



GDC

March 21-25, 2022
San Francisco, CA

How to Run (and Survive) a Writers' Room

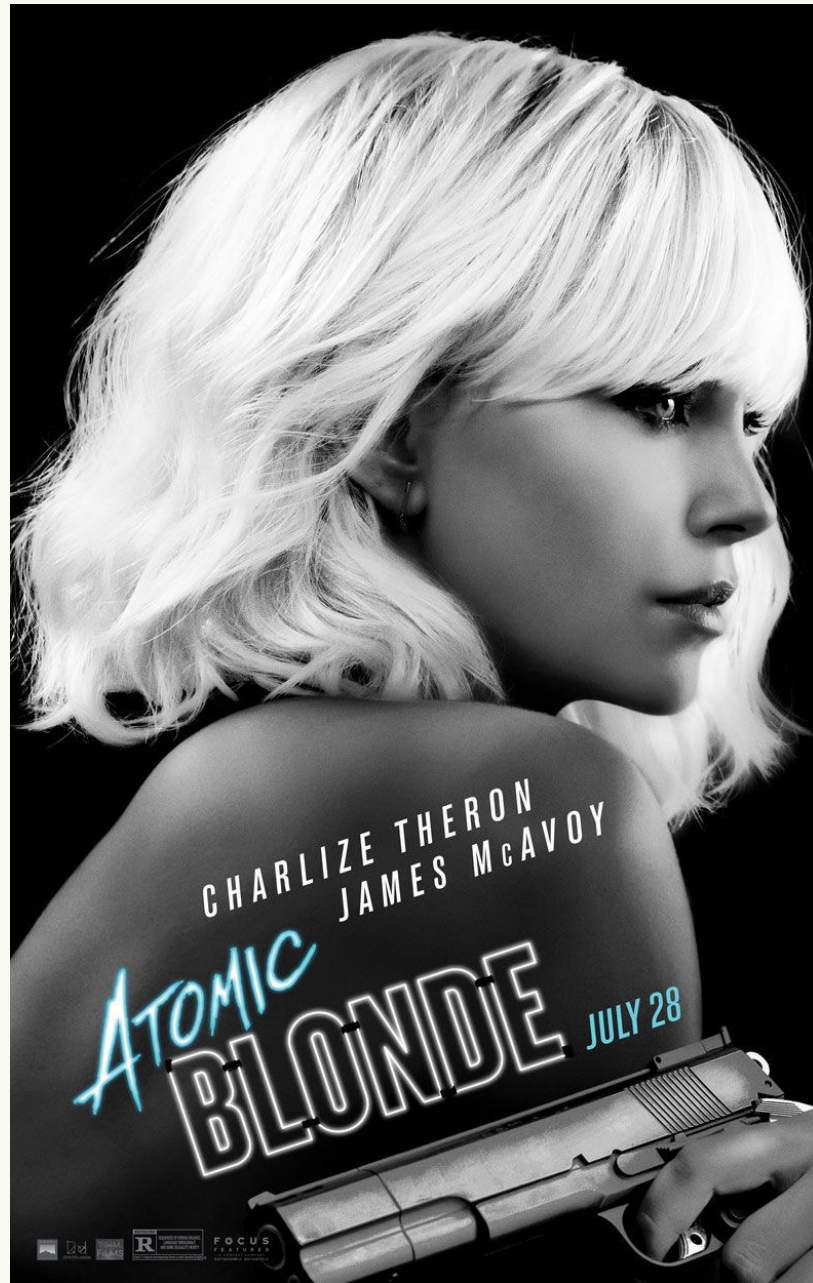
Antony Johnston

@AntonyJohnston

#GDC22

Who am I?

Who am I?



Who am I?



