between city streets and mental hospitals, discovers help to overcome his real and imagined fears and fights his way back home to his rural sea-island roots.

## **Gossip in the Sanctuary** –Drama

by Trent Copeland

As the daughter of an overbearing southern Baptist preacher, a musically gifted black girl struggles to find her identity beneath the weight of her family's dark secrets of shame and guilt.

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## **Light Years From Home** *-Sci-fi*

by B. Gautham

Three teens and a younger sibling are abducted by a benevolent alien race who use the kids' skills in a swashbuckling space adventure to defend the alien planet in a battle against hostile forces.

## **Backwaters** *-Action/Adventure*

by Jeffrey Craine

A local fisherman witnesses three men dumping a body off the Carolina coast. After a shootout chase, he finds out they are police officers and he's now being framed for the murder. He must clear his name before they catch him. It's The Fugitive set in a diverse country town.

## **9/10** *-Drama*

by Richard Willett

Four interwoven multicultural stories that take place in the World Trade Center on the night before September 11, 2001.

## **Know Your Body** *-Comedy*

by Ariella Carmell

When a college-aged girl begins teaching a volunteer sex ed class to local middle school students, she soon realizes that she has a lot to figure out when it comes to her own sex life.

## **The Untitled Twin Project** *-Drama*

by Bea Lovett

A former child actress takes on her twin's identity so they can deal drugs in two places at once until they are implicated in the overdose death of a celebrity -- based on a true story.

## **Popular** *-Dramedy*

by Marley Schneider

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GOP strategist Lee Atwater is hellbent on winning the 1988 presidential election. But when he goes too far, he ends up changing American politics forever... and in the worst way.

## **Pickup** *–Drama*

by Alexander Leiss

Days from her sixteenth birthday, a teenager runs away from home and enlists the help of her grandma to travel down the West Coast and track down a truck which belonged to her father, a soldier killed in action.

## **Think Tank** *–Thriller*

by Phil Davey

An economic policy adviser finds himself the defendant in an impromptu trial for his life, set up by a mourning father hurt by the advisor's policies.

## **Imminent** *–Thriller*

by Lee Brandt and Christopher Lawrence

During an interrogation, a government investigator discovers a sinister high-tech program, run by men who will do anything to protect their secrets.

## **Brook Farm** *–Comedy*

by Alexander Wake

On the cusp of American Civil War, a group of Boston intellectuals cast out to the countryside to establish a progressive society, but their ill-prepared nature sends them into historic disarray.

## **Rescue Dog** *–Drama*

by Brent Delaney

A delusional young boy develops an unconventional relationship with a stuffed dog as a way to cope with his father's tragic suicide.

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## **A Price Paid** *–Thriller*

by Andrew Marshall

Two injured women seek help from a pair of strangers only to discover that they are actually dangerous criminals on the run. Contained one location thriller.

## **The Hollow Tree** *–Dramedy*

by Rafa Russo

After the famous director Friedrich Kessler passes away, it's up to his protege to shoot his final script, a sequel to *The Hollow Tree*, Kessler's career-making film from a decade ago. But before production can get underway, Friedrich's ghost insists on re-assembling the original cast and staging a table read, despite the considerable complicated history that's filled the years since everyone was last together.

## **The Ventriloquist** *–Drama*

by Michael Mortimer

A has-been ventriloquist has the chance to solve his money problems and boost his career by winning the town's annual talent competition, but a chance meeting with a neglected boy, changes his life forever.

## **The Eremite** *–Sci-fi*

by Mark Sposato

A self-proclaimed time traveler convinces a grieving journalist to unravel a biotech conspiracy that could annihilate the human race.

## **Under 'S' for Sucker** *–Family*

by Peggy Hanna

A troubled but likable 14-year-old boy, longing for a permanent home, lands in an emergency foster home where he's not wanted.

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## **Property of...** *–Thriller*

by David Santo

A female tattoo artist enters the dark world of human trafficking to rescue her kidnapped daughter from a drug kingpin who is going to sell her in 2 hours.

## **American Fallout** *–Drama*

by Harry Kakatsakis

In the not-too-distant future, in a society that's largely crumbled, the owner of an isolated desert gas station and a hard-edged survivalist work together to prepare for an impending war that's all but certain to spell the end of what little order still exists in the world.

## **The War on Santa** *–Family*

by Farrin Rosenthal

A precocious six-year-old boy discovers Santa is not real and declares war on Christmas.

## **The Strippers and the Vampire's Daughter** *–Horror*

by Peter Hurd

When a reserved model inherits a strip club from her estranged mother, she discovers too late that the strippers are a vampire coven who want her as their next queen.

## **Vision** *–Thriller*

by David Tenenbaum

A woman whose mother was murdered while carrying her must use memories buried in her unconscious to find the killer before she becomes the next victim.

## **Out Of Time** *–Sci-fi*

by Joseph Villanti

Scientist Tom Henderson discovers time travel, and all the collateral damage that comes along with it.

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