Twitter Thread by Matt Ritter



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1) Here goes my thread about how I landed my first OWA. Open Writing Assignment. Btw, I had no idea what term meant a year ago so don't feel bad if you don't. The easy way to explain: A studio/producer has a property/IP/an idea but no writer. #screenwriting #pipelinewriters

2) So they solicit writers to come in and give their take. It's basically a bake off. I had low hopes because I'm a new writer and they almost always go with more established writers, but hey, sometimes the best idea wins! I landed it, yay.I'll get to that, but first my long road

3) Grew up on Long Island, middle class, zero connections to Hollywood. I mean ZERO. Chose law school. I wanted to be in entertainment but didn't know that was a viable career path. Did well, worked at biggest law firm in the world. But deep down I knew this wasnt the life for me

4) So quit/got fired (depends who you ask ;), and hopped on a plane to LA w no plan.Begged a guy I knew to let me sleep on floor in his back room. So went from making lots of money to zero money with no gameplan.I don't recommend having NO PLAN. Knew I loved writing and standup

4) Sidenote - this thread isn't about my standup career, but objectively I've done pretty well. Started the first and only lawyer/comedy troupe, headlined the country. Album #1 on iTunes. But was making basically NO money. Got a comedy manager, pitched an idea for a reality show

5) she paired me up w creator of Intervention, he liked idea. Next thing I know I sold my first pitch (I've always been great in a room- which obviously helped on the OWA). So now I'm a reality show creator. Show gets cancelled after 3 episodes. Back to being broke.

6) Figured I may as well try the reality thing as I have a foot in door. Catch a break when I make a good impression on Duck Dynasty creator at a tv event I paid to go to (ALWAYS GOTTA TAKE SHOTS). He lets me interview for job there. Next thing I know I'm producing Duck Dynasty

7) Lied and said I knew AVID, Youtubed like crazy, self taught enough to scrape by till I picked it up.That led to stint producing FAT N' FURIOUS. You read that right: heavy set car mechanics fix muscle cars. Thats the premise folks. Thought about why I moved to LA.This aint it!

8) Meanwhile - my writing career at that point: I had gotten quarterfinals of a competition. Probably wrote spec of every trendy comedy show. But had no idea what I was doing. Just hadnt put the time or thought into it honestly. Was winging it.

9) Did some soul searching, asked myself what do I truly want.Thought about what I really love, so I decided I was gonna write hourlong legal drama. I love the law, I understand it, it's also my advantage. So I quit the reality world.I needed to dedicate way more time to writing

10) So made two big choices. Said I won't ever work in reality again as it's too time consuming to write and I'll find some side hustles that will enable me to focus. Got a job reading for Amazon. This was a game changer. WHY? Because I read no joke, over 1000 scripts.

11) Set a timer b/c we were paid by script, so I could crank out notes, make money and go back to my writing. Learned a ton, it's like anything else, you have to get the reps in. Both reading AND writing. I dont think you can be great at this until you've put the time in on BOTH.

12) Also found a side hustle legal recruiting b/c it was something I could do on my own time, commission only job. My mental health started picking up which I think is also huge. When you lift some burdens the writing starts to flow IMHO. So now I feel like I have a plan.

13) Just need to execute. I'm in my late 30s, feel the stress of time passing me by (Which is BULLSHIT) but it's something I deal with. So I option the rights of a story about a law firm collapse and write it. This time I'm determined to make it great.

14) The diff between good and great is everything in this biz when trying to break in.Again, just my opinion,but I got NOWHERE with 18 scripts at that point that ranged from terrible to pretty good. So I said I'm not sending this out to anyone who matters until it's GREAT

15) So not only did I enroll in UCLA extension classes,where I met some great writers (who are now working - made a great group of friends there), I started working w a script consultant.I love my guy @DannyManus he's helped me a ton. So I got the script ready

16) and decided to do a table read. This was another GAME CHANGER for me. I got working actors/writers around town invited them to my courtyard, ordered JOANS ON THIRD and said that in the email because who the hell is gonna skip out on JOANS? Nobody, that's who. Everyone showed.

17) Had an incredibly read. But also got a ton of great notes, hearing it out loud, man do you realize how much extra dialogue you have, really trims the fat, also easy to catch anything that bumps people. Then Danny offered to send it to a few managers. Objectively it was great

18) Again, you need it to be OBJECTIVELY great. How do we know? Competitions, working writers, reps say so. We know the ways. Sometimes we lie to ourselves. But if its great, its great. Not everyone will like it. But SOMEONE will. Some managers passed, but some really dug it.