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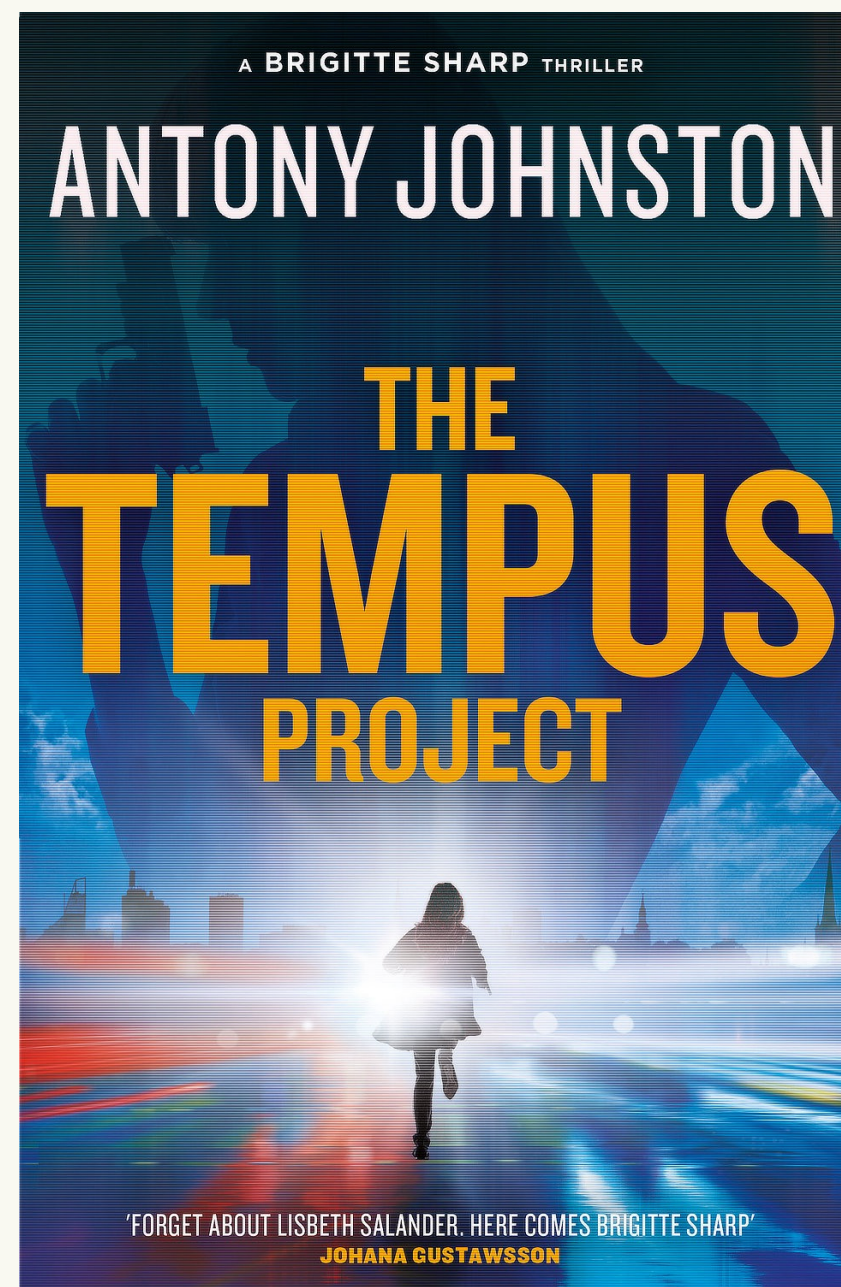
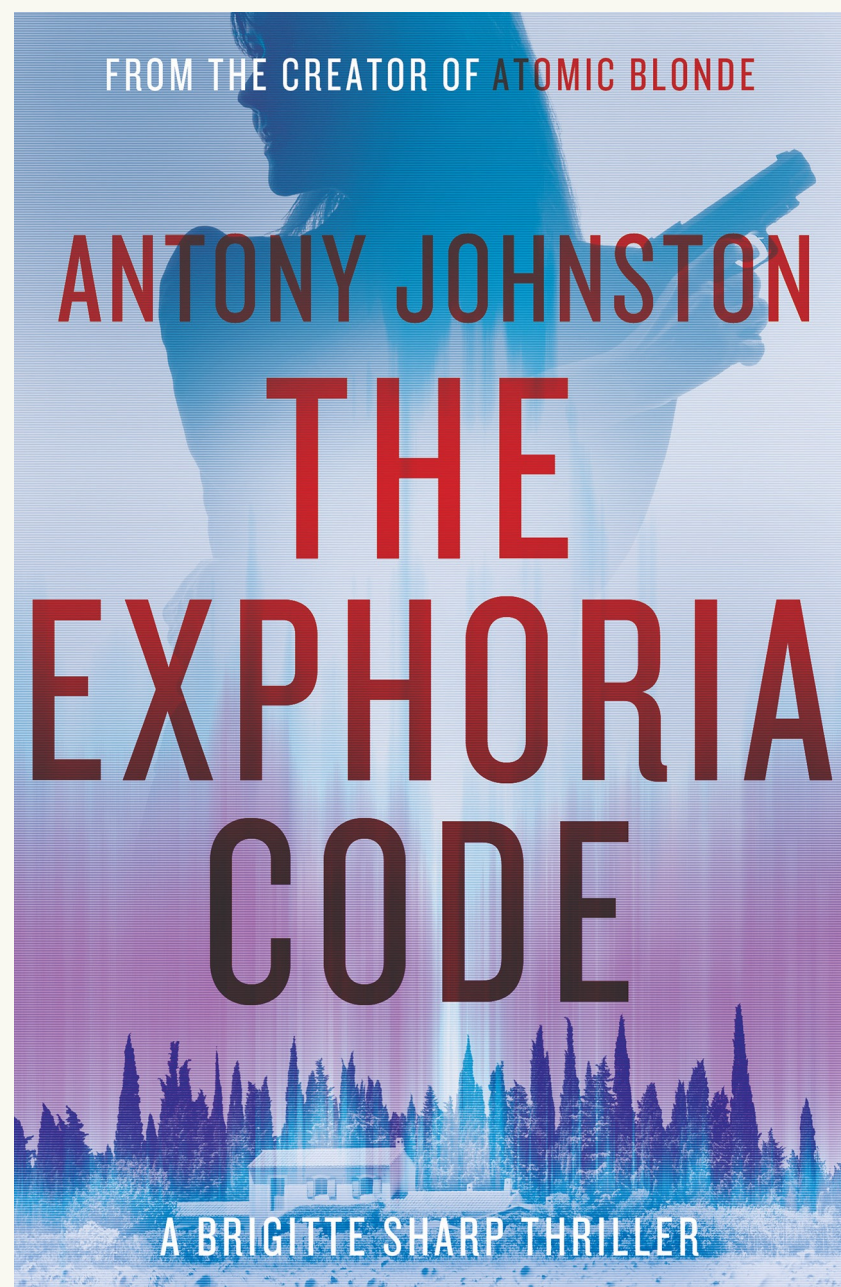
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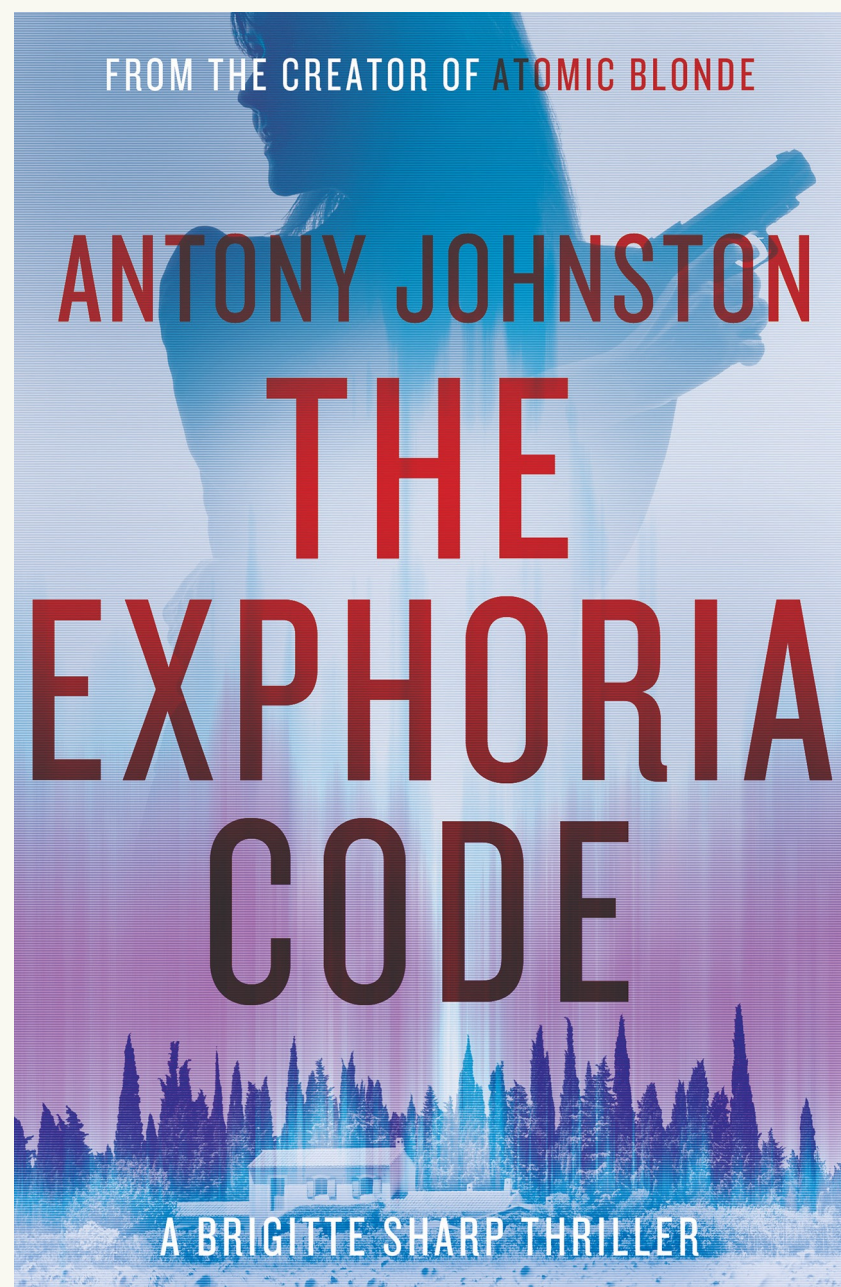
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