BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series, in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

David S. Goyer

23 September 2013 at BFI Southbank

David S. Goyer: Thank you, I've never given a speech before, so this will be interesting. I thought I'd start with a very bad screenwriter joke. There aren't any good screenwriter jokes, we'll see how this goes over.

So, a screenwriter is driving home from Universal Studios, drives up the hill, he sees smoke, hears sirens. He gets his way to his home, he threads his way past the cordons and the fire-fighters and the police and says 'I live here, I live here' and he finally gets to his house and it's completely burnt down.

He asks the cops 'what happened? What happened' and the cop says 'your agent came by the house and we think he went completely psychotic. He buggered your dog, and then he strangled your dog. He took crowbar to your laptop and then the back up drive in the basement, and then he slashed your Warhol – I don't have a Warhol, I wouldn't be here tonight if I had a Warhol – anyway, then he poured gasoline over everything and he torched your house and there's nothing left.

And the screenwriter says 'my agent came to the house?'. Anyway, *budum bum*. I'm a terrible, terrible public speaker, so I have to read from what I've written. Thanks for joining me, I'd like to thank BAFTA, the BFI and the JJ [Charitable] Trust. Jeremy [Brock] as well.

I apologise in advance for any awkward pauses or disjointed transitions or assorted dangling participles. I hope some of what I say tonight will be inspiring, or informative. I don't claim to be an expert, I'm just a guy who's managed to make a living for the last 26 years as a writer of film and television.

Before I started cobbling together these notes I went online and I looked at what some of my peers had said. First I thought I would wing it, and then I got really nervous when I saw what they had done. I was particularly impressed with Charlie Kaufman's speech, he's a writer that I admire greatly. As I listened to him, though, I got kind of depressed because I realised that essentially I was the antithesis of the kind of writer he was championing.

He writes these deeply personal, idiosyncratic films, and I basically represent the enemy. I'm an 'A-list screenwriter' and I use that with air quotes, who makes his living churning out the kind of tentpole pictures that are allegedly destroying Hollywood.

And since I'm a blockbuster guy I'll probably never be up for a BAFTA, so being here tonight probably represents the closest I'll ever get to one of those shiny little masks. Which, apropos of nothing, every time I see a picture of a BAFTA I think of the movie *Zardoz* and the giant floating head. It's the one where Sean Connery's got a ponytail and a ray gun, and he's got a weird banana hammock – I think I've got a picture of the poster of Zardoz. I just wanted an excuse to show that poster, it's my favourite bad movie. But yeah, that always reminds me of the BAFTAs.

Anyway, I predominantly work for the so called majors, so my comments are necessarily going to be informed by that bias. But I do think what's happening to screenwriters in Hollywood is kind of a bellwether for what's happening to screenwriters abroad. Amongst the things I'm going to do tonight, I want to touch on the future of screenwriting, and where I think the industry is heading, and what that means for all of us.

I wrote this great speech, or what I thought was a great speech, and then I gave it to some of my assistants and they said 'it's really dry, and you didn't include any personal anecdotes, you've got to do that'. So, sprinkled within – hopefully – a real speech is a bunch of bullshit personal anecdotes. I'm probably going to be the writer that swears the most at these events.

Hopefully there'll be some pearls of wisdom buried beneath the bullshit. I'm 47 years old, I sold my first screenplay when I was 21. It wasn't a very good script, and the resulting film wasn't much to brag about, but it got me my start. I landed an agent when I was 20, and here's how. I'd read about a young man that had become an agent when he was 22, and I reasoned that someone who had made agent at the age of 22 was probably a hustler, and I wanted that kind of person working for me.

So I cold called his office from my dormitory room, I was still in school at the time, and I left a message with his secretary, saying that I'd written a screenplay and his assistant promised to get back to me – and I knew she never

would. I hung up, saying thank you. The next day I called his office again and I left the same message.

The third day I called his office again and I left the same message. And I kept doing that for 45 business days – this is true. Finally on the 45th business day the agent jumped on the line and he barked into the line 'who the fuck are you, and why do you keep calling me?'. I knew I had a couple of seconds, and I said 'my name is David S. Goyer and I've written a screenplay' – at 20 I added the 'S' because I thought it leant some kind of mystique or something like that.

I said 'I'm about to graduate from film school, and I've written this amazing screenplay and I'm going to be a really big writer some day and if you don't sign me you're going to regret it'. He laughed and said 'fuck it, send me your script. But don't call me every day to see if I've read it or not'. So I sent my script in, and I waited two weeks, and then I started calling him every day, for – I don't know – two or three weeks.

Finally he picked up the phone again and he said 'your script's actually pretty good'. So he said he was going to sign me, and then he admitted that he decided he was going to sign me even if my script was mediocre. I said 'why in the world would you do that?'. and he said because I'd shown such ridiculous confidence in calling him every day that he figured I'd probably get somewhere. Now why did I show confidence? There's a point to this.

I didn't really have anything to lose. I was sitting in my dorm room, literally in my underwear, calling every day and I just thought what's the worst thing that can happen? The guy would laugh at me and he'd hang up, or maybe tell me I was a shitty writer. At the beginning of my career I had a number of people tell me that I was a shitty writer.

So here's my first point; probably every successful writer in stage, screen or prose has been told some version of 'give up' at some point in their career. It's rejection. If you can't deal with it, if you can't pick yourself off the floor after someone has completely crushed your soul, if you can't continue onward, then you probably shouldn't be trying to write for a living. That's my first pearl of wisdom.

The other thing, now I'm going off book for a second, when you're trying to write for screen – this is film or television – you're trying to convince someone to make your script. I think what a lot of beginning writers, or even professional writers don't realise – and I had this epiphany about five years into my career – is I think someone once said that for every film that gets made a thousand scripts are written. You're not just getting your film made, you're killing off those other 999 scripts, the possibility.

Your script sperm has killed off the other male sperm. And it's a big deal because you realise that in order to even get a small film made someone else has to spend a million dollars, or two million dollars or three million dollars, or $300 million. So part of writing a good script is actually convincing people to risk all their money and their livelihoods in making your film.

So perseverance and stick-to-it-ness, that's a really important component of writing. Anyway, thanks to my perseverance I got an agent, but I hadn't yet sold a script. My agent asked me if I could try my hand at writing an action film – I never thought I would be an action writer, I thought I would write comedies. I'm probably glad I didn't do that, but *Die Hard* had just come out, and a few months later I wrote a script called *Dusted*. It was a story about a cop who gets sent into prison undercover, and at the time I was working at a studio as a runner.

I was delivering mail and getting executive bagels – grunt work. My agent called me in the middle of the bagel run, literally, and he said 'there's this guy called Jean-Claude Van Damme, do you know who he is? He calls himself JC'. I didn't.

Anyway, he'd made a moderate splash with a couple of B movies called *Bloodsport* and *Kickboxer*, and he'd read my script and he wanted to meet. A few hours later I was sitting down with him. JC was this sort of Belgian pretty boy model who'd learned how to do the splits and a spinning wheel kick and somehow got himself a film deal.

He could barely speak English, but he was very enthusiastic. And MGM was going to make a

new film with him. JC said, and I'll always remember this, he said 'I think you're a great writer. Hollywood will try to destroy you (this is verbatim) but I will protect you like an eagle' and he made that motion. And then he gave me a big hug, this is true, and he kind of rubbed his knuckles on top of my head like you would with your little brother.

