

Getting Started In Movies and Anime

An interview with author Diane Dru Botsford
By Robert Delwood



Diana Botsford at Houston's *Delta H Con 2015*.

"Hollywood is in big trouble," Diane Dru Botsford warns, "but that's a good thing." Good at least for upcoming filmmakers and story tellers. And Botsford should know. She is a veteran writer and producer who established herself through the old and new ways of doing of business. For the old way she's written scripts (including for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), produced shows, and directed visual effects.

For the new way she's making her own material. Botsford recently produced and got critical acclaim for her six part web series, *Epilogue*, smartly writing a pandemic scenario with a science fiction/fantasy twist. She is also the official novelization author for the TV series *Stargate SG 1 (SG1)*. Her *Delta H Con 2015* panel chronicled an Antarctica trip, wanting to experience its environment firsthand so she could write realistically about it for *SG1*.

The difference now is that she's independent of the studios. She points out the "the old model is broken. When was the last time you watched a commercial?" Mostly a rhetorical question, viewers now switch to online programming such as Netflix and HBO, watching entire series on DVD collections, or even just skipping commercials with their DVD-Rs. The studios are losing grip on their market, and the creative community is taking advantage of that. "When I started, to become a TV writer you had to move to Los Angeles and the studios closely controlled the market and content." In contrast, the new model allows anyone to freely shoot and, more importantly, to show their content. Productions can be made with anything including a smart phone, and then broadcast on the Internet such as through a personal YouTube channel, a website, or just stream it directly.

At the same time, the demand for new programs is growing. One change can be seen in the explosive growth of the web series, which, to the point, is also called web television. The low barriers make this an excellent way to start in the industry. Botsford lists three important aspects.

Writing. Attending anime conventions, you get the idea that being a voice talent is the epitome of the market. It has the appeal and visibility that makes it easy to see, but it's only a small part of the process. Story content is overlooked but is more important. Great anime bases itself on compelling tales and "story telling is in our DNA. We understand great stories through heroic trends," Botsford explains. "There is a powerful relationship between mythology and storytelling."

In addition to constructing a story is deconstructing one was well. Study a movie or a TV episode, and use a notecard for each scene, noting what the actors do, where they are, and how the plot developed. Add your variations to improve it. Finally, write your own episode following those guidelines. In the industry

this is called spec scripting or scripting to a specification. You can even submit these scripts to shows. Almost every studio has script internship program.

Production. Each show is still a production and you will need a story, script, logistics, actors, and editing. Of course, budget will be an challenge but use the biggest budget available. "Small entrepreneurship is valid without having to sell out to Hollywood," Botsford says, referring to crowd funding such as IndieGoGo. She adds to "Keep in mind, you don't have to shoot it well yourself, you get someone to shoot it well for you. The most important factor, she says is to "expect to work 40 hours a day to make the episodes."

Competition. The intent is to build reputation. To sell scripts you'll still likely need an agent, and you'll need a reputation to get that agent. One way is by entering your productions in competitions. This gets you feedback and winning or even placing is invaluable credit to present to potential buyers.

With her diverse portfolio, I wondered what she thought her best thing she's done is. After a moment and an impish smile, she simply said "I haven't done it yet."

Web Resources

The following are resource links related to this article.

- Diana Dru Botsford Web site: DianaBotsford.com.
- Scripting internships: NBC Television Writers on the Verge (<http://www.nbcunicareers.com/writers-verge>). "Hollywood is in big trouble."
- Warner Brothers Writers Workshop (<http://televisionworkshop.warnerbros.com/>).
- SimplyScripts.com. This is a collection of freely available TV and movie scripts. <http://www.simplyscripts.com>.
- *The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd Edition by Christopher Vogler. Insights and observations on mythology's influence on stories, movies, and man himself.