19) A few wanted to take it out asap. But only one Bellevue @johnzaozirny and @Jeff_Portnoy who were talking about developing ME as a writer. I think that's what makes them stand out, in addition to lots of other great things they do. We workshopped script for another 6 months.

20) Finally took it out. Got a producer on board, and then nothing. Died on the vine. Btw, when I got a manager, I thought FINALLY. When I got my first producer deal I thought FINALLY. But really there is NO FINALLY. It really is a marathon. So now back to drawing board.

21) At this point I'm pushing 40, no money earned in screenwriting.Have great reps, what the hell am I gonna do next. So I decide to write a feature.I found a great story during my low point when I was forced to crawl back to law and do min wage doc review (truly hellish job)

22) It's a huge lawsuit that I thought would make for a cool movie. Follow my process now. Write 10-12 hours a day. Send draft to consultant. Send to working writer friend. Send to managers. They send to their "circle of trust" other working writers. My script gets 10 solid reads

23) We take it out and immediately a huge A lister and major producer attach. Get signed by UTA. I admit this was all shocking. Getting on Blacklist was bonus surprise bc we didnt send out after we got the big attachment. So I'm thinking FINALLY I made it.

24) Then COVID hits. Everything is stalled. The day they announced lockdowns, people start baking. I start writing, and writing, and writing. Finished four features and a pilot. The pilot got me some massive meetings and the features have a lot of traction.Still no PAID writing

25) Finally we get back to the beginning the OWA. My agent explains what these are in our first meeting, says it's a way a LOT of writers earn a living. Said its a lot of work and you wont get 90 percent of them but if you get 1/10 you can live off them! It's a big win to get one

26) So I think to myself, great, I'm a standup, I'm great in room, my whole life I've been waiting to just get in the room. So he sends me somethings that just dont make sense for me. Note - lots of writers pitch on all, some skip them all as they take a TON of time and energy.

27) Pitching an OWA is a big commitment, if you're gonna do it, DO IT. Otherwise it's like writing a mediocre script. You won't get much benefit and you'll be annoyed with yourself. I commit hard to everything I do now. I wasnt always like this, but now I am. So he sends a few

28) I email my takes, hear nothing back. You usually NEVER hear back.The frustrating thing about this town. You don't even hear the NO half the time. Finally he texts me about something I loved as a kid, (cant say what it is). They want a take on it. Am I into this? Hell yea.

29) So I actually haven't gotten to pitch an OWA yet, when finally he says I got you in for this thing (Which is my dream project). So I get in - it's a zoom and I said to myself I need to blow them away. Probably a ton of working writers want this thing. It's a great property.

30) And there's money on the line. So I lock myself in my office until I'm convinced I have the MOST ORIGINAL take I could ever come up with.Normally you don't have a ton of time, so you need to really lock it if you're gonna pitch an OWA. Tip:weave in personal stuff.Start w that

31) Youve probably heard that advice but it works, WHY you? There are a ton of great writers w more credits, so they need to know YOU are the person to write this. I also rip some awesome standup jokes that feel improvised even though I practiced the pitch on a bunch of friends

32) My wife heard it a million times (tip* have a spouse that will tolerate your career) So I finish the pitch. They tell me they are speaking to ALOT of other writers. Didnt make me feel good but at least they were honest. Told my agent I nailed it but doubtful I'll get it.

33) Two months go by, I had already given up. He calls to say they want to hear more. So now I'm pitching to entire huge team on zoom. Gotta step up my game even more. Pitch the hell out of it. At the end they were asking about my availability so I'm letting the hope creep in

34) Mind you, I'm very confident, but I just know this business. So another few weeks go by. Finally my agent calls with my manager on (a dead give away good news is coming). He messes with me and says "You know you blew that pitch right?" At that moment I finally knew.

35) Landed my first paid writing gig. An OWA. A big one at that. Start writing on Monday. I wont say I FINALLY made it because there is no FINALLY, but I've reached an objective milestone. I'm in my 40s. Made a ton of mistakes, weird turns. But it all led me here so I'm happy.

36) I wrote this because I've spent years following other writers on twitter and a TON of people helped me get here, too many to count. So if I can help at all even with this stupidly long chain, I will. To my fellow writers. Just keep writing. Don't give up. Your day will come.