Anyway, he said he wanted to have MGM buy my script and he wanted to start production on it immediately. Incredibly that's exactly what happened. Four months later I was on the set of my first film, I was 22 at the time, I had to take all of JC's dialogue and sort of portion it out to other actors because he could barely speak English. And I had to change the title to *Death Warrant* because MGM had market researched titles and 'death' had scored well. So *Dusted* became *Death Warrant*.

And I thought, you know, I could show clips of really good stuff that I've done and I guess I'll do that, but I'm going to show a clip of *Death Warrant*.

Clip of Death Warrant

I thought no-one else is going to show Jean-Claude Van Damme clip. I also don't like to take myself too seriously. I like to do a good job writing, but I always cringe when I say 'I'm a writer'. It's clearly not my finest hour, but we all have to start somewhere. Which leads me to my second pearl of wisdom, which is everyone wants to write an Academy Award winning film, or a BAFTA winning film their first time out, but there's nothing wrong with learning your craft in the trenches.

Coppola and Scorsese started out with Roger Corman [as did] Jonathan Demme, James Cameron, and in those days B movies were a good place to earn your water wings. I never worked with Corman, but I worked with Van Damme. And believe it or not he actually taught me some things.

He once said to me, and this is true, while we were filming that movie, he said 'one day you'll write a script that's too good for me', and thankfully I did. In 1994 I wrote a script called *Blade*, and that script changed my career completely. For the first time I wrote a script without any editorial interference.

An executive at New Line named Michael De Luca he gave me the shot, and he didn't try to dictate the story. He just said 'write it the way you think it should be written' and this a very rare thing to happen. There's another pearl of wisdom hidden there, hire someone you think is talented and then get the fuck out of the way. Park your ego, it's a lesson that very few studio executives and producers have managed to put into practice on both sides of the Atlantic. But if more of them did I genuinely think, I believe, the film industry would be much healthier.

I've been in involved in three film franchises now where I was allowed to write with virtually no creative interference. The *Blade* films, *The Dark Knight* trilogy, *Man of Steel* and it hasn't been lost on me that those three projects were also the ones that were the most financially successful. You can't just chalk it up to the fact that Batman and Superman are well known, because nobody knew who Blade was.

But I want to go back to *Blade* for a second, for an additional point. That script wasn't made immediately, it floated around for about four years before it went into production, but it was a script that the community liked. It was passed around from one film executive to another, and they liked it because it was brash, because it didn't feel like a generic Hollywood film.

The reason it didn't feel generic was because I was writing what I wanted to write, and I didn't have any regard for what Hollywood might desire. And even though the script took a while to get made I was now being offered projects as opposed to having to audition for them. So my point here is that a good script can open doorways for you even if it never makes it into production.

Being John Malkovich was a script like that, it was floating round Hollywood for years before Spike actually made it. Around the time I wrote *Blade* I had a set of business cards printed up. I was feeling kind of bullish, and they just said 'David S. Goyer, Writer'. I showed them to my writing mentor, who's an old timer named Nelson Gidding who'd written a lot of films for Robert Wise. He promptly took the card and he threw it in the trash.

He said 'no writer worth his salt prints up a fucking business card that says writer on it'. If any of you have business cards that say 'writer' on them I apologise right now. Nelson continued. He said 'it's bullshit, you're not a writer, you're a human being who writes for a living'. So here comes, I guess, another pearl of wisdom.

Nelson was old school, he considered writing a craft as opposed to an art. He felt that all writing, even science fiction or fantasy, needed to be based on human experience. One of his grips with young writers like myself was that we wanted to start writing films without actually living any of our lives. A writer has to have human experience, a life beyond the page, or else they're essentially drawing from nothing.

Nelson had been a navigator on a bomber in World War II, his plane was shot down over Italy, he was one of only two survivors. He was Jewish, a Jewish-American soldier captured by the Nazis, imprisoned with other Allied officers for two years. Tried to escape, was recaptured. Tried to escape, was recaptured. Finally was liberated by the Russians near the end of the war.

And he spent a year drinking and carousing his way through Europe with the Russians, before he made it back to America and told them that he was actually alive. When he got back to the States his fiancée had married someone else. Heartbroken he went to the South Pacific and somehow – this is true – managed to save Truman Capote from being knifed in a barfight. That is human experience, and I didn't have anything like that. And I'm not suggesting you should all go out and get in barfights.

So I threw away my business cards and I started travelling. I went to the South Pacific, I learnt to scuba dive, I bought a motorcycle, I crashed a motorcycle. I went skydiving, I went to Africa and South America, all throughout Asia. I got out of my comfort zone, and I got some life experience. And my writing started to improve – it markedly improved.

And even though I'd been making a living for almost 10 years at the time it wasn't until I'd had these experiences that I felt I could truly call myself a writer. Now you might be asking yourself how does one apply their personal life experience to a film about vampires, or a vigilante who dresses up as a bat? I'm going to give you a couple of examples.

In my travels I'd managed to go tracking in Tibet, and when Chris Nolan and I sat down to reinvent Batman we wanted Bruce Wayne to travel far afield. I showed Chris some of my photographs from Tibet, which I'd taken during my experience. And those formed the basis for Bruce Wayne's vision quest. You can show a couple now – these are just photos that I took when I was in Tibet.

But the point is, when Chris and I were breaking the story of *Batman Begins*..... that's me drinking yak butter tea, which is terrible. This was a place that had never seen white people before. I can't say that the Tibet trip was an easy trip, it was actually a very difficult trip, but I never would have imagined that that trip would become the basis for the beginning of *Batman Begins*, and it did.

I showed all of my pictures to the production designer, and that's why Bruce Wayne goes to Bhutan in *Batman Begins*. Batman and *The Dark Knight* films led ultimately to Superman, and again you might be wondering what possible personal experiences I could have applied to Kal-El's origin. During the period that I was writing *Man of Steel* my father died. We'd been estranged, and I'd only seen him three or four times from the time I was 18.

But I did manage to see him a week before he died. During the same period I became a stepfather, and a biological father. As I was writing *Man of Steel* I realised I was crafting a story about fathers and sons. I didn't realise it when I started out, it was sort of about midway through. I decided to lean into it. Early on in my relationship with my step-son I remember having a conversation with him.

He was concerned that I was my biological son's father but not his. He said to me one day 'can't we just pretending I'm your son?'. So here's a clip from *Man of Steel* where you can see I completely plagiarised my step-son for the movie.

Clip from Man of Steel

Of course Kevin Costner was way cooler in replying to his adopted son than I was to mine. But for me, I remember sitting there having that conversation with my step-son and that was the emotional 'in' for me, into this crazy, giant movie. It was really that simple. So can a superhero blockbuster have these personal and resonant moments, even within the constraints of a genre film? I'd like to think that's one of the niches that I've carved for myself. Anyway, that's my encapsulated origin story, and hopefully there are a couple of things that amused you or inspired you, and having done that I'm not going to completely crush all of your dreams.

Two years ago I ran for a seat on the Board of Directors of The Writer's Guild of America, and much to the dismay of my wife I won. I wanted to help my fellow writers, I was curious to look behind the curtain and to drill down in the specific economics that were driving our industry.

I'm speaking of America obviously, for years, ever since the writers' strike of 2007 and the collapse of the home video market, we've been hearing that the sky is falling. The narrative basically goes like this. Mainstream studios are making fewer films, fewer writers are being employed and middle class writers are becoming an endangered species. To make matters worse profit margins are supposedly shrinking.

Is there any truth to this? Yes and no. So 10 years ago the major studios released 136 self produced films. Last year they released 101, so it dropped considerably. Ten years ago there were roughly 2,000 working WGA screenwriters, last year there were 1,500 so that's a big drop. It sounds bad, and to a certain extent it is. Fewer films means fewer opportunities for screenwriters to ply their trade.

In America the box office is dominated by the box office mentality, like *Man of Steel*. There used to be a healthy market for mid and lower budgeted films, for indie films, or even B movies like *Death Warrant*. But [apart] from micro budgeted horror fare like *Paranormal Activity*, that market has almost completely dried up. If you're going to make a tentpole film today you'd better base that film on existing intellectual property, on something that has franchise potential. It's all the studios talk about.

Unless you can make a toy line from it, or a key chain or bobble head of an iPhone case, or unless that movie can be firmly characterised as what they call a four quadrant film, meaning that everyone from tweens to grandmothers want to see it, then the studios are probably not going to make that movie.

Maybe they'll make one raunchy, R rated comedy a year, maybe one chick flick – and yes, they call them chick flicks over there. But the rest are going to be based on superheroes, or the young adult series de jour, or they're going to be remakes of existing films.

And there's definitely a self fulfilling prophecy that seems to be playing itself out in Hollywood, a sense of the snake eating its own tail. My own Batman film was a reboot from one that had been released eight years prior, and I've just written another script in which we're rebooting Batman yet again, only a few years after *The Dark Knight*.

Now, you're probably thinking if I didn't cut my teeth on comic books – like myself – or Hogwarts, I'm screwed. And to a certain extent you are, and to a certain extent you aren't. And here's where a little bit of hope trickles back into my presentation. While the screenwriting industry has contracted, the television writing industry has expanded, rapidly.

An acquaintance of mine was in a meeting with Jerry Bruckheimer, who produced *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Top Gun*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Bad Boys*, and also tv shows like *CSI* and *Without A Trace*. He told my acquaintance 'television won'. So let's look at the numbers. In 2003 there were 14 American broadcast basic cable and pay cable networks airing original programming. Today there are 29, so they've doubled.

In 2003 there were roughly 3,000 WGA members working in television, today there are 3,500, so you can actually see where those 500 odd screenwriters have migrated. Television is no longer regarded as a second tier medium. Increasingly high end screenwriters are gravitating towards scripted series. You've got

Jonathan Nolan of *The Dark Knight* fame, creating Person of Interest. Frank Darabont of *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*, *Walking Dead*. David Benioff scripted The *Kite Runner* and *Troy*, helms *Game of Thrones*. Graham Yost who wrote *Speed* reinvented himself with *Justified*.

You've got feature directors like [David] Fincher and Michael Mann, Guillermo Del Toro, Jane Campion, all migrating towards television. I've followed the trend as well, first with a show called *FlashForward*, and I have a show on now called *Da Vinci's Demons*. I'm acutely aware that that list is dominated by white men, but that's a subject for a different lecture, probably not from a middle aged white man like myself.

Why the great migration? First of all television is more profitable than film. It's a higher margin business. International cable markets are quickly growing and all these channels need product. International co-productions are booming. My own show, *Da Vinci's Demons*, receives production funds from both Starz and BBC Worldwide. You've got additional new platforms emerging, like Netflix and Amazon, Hulu, X Box.

And it's important here to cite the level of film actor talent gravitating towards television as well, because they're basically better roles. You've got Glenn Close, Laura Linney, Holly Hunter – and on the Y chromosome end of the spectrum you've got Kevin Bacon, Kevin Spacey, Kevin Costner, I'm only going to list guys named Kevin. Those are the only men in television. TV's basically making the kind of epics and genres that the movie studios used to make.

Historical costume dramas and crime stories and zombie apocalypses. And TV is often doing it better now, with more complex narratives and corresponding budgets and critical acclaim arising. As an example of a narrative specifically designed for TV I've got a scene from a show I did called *FlashForward*, and it takes place after everyone on the Earth has experienced a vision of their lives six months [into the future]. I want to show this clip from *FlashForward* to show you basically the kind of scene that couldn't be done in a mainstream [film] today.

Clip from FlashForward

It would be very hard to do a scene like that in a mainstream Hollywood film these days. On television, instead of having to tell your story in two hours you've got six episodes, or 13. Characters and audiences are given the opportunity to grow. Writers also tend to be better treated in television. It's true. Film is a director's medium, and in television at least in America, the writer is king.

And there's a reason for that, in television directors tend to be more itinerant [but] in serialised television writers can't be. Someone needs to keep track of the storylines. Is that line of dialogue consistent with Lady Mary Crawley's backstory? Who are we going to ask, are we going to ask the director or are we going to ask Julian Fellowes? We're probably going to ask Julian Fellowes.

Who's going to keep track of Don Draper's myriad lies? Probably Matthew Weiner, the guy who invented him. In the American system we have a class of writers known as showrunners. Brett Martin recently published a book on the subject, entitled *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution, From The Sopranos and The Wire to Man Men and Breaking Bad*.

If you haven't read it it's an interesting book, and the premise is basically simple. You get good television when creators refuse to compromise on their creative visions. Which takes me back to the lesson of hiring talented people and getting the fuck out of the way. For whatever reason it's happening a lot more now in television than in features. Showrunners also aren't as common in the UK, you've got a whole job category here that doesn't exist on my side of the Atlantic.

I'm not knocking script editors, they just don't exist in America. And if I can make one generalisation about the television industry here, it's that I think in America our writers tend to be more empowered than British television writers. When we started production on *Da Vinci's Demons* I told my British partners that I wanted a writer on set every single day of production. They said 'we don't really do that over here' and I said 'well you're doing it now'.

And we have been, we're in our second season and I think everyone agrees that the product's benefitted from it. You've got some phenomenal TV writers here in the UK. Julian Fellowes, who I mentioned before, Steven Moffat, Mark Gatiss, Neil Cross, Dennis Kelly. Abi Morgan just won an Emmy. I watch virtually everything these writers produce, and if I could wave a magic wand over the industry here I'd wish your television writers be given even more autonomy. Interestingly enough, as the critical perception of television has risen we're seen this reverse migration back into features.

Neil Cross is writing movies now, Steven Moffat. Scott Gimple, who's currently running *Walking Dead*, has moved into film. And the list is growing. And amusingly the justification used by film executives when hiring TV writers now is that they're looking for writers who are capable of more character nuance and narrative complexity. In other words all the kinds of things that used to make movies good now tend to be happening on television.

But if an infusion of TV writers can make film more watchable I'm all for it. So where does that leave writers? Well, there are always going to be a certain number of tentpole pictures made every year, and I suspect we're going to be stuck with Spandex and dystopian teen melodramas for a long time. But Jerry Bruckheimer, I think, was essentially right. Television won. Conventional wisdom taught us that all these new distribution platforms like internet streaming and video-on-demand, they would cannibalise the television industry.

But in actuality they haven't. The numbers bear it out too. People are simply watching more television on Smartphones and tablets on the backs of seats in aeroplanes. And the industry as a whole, particularly the international market, is booming. Increasingly the big conglomerates are divesting themselves of any branch that isn't pure media.

Warner Bros. has dumped AOL and Time. Fox is spinning off news and book publishing. There's even talk about Sony shedding its consumer products division. Why? Because over the last decade the core media businesses have been the ones that have been the most profitable.

In the last four years Time Warner's stock has nearly tripled. The same with Viacom, Fox and Disney. And all of that growth has been driven by the newly emergent television industry, which is much more profitable than the film industry. Which is in turn being built on the backs of writers. Writers are increasingly crafting stories that are challenging, and genre busting, and they're creating the kinds of memorable roles that keep people up at night chattering away on Twitter and the message boards.

So is the sky falling? Not really. It's just that the work and the opportunities are migrating elsewhere. Believe it or not I think today is a more exciting time to be entering into the film industry than when I started back in 1988. It's just that now most of the exciting stuff is actually happening on the small screen as opposed to inside multiplexes.

Can I show the clip from *Da Vinci's Demons* as well now? Again, something that I'm not sure I could have pulled off on film.

Clip from *Da Vinci's Demons*

When I was growing up probably my favourite film of all time was *The Man Who Would Be King*. I loved *Lawrence of Arabia*, and *The Devils* by Ken Russell, and all these great, amazing adventure films. The reason why I did this show was because I knew I could never make a movie like that in Hollywood any more. But I realised I conned the BBC and Starz into letting me do this show, which is basically those movies just done as a television show.

I grew up loving those films. Other films like *Three Days of the Condor* and *The Parallax View*, I used to bemoan the fact that the studios aren't making films like that anymore. Then I realised that they are, they're just doing them on television. So all of the pearls of wisdom I've iterated tonight still apply on television, and maybe some of you will be lucky and will write some films, but certainly the work is migrating there.

Perseverance, life experience, write what you feel passionate about not what you think the market is dictating. At the end of the day good writing, and passionate writing, I do believe will always win out. And if you have a card that says 'Blankety Blank, Writer' consider throwing it

out. Anyway, that's my little presentation tonight, thank you.

APPLAUSE

Mark Salisbury: Thank you David for those pearls of wisdoms and swear words.

David S. Goyer: Was I not allowed to swear?

MS: No, no, please do. I'm going to talk for probably about twenty, twenty five minutes then I'm going to throw it open to you, so put your hand up if you have a question.

MS: So you grew up wanting to write comic books initially?

DSG: I did, I did yeah.

MS: And then you wanted to be a homicide detective.

DSG: Yeah.

MS: And then suddenly you decide to be a screenwriter. Now, in my research there were two stories. One was that your high school teacher called your Mum and said you should be a screenwriter. And the other one was that you went to see Lawrence Kasdan give a talk and that changed your mind. So is it both?

DSG: Yeah, it was both. I grew up in Michigan, a single Mom, paper route, things like that, lower middle class. The idea that I would go to Hollywood and become a screenwriter, that was just crazy. I didn't know anyone in Hollywood, I had never read a screenplay before in my life, so the thought was maybe I should do a sensible job.

I think my Mom and my grandmother wanted me to try to be a doctor or a lawyer or something like that. But I was always really interested in justice, so I applied to and was accepted to, a school for police administration. I was going to be a homicide detective in Detroit.

I was all set to go and then these two things happened. A couple of my high school teachers literally staged an intervention with my Mom and said 'you can't let him do that. He should write'. They actually applied to USC Film School on my behalf; they started the application process without me knowing it.

MS: So why did they think you should write specifically scripts, and not novels or journalism or comics?

DSG: Well they thought that because around the same time I had read that Lawrence Kasdan, who wrote *The Big Chill*, *Indiana Jones* and *Body Heat* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, he'd gone to the University of Michigan. I had read that he was going to speak at the film school there. I cut class that day; I just thought it would be interesting to hear him speak. Somehow I snuck into this room of college students and I actually cornered him afterwards and talked to him for a few minutes.

I said 'I think I might be interested in doing this' and at the time he said 'then get the fuck out of Michigan' which is kind of bad form because he was speaking to the University of Michigan about film. But he said 'go to New York, or go to LA, that's where all the films are being made. If you really feel you want to do this go there'. Those two things kind of happened simultaneously.

MS: So can you remember the first script that you read?

DSG: I got a job, it wasn't until I got to USC, I was in the screenwriting programme there and I got a job working the night shift in the screenplay library. You could come in and read the scripts, but you weren't allowed to photocopy them, which of course I did because I was working the night shift. I made a healthy side-line photocopying scripts for film students and stealing them out of there. The first script I read was *Body Heat*, a Lawrence Kasdan script.

MS: You mentioned *Blade* earlier, and that was the script that started you on this path that you're on, and it also set the template for modern comic book movies. We had Tim Burton's *Batman* and Richard Donner's *Superman*, but this one was different. Why do you think it changed things? It was pre *X-Men*, it was pre *The Matrix*, it changed action movies as well as comic book movies. But why was that?

DSG: I think there were two reasons and then an interesting thing that happened. One is nobody was making action films in particular that had African-American leads, in high budget films. There were lower budget films, and at the time New Line had made *Deep Cover* and *House Party*, they were the scruffy kind of mini studio that were making films that the other studios wouldn't make. At the time they said 'we'll make this script if you can write it in the six to eight million dollar range'. The budget for my first draft came in at forty five million dollars.

Incredibly the same guy, Michael De Luca, who had said 'just write what you want to write' he literally gave me no notes. He just said 'fuck it, let's make it'. It was R rated and his immediate bosses said 'you are in insane, there's no marketable black star, and it's R rated, and it's going to completely fail'. And it was this crazy mash up of blaxploitation... people were very into Hong Kong action films at the time, but people weren't into it back then, but I was.

I would see these film festivals, and I think it just worked because it kind of broke the rules of what an action film should be. It was completely gonzo. And the other thing that was interesting is that it was a convention in Hollywood that you could only make a comic book film if it was based on the top tier characters: Batman, Superman, maybe Spider-man. X-Men hadn't even been made.

There was no thought that you could make a film out of a secondary or tertiary character. At the time this was true. Marvel thought so little of this character that they optioned it to New Line for $125,000. That was all Marvel made on that film. On the second film I think they made $175,000 and finally....

MS: They wised up?

DSG: No, they had them over a barrel. The movies went on to make, collectively, over a billion dollars. It was a big eye opener for Marvel and DC because they realised they didn't just have to be well known characters, that there was something interesting in the DNA, that they could still become these big, giant franchises.

MS: And do you think it's because you took the characters seriously, and you put them in the real world?

DSG: Yes, thank you for saying that. That was the other thing that I did, as I said, I'm not going to write it like it's a joke. It's not a wink and a nod, I'm going to pretend it's real. Which is what Chris [Nolan] and I ended up doing with *Batman Begins*. The Burton films, which I love, are very cartoony in their own way. We just said, our main working rule was, we're just going to pretend as if it's real. It made it more difficult in the writing process also, because that also meant that everything he did had to at least have some basis in reality.

We couldn't just do it because it was cool, or that was the way it happened in the comic books. And I think that resonated with people.

MS: At some point you were developing it with David Fincher....

DSG: *Blade?*

MS: Yes, and I'm just interested very briefly in what the David Fincher version of *Blade* was like compared to the Stephen Norrington one.

DSG: The script for Blade was like the slutty girl (or guy) that sleeps with everyone. That script was attached to so many... Sam Raimi, David Fincher, there were so many different iterations of that movie. Fincher, I did a draft with him. *Seven* had not come out yet, but I had seen it. I think in a way... God, I think it took itself too seriously a little bit. We'd gone too far in the extreme, that iteration wasn't quite as fun as Norrington's version.

MS: You mentioned confidence earlier, and you said that that was the script that you suddenly felt that you were a screenwriter. How many scripts down the line had you written at that point?

DSG: I think at that point it was probably the 10th screenplay that I had written, and you're right, it wasn't until *Blade* that I felt like I actually deserved to have anything made out of my films. But I'd had four or five bad things made prior to that. I almost showed a clip from the *Nick Fury: Agent of Shield* TV movie with David

Hasselhoff, but I decided one bad film's enough.

MS: You said it opened doors for you, it got you other jobs, and one job it did get you was *Batman Begins*, because that's what [Christopher] Nolan read, and called you in. Can we just talk a little bit about that working relationship with Chris Nolan, and then later with Jonah [aka Jonathan] Nolan, because you co-wrote the script for *Batman Begins* with Chris, and then the other two films you're credited as co-story with Chris, and then Jonah and Chris wrote the screenplays. So how did that working relationship....

DSG: I had met Chris before *Memento* had come out, so we knew each other a tiny bit socially. He knew who I was, and it was one of those calls you don't think you're going to get. I got a call and it was him, and he said 'I'm going to develop a new version of Batman over at Warner Bros.' and I had had many, many friends who had written various iterations of Batman films that had not gotten off the ground over the years.

I remember rolling my eyes and thinking 'yeah, this movie's never going to happen'. I said 'what's it going to be?' and he said, 'I don't know, I just want it to be his origin story'. I said 'we've seen it' and he said 'no, his real origin story, what happened in between'. That was kind of all he had at the beginning. I remember thinking this is never going to get made so I'm just going to extemporaneously shoot from the hip and say, 'well I would do this and this and this for maybe half an hour'. I said 'you can take my ideas, it's fine, it's good talking to you' and I actually kind of turned it down.

Then he called back about three or four weeks later, and said 'I've met with a bunch of other writers and you have to do this. I promise you it's going to get made'. We started working together, and it got made. So that first film was me and then Chris, and then me and him together.

What happened on the second film was I was actually directing a film and I only had time to do treatments, so Chris and I, for *The Dark Knight*, did about a thirty five page treatment, which was pretty extensive. And then Jonah came in and did some work, and then we ended up doing a kind of mish mash on the third one.

MS: When you're embarking on a kind of comic book movie, Batman, Superman, The Flash, Ghost Rider, Magneto... how do you start that process? Do you just literally go to a comic store and buy all the graphic novels you can find? Or go to your own collection and start reading and reading and find in the themes... just take us through that process.

DSG: It's funny, because I've read comic books when I was a kid. My brother and I collected them, we had an extensive collection, my mother never threw our comic book collection out and now she's patting herself on the back. One of the attractions for Chris was that he had never read comic books, he didn't know the world. So he trusted me on that franchise, and also on Superman, to kind of know what was canon, what could be changed and what couldn't be changed.

I was usually the one who [was asked] 'What do you think? Should we change this? How far can we go? Will it break?' I remember early on in *Batman Begins* he said 'does he have to have a utility belt?' and I said 'yes'. He said 'why?' There was one version without the utility belt and then he showed me a design and it was all black, and I said 'it's got to be kind of yellow' and he was like 'ohhhh!' So it was yellow but really, really scruffed up. So I performed that function.

I think when you're working with *Blade*, nobody knew *Blade* at all. And I did a lot of invention. But there was something that was similar to *Blade* in terms of *Man of Steel* and *Batman*. I would try to distil what was the DNA of the character. In the case of Batman and Superman I had read a lot of the material, but I went back and re-immersed myself in a lot of the material, and I developed this process where I would write down themes and elements of the story, or origin story, that were sticky.

So in the case of Batman and Superman, you've got these characters that have been around for seventy years, that are constantly being reinvented. And they're changing the origin stories; they're changing how they meet the Joker or how they meet character X, Y and

Z. But over the decades certain elements remain sticky. It's sort of like story Darwinism, they would sort of bubble to the surface.

I identified about ten things that remained sticky about Batman, and ten things that remained sticky about Superman and I wrote them up. I said to Chris 'these are the 10 things that must be in the movie, that we should not change'. I did the same thing with Zack [Snyder] on Superman, and said they were sort of like the Ten Commandments, and I decided as long as we stick to that I think we'll be good. As long as we honour that.

MS: You said that reinventing Superman was even harder than Batman....

DSG: Because he's just not as innately cool as Batman. I love Superman, but I can just tell with my own research group – I've got two sons, six and three – and we've got Batman costumes and Superman costumes in our playroom, and they always fight over the Batman costume, they don't fight over the Superman costume. I think it's because Batman's costume is black, and it's just cooler. He wears a mask, and also because Batman is human, so it's easier to identify with him. It's a little bit more aspirational.

MS: Did DC give you free licence to do anything with these characters? I remember talking to Grant Morrison years ago about this aborted Superman pitch. He wanted Superman to push the moon, and they said to him 'he can't be that super'. So I just wondered...

DSG: It is funny when you get these arbitrary rules of what you can or cannot do. I've had crazy arguments with Warner Bros. about the culture on Krypton and things like that. *Blade* had been successful, so I think on some level they figured if he can do something okay out of *Blade*, maybe he can figure something out. But the one thing that Chris and I did that none of the other filmmakers prior to us had done, we went to New York and we met with the publisher and the main editors of Batman, on our own dime. We met with them for two days, and before we even started we said 'what do you think should be in a Batman film? And are there any rules that you would absolutely not break?'

It sounds simple, but none of the other filmmakers had bothered to do that. They just dismissed the comic books and the creators. I just thought these guys have been doing it for six decades, they know something. And we learned a lot of things. I think we earned their trust, and then when it came to Superman they said 'you've got it'. They just said 'go'.

MS: And you talked about humanising the character, because obviously he's a God, but you decided not to have Kryptonite for example, to make your life difficult.

DSG: That was a tricky one because... I never particularly liked Kryptonite. The whole reason it was invented in the comic books in the 50s or 60s was because he was too powerful. They needed to give him this Achilles heel. But it was such an easy plot device, and I said 'you know what we're not going to have Kryptonite in this movie' and Chris agreed.

At the time we had no idea, when we got into it we said 'God this is hard, we've really screwed ourselves'. But it's also interesting as a writer sometimes to write yourself into a corner or present yourself with some challenges and see if you can work your way out of it. So I decided that his Kryptonite would be his humanity, and that's when I stumbled upon the idea that it's the story of two fathers. Really the movie is about Kal-El having to decide 'am I my human father's son, or am I my Kryptonian father's son?'

And if I side with Krypton we decided to give him this terrible dilemma. Spoilers, if you haven't seen the movie, he's given this opportunity in the movie to essentially get Krypton back. But in order to get it back they're going to terraform Earth and remake it on Earth. The humans will die, because the Kryptonians breathe a different atmosphere and whatnot. I thought that was an interesting challenge for him, the MacGuffin of the film hinges upon which lineage I'm going to choose, and that's how we sort of embedded his weakness.

MS: You made him not just an outsider but an actual alien, and it became a first contact story, which people hadn't really done before. So how quickly did that....

DSG: From the very beginning. I loved the Donner films, but the thing that always bugged me, I think it was the second Donner film and Lois Lane is interviewing Superman and they cut into the interview midway, and she says 'so, you're from Krypton, huh?'. And he says 'yeah' and she says 'cool'. I'm like, 'what?' He's from another planet and everybody in the movies is just like 'yeah, he's from another planet'.

I just thought if he existed, if he showed up, even if he had not got superpowers it would literally be the biggest thing that ever happened to humanity. So I said we've got to go back to the idea of him being an alien and it being a first contact story. That was my first 'aha!' moment. When I said that the studio kind of said 'yeah, you're right, that's kind of interesting'.

MS: And something you said in one interview, which was you wrote it as if the Krypton stuff didn't exist. So you always thought about the human side and then added...

DSG: Yeah, well the way that I wrote that script was, every time I would approach a scene, even the stuff that took place on Krypton which in that script was about twenty eight pages, I stripped all of the Kryptonian gak out, like the laser guns and the beasts, and I wrote it as if it took place on Earth first, in the most mundane way possible. As if there was a human conflict going on.

And I tried to write as many scenes as possible that way first, because I was curious to see if they would work stripped of the alien stuff. And I was able to get a version of the Krypton prologue that worked that way. So I thought that's how I know the story's kind of sound and not relying on the crutch of giant flying dragonfly creatures and stuff like that.

MS: Last Superman question, I promise. So the ending of the film came in for scrutiny, people were criticising various things that happened. One was that Superman killed Zod – sorry, spoiler – and the other was the collateral damage of the fight at the end. And Zack was even justifying it in various interviews. I found one interview where he said 'I wanted to see a level of destruction I'd never seen in a superhero before, if you had these people, with these powers'. So what was the thought process writing those two moments in the film? Discussions with Chris, discussions with Zack and then throwing it out to the wide world and getting that kind of feedback?

DSG: We were pretty sure that that was going to be controversial. It's not like we were deluding ourselves. We didn't just do it to be cool. We felt in the case of Zod, again we wanted to put the character in an impossible situation, have to make an impossible choice. And this is one area – and I've written comic books as well – where I disagree with some of my comic book writers [who say] that Superman doesn't kill.

But it's a rule that exists outside of the narrative, and I just don't believe in rules like that. I believe when you're writing a film or for television you can't rely on a crutch or a rule that exists outside of the narrative of the film. And so the situation was Zod has said 'I'm not going to stop until you kill me or I kill you' and the reality is no prison on the planet could hold him, and in our film Superman can't fly to the moon, we didn't want to come up with that crutch, we wanted him to kill. But also our movie was, in a way, Superman Begins, he's not really Superman until the very end of the film.

We wanted him to have that experience of having taken a life, and then to carry that through hopefully onto the next films. Having been backed into that corner, and realised that because he's Superman, because people idolise him, he needs to hold himself to a higher standard. So that was one of the reasons.

And then in terms of the destruction, again I felt in a lot of the superhero films they just destroy all these things and there are never any consequences. It's just fine. We didn't want to shy away from that either. The other thing we knew that we were up against was that people – rightfully so – idolise the Donner films. But they were made thirty five years ago, and so we knew that in order to... we were reinventing the character. In order to move on we were going to have to take some big swings that differed from the Donner depiction.

MS: Before I throw it open, I'm going to ask you a couple of quick process questions. You're executive producing *Da Vinci's Demons*, you

write video games, you're producing several movies, several TV shows. How do you do it? Just explain your process. Where do you work, for instance? Do you write longhand, because it just seems like a phenomenal amount of work for one individual? Do you sleep?

DSG: I sleep, yeah. When I started out... I've been writing professionally for twenty six years or something like that. When I started out I could only write one thing. And I've gotten faster, it's like any muscle. I've gotten to a place where I can multitask – in fact where I think it makes my process better to multitask now, because I'll work very intensely on something. I'm very rigid and organised; I work for the same period of time every day. I largely work in two places...

MS: And what is that time?

DSG: I tend to work from about 9.30 to 1.30 or 2 every day. A lot of writers have rituals, I have a ritual. I meditate, and then I drink a lot of green tea. So I make my green tea, and I try to do that every morning, sometimes I fall off the wagon. I have a programme that allows me to not connect to the internet, that I set for X amount of time, and turn off the phone. I have a detached office, away from my house, so nobody can hear me and the kids aren't allowed in. And I also have a place in Wyoming that I go to, usually on every script at some point for about eight or nine days of just super intensive writing.

I'm a real – my wife can attest to this – I'm an incredible pain in the ass when I'm in script because I'm always thinking, waking up at three in the morning and scribbling something down. I've just gotten better, it's like any muscle, I've gotten better at doing it and better at working on a couple of things.

MS: So when you say you multitask, can you write two or three scripts at the same time or do you have to finish one?

DSG: No I write two or three scripts at the same time and I will block out the day, it's ridiculous, but you'll see my calendar and it will say '*Man of Steel* from 9.30 to 11.30; *Da Vinci's Demons* from 11.30 to 1; this other project from 1 to 2'. That's what I do, and I find that switching rhythms and writing different kinds of characters, I don't know, because you're always working on the script and when I come back to it it's like a relief to get back to Krypton or Gotham or whatever, or a relief to go back to Florence.

MS: So do you write outlines for everything? How long are your outlines?

DSG: Yeah. If it's a film they tend to be fairly extensive, at least twenty pages long. I never give the outlines to the studio – avoid that, avoid it. Terry Rossio, one of the guys on *Pirates of the Caribbean*, once said 'an outline is the worst format to convey your best ideas'. It's great for yourself, but it's a wretched format to give to other people because it's not the script. Often a lot of great ideas that are all about the execution, they sound really dry or they sound like they won't work in outline form, and a lot of good ideas get killed off in the outline stage.

MS: And in terms of writing action, that forty minute Zod-Superman battle, is every single punch... how much is too much?

DSG: It depends, I've also directed my own stuff. It depends. The way I'll work with action, I'll write a general version of what I think the action sequence will involve, the main basic points, and I'll try to convey the intensity or whatnot. And then if I'm working with the director or the stunt co-ordinator, you'll go to the location and things start to change. You'll hash out different things.

With Zack now I've evolved this process where I write the first version and he storyboards, and he shows me his primitive sketches. I comment on his sketches, he then revises his storyboards while I revise the script. It's a strange process, but then we'll have a scene that more closely approximates it, and he's got a finished set of boards.

Then we'll pre-viz, pre-visualisation like an early computer generated blocking of a scene. We'll pre-viz and then we'll watch it and say 'wow there's really a lull there' and even though I've scripted stuff I'll say 'I'm going to move this dialogue here instead', it's become this very elaborate process.

MS: I have to say, if you visit David's site there are several examples of your scripts on there.

DSG: Yeah, I've uploaded some and I hope to upload more.

MS: You mentioned being a director, has that impacted your writing?

DSG: I think it's made me a better writer, because there's a lot of cheats you can do as a writer. I remember, I referenced Stephen Norrington in the first *Blade* film, I described a character walking in the room, looking like a living nightmare. Steve said 'what the fuck is that? How do I... what does that mean?' No person who had read the script up to that point had questioned [it] but I realised it doesn't mean anything. It's cool, but it doesn't really mean anything, so I don't cheat anymore if I know I'm writing for another director.

MS: Okay, I'm going to throw it open to you, I'm going to ask a very quick question while the mics are going... *Death Warrant*, the villain was called The Sandman and there's a password of Morpheus to get into this programme. Are they Sandman references, Neil Gaiman?

DSG: Yeah, that was Neil Gaiman's stuff.

Question: David can I follow up on something you started to talk about before on *Da Vinci's Demons*? As far as the differences between the American series writing and the British series writing, the show runner system versus the script editor system, I'm sort of curious with *Da Vinci's Demons*, did you drag the writers on that kicking and screaming into the American system or have they drawn you into their way of doing things? Or have you sort of created a hybrid of both. And also, how do you fit into *Da Vinci's Demons*, because you've got quite a number of credits on the first series, so I'm curious how your writing of the series fits into that mix.

DSG: Okay, so two parts to that question. The first part is I dragged my British partners kicking and screaming into the American way on this show. It's a little different in the British format, when you're doing something like *Luther*, which might be four episodes, it's a little different than ten or thirteen. One writer can write every episode, and often – not all of the time – they'll film them as one production period, or something like that. But we were doing eight or ten or thirteen, and there was no way that I could physically write all of the episodes. I feel very strongly about a writer being on the set, both for film and for television, they should be. I think often directors feel threatened by the writer, they shouldn't be. But yeah, I dragged them kicking and screaming into the system.

One of the reasons also why they didn't want to do it, frankly, was we had one British writer and we had a lot of American writers, and they didn't want pay to fly them over and put them up, because it was an expense.

But, you know, when you're making a film or a television show it's a living, breathing thing and even with the best of intentions sometimes, even if you say 'we're not going to change a word of this script' things have to be changed. In this case there was eight hours difference, and I just said the writer has to be there. We did make changes, and we always had a writer there, but that is a system I imposed.

And in terms of how I work on the show, well the first couple of episodes I wrote and directed myself, but then I had to hire the other writers. It's interesting, *FlashForward* and now *Da Vinci's Demons* and some other things I'm involved in are the first time where I'm overseeing other writers. I find that I like it a lot, because it's fun to boss other writers around. But mostly because if you're writing film it's a very solitary experience and in *Da Vinci's Demons* and *FlashForward* we break the stories as a group, so we all collectively – six or seven of us – sit down and say 'what should this episode be?' And we argue it out, and then what's interesting is I've assembled this team of writers, and they all have different strengths. I didn't hire writers that were all the same, and I didn't hire writers that were all like me, because I thought that collectively it would make for a more interesting show. I did the same thing with *FlashForward*, and it's been interesting, I try very hard to listen to these other voices.

I said earlier, hire good people and get the fuck out of the way, and that's been interesting being on both sides of the fence, because I try to empower the writers as much as possible. They will passionately advocate for certain things, and sometimes it's not the way I would go, but I have to really listen to them and decide, 'well maybe this might be the way I

go, but they really believe in this' so more often than not I will try to side with the writer even if it goes against what I would do.

MS: What about the creative differences working with network television, in the case of *FlashForward*?

DSG: It's night and day, unfortunately network television in America, for me at least... the notes process... putting aside just the fact that it would be the equivalent of pre-watershed show on network television in America. There's just a lot more creative freedom in what we call cable, or pay television. Sky, things like that. There's just a lot more creative freedom, because they're not worried about selling advertising. The model is different, they're based on subscriptions, just who signs up to their show, so they're willing to take more risks.

MS: So you don't have to have a cliffhanger to get them to come back next week?

DSG: No, no.

Question: I wanted to ask you what your experience was as a writer in the games world, and how you see that art form evolving? Reading the reviews of *Grand Theft Auto V* last week there was a lot of talk about the characters, about the story arc, and it felt that was a new step forward, so how you do see that medium going?

DSG: I'm a gamer, I do consider it an art form. It's a nascent art form though. The film industry has been around for more than a hundred years, and really modern video games have been around for twenty, twenty five years, something like that. So if you compare it that way, from medium to medium, the games industry is still in its fledgling days. But I do think the narratives are becoming more complex, and I think the games industry is realising they have to.

It was interesting, because they sought me out for *Black Ops*. On the one hand they wanted the guy who worked on *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, they wanted to be able to put that on the game box.

But on the other hand they recognised that, it's interesting, technology has been driving the narrative in games because as the CG in motion capture made it look more realistic, it put more of an onus on the game makers to make the dialogue that they're saying feel more realistic, because suddenly they aren't just eight bit pixel characters uttering things.

It doesn't matter what they say when they're eight bits to a certain extent, but if they look almost photo real, it matters. And more and more the games industry is sort of realising that.

MS: You said it's more like writing television than movies...

DSG: Writing for games is more like writing for television, because each level is sort of like an episode. It kind of has a beginning, middle and an end. And then if you do something like the second *Black Ops*, that I did, where we had branching narratives, it's not even linear. Literally, based on the decisions you make, I think we had something like seventeen or eighteen different endings, so that was a really interesting process as well.

It was very complicated, we had to come up with a flow chart, if A then B then C kind of thing. That was fun to work on too. And also interesting because that first game came out and did more money than *Avatar*, so it was kind of incredible to work on something like that, and then the second one did the same again. It was bigger than *The Dark Knight* or *Man of Steel* will ever be.

MS: *Grand Theft Auto* made eight hundred million on its first day, which is just astonishing.

Question: It's been rumoured that you would be working on a *Metal Gear Solid* script....

DSG: That one's really simple. No. I like *Metal Gear Solid*, but no I'm not involved.

Questioner: The second half of that question is there's been a number of video games that have been adapted to the big screen, but none of them have ever seemed to work convincingly. I was wondering if you had an opinion on why they didn't work?

DSG: I do, I do. I think there's only really been one successful video game adaptation, and that was probably *Tomb Raider*. Whether or not

you think it was a good movie, it was successful financially. But I think that's probably the only one that was really financially successful. I think the reason is actually pretty simple, that most good video games are about immersive environments. If it's a first person shooter you are the character.

Most video games – and this is changing – tend not to have strong characters. If you think about video games you think about how cool that level was, or how amazing... often gamers will talk about 'that was so cool when I did this...or I did that'. You realise if you're adapting an environment or a milieu into film, the video game actually does a better job of it. The film will never do as good or as immersive a job as the video game. Once we start seeing video games that have more memorable characters, then I think you'll see more successful video game adaptations. We'll see if *Assassin's Creed* works, that seems like the best candidate right now.

MS: I assume the *Resident Evil* films make money, since there are five of them.

DSG: They do, I will say that. But I think they get a pass because they're doing the zombie survival horror thing. I like the games and I like the movies. Alice is a super amazing character.

Question: David I was just wondering, in your career to date, what you would think of as your biggest challenge and indeed your proudest moment?

DSG: I don't know that they would necessarily be the same. You know I'm really proud of *Batman Begins*, because I felt like we'd changed comic book films. Chris really wanted to make something that was reminiscent of *Lawrence of Arabia* and things like that. And I'm proud of *Man of Steel*. It's really hard to adapt Superman. He hadn't been cool on film for a long time, and even though the film was controversial, interestingly enough I've had more people come up to thank me for that film than even the Batman films. So I'm proud of that, and I also think *Man of Steel* was definitely the hardest script I've ever written.

I remember getting the job by saying I'm going to do a first contact story, and then sitting down to write it and just being utterly paralysed for a week or two, because I just thought 'what the fuck had I done?'. I wrote 'Exterior: Krypton, day' and then I was just 'fuck!' That's where I said, okay, and then I wrote 'Exterior: Philadelphia, day' so I thought I'd do that first to see if it worked.

MS: And is it true you came up with the idea to do Superman while you were stuck on *The Dark Knight Rises*?

DSG: That is true, here's an argument for multitasking. Chris and I were working on the story for *The Dark Knight Rises*, and we were just utterly blocked, and he said 'let's just part ways for a week and see what happens'. I just went into my office, I go into my home office even if I don't have an idea, I'll still make myself sit there during those hours. I sat there and sat there, trying to figure out what the hell to do on *The Dark Knight Rises*.

And because all writers procrastinate I started reading some Superman comic books instead, and then just spent two days writing Superman ideas, even though someone else was working on a Superman movie. I came back after a week and Chris said 'so, have you cracked that problem with *The Dark Knight Rises*?' I said 'no', he said 'what have you been doing?' I said 'I have this idea for Superman,' and because Chris also likes to procrastinate he said 'okay, what is it?' I told him and he said 'that's really cool, I like that idea'.

And this never happens, but he called up the head of the studio and said 'Goyer's just told me an idea for Superman, I don't care what else you're working on, I want us to come in and pitch it to you,' and then he hung up the phone. He said, 'do you mind if I produce it?' I said 'are you kidding me? sure it's great'. Then we went in and suddenly they weren't doing the other movie, and we were doing this movie.

Question: Regarding that period between *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Man of Steel*, when it was announced that you and Christopher Nolan were doing a Superman film – and that was announced before the final Batman film came out – I think we all got excited at the prospect of crossover, and the possibility of Nolan's Batman universe combining with the *Man of Steel* one. I was wondering if that was in the

back of your mind, if ever there was an intention to have those two worlds connect in terms of actors crossing over, and uniting those two worlds.

DSG: No, I know it sounds strange given that I've been involved in both, but Chris made it very clear... also strange that Chris was involved in the other one. He made it very clear that he wanted those three Christian Bale Batman movies to stand alone and be their own things. So I knew there was no chance whatsoever that that version of Batman would ever cross over with Superman.

But then when we were making *Man of Steel*, Zack is more of a comic book geek, as I am. So we couldn't help ourselves and we thought it would be cool to throw in some little, what they call Easter Eggs, in *Man of Steel*. So in the back of our heads when we were doing *Man of Steel* we thought it would be cool to start making this a shared universe.

MS: Didn't you once write a Batman meets Blade mash up?

DSG: No....

MS: As a child? I thought you did.

DSG: Oh yeah, as a kid sure, but that doesn't count.

Question: You said about how many writers are turning to TV because you can flesh out a character's story over more than two hours, but with things such as Harry Potter and the Marvel cinematic universe, where characters are now around for more than two hours, do you reckon that films are likely to start copying TV in that respect? And do you reckon it's a good thing?

DSG: Well yes, that does happen and obviously I've been involved in a couple of those situations. But those are rare, and the other thing is you don't know that a film is going to have a sequel. But with a TV series you know that you're at least going to have a first season because that's just the nature of the business.

I also think that, having been involved in many sequels, and this is the one thing that Chris really hammered in, and it's a little different from what they're doing at Marvel, but we always approached those films and even *Man of Steel* as if that were the only film. Remember when I was talking about not adhering to rules that were outside the narrative? Chris and I don't like to work, assuming you're going to get a second film.

We don't like to work that way because then we feel we're not being truthful to the narrative that we're writing. So all three of those Batman films – obviously the last one, but the first two were written as if there was not going to be another film. Even *Man of Steel*, it does end in a way where he puts on the glasses and says 'welcome to the Daily Planet....' and it could end, and it's done.

Chris and I have always felt that if you have a good idea then you should use it in a film. We don't like to do what we call sequel bait. Because it's incredibly rare that you know, the Harry Potter situation is a very rare situation, that you know you're going to have other films. Even recently where they plan on having other films, there was recently an adaptation of *The Mortal Instruments* that didn't do as well as they thought, and so now it's question whether or not they're going to do another one.

MS: So, who came out of that open pod that's in the Fortress of Solitude in *Man of Steel* then?

DSG: Well you see that's the part that I can't help myself. He walks into this spaceship, and there's four cryogenic pods, and there are three desiccated skeletons. And one of them's open. It's funny because almost everyone involved in the movie didn't notice that. I pointed that out to Chris, in fact they built the set but they hadn't left the open pod. I pointed that out and he said 'oh yeah, I just somehow read right past that. Who is that?' I said 'I don't know, it's just cool'. It's a cool question, I can think of a lot of possibilities, and I've got ideas.

We don't need to know if there's going to be another film, but I think that's kind of cool to just leave some.... if you're really paying attention you're like 'wait, this ship crashed eighteen thousand years ago. Does that mean a Kryptonian got out eighteen thousand years ago and was walking around and doing stuff?' Maybe that person is the genesis of Hercules or Gilgamesh, or I don't know what.

We did something like that in the film where... there was another moment where he's helping on an oil rig fire and he gets blown into the ocean and these two whales see him in the water. That was in the script, even before Zack came on board. The studio and everyone kept trying to cut it. They said 'why? We have to do these CG whales, and it's expensive... why is it there?'

I said, 'I don't know, it's a vibe, I don't know. The animals know he's the one, the chosen one. I don't know, it's *The Lion King*'. But sometimes it's important to just do stuff because. Even in a big, giant movie like that.

Question: You showed a scene from *FlashForward* and you said that couldn't be done in a film...

DSG: I mean perhaps it could be done...

Questioner: I just wondered if there was a particular reason for that? And what do you see as the biggest difference between TV and film in terms of writing.

DSG: One of the biggest differences is that you have to write a beginning, a middle and an end in two hours, so it's incredibly compressed. With television, if you're doing serialised television, it's open ended and you can have characters, like in *Breaking Bad*, go from being a protagonist to an antagonist. It's very difficult to do that in film, if you've only got two hours. You can have characters grow and change, you can have characters surprise you. Even in *Da Vinci's Demons* we had a secondary character and we had scripted and filmed his death scene in episode six, and then we saw the cut of episode three in which it just so happened that that actor had had more to do in that episode. He was really good, so we un-killed him.

We filmed this scene in which he didn't die, and then we said 'great, you're going to be in season two' and his agent said 'great, we're going to renegotiate'. We said 'hold on, we actually have the film of where we killed your guy's character, so.... you really don't have us over a barrel'. But that kind of stuff doesn't happen in film. And the other thing that happens in television that's very different is there is a feedback loop between the audience and the filmmakers.

I mean, it's a delayed response, but if you're lucky enough to be still making your show after people have watched it or consumed the DVD, we're not immune to what's going on. You listen, there's a feedback loop, and certain characters rise to the surface that might not have. That can't happen in film, because you make it and it's done, and it goes out to the audience and there's no feedback loop with the audience.

MS: I'm afraid I must bring this to an end. So please put your hands together and thank David Goyer.

APPLAUSE

DSG: Thank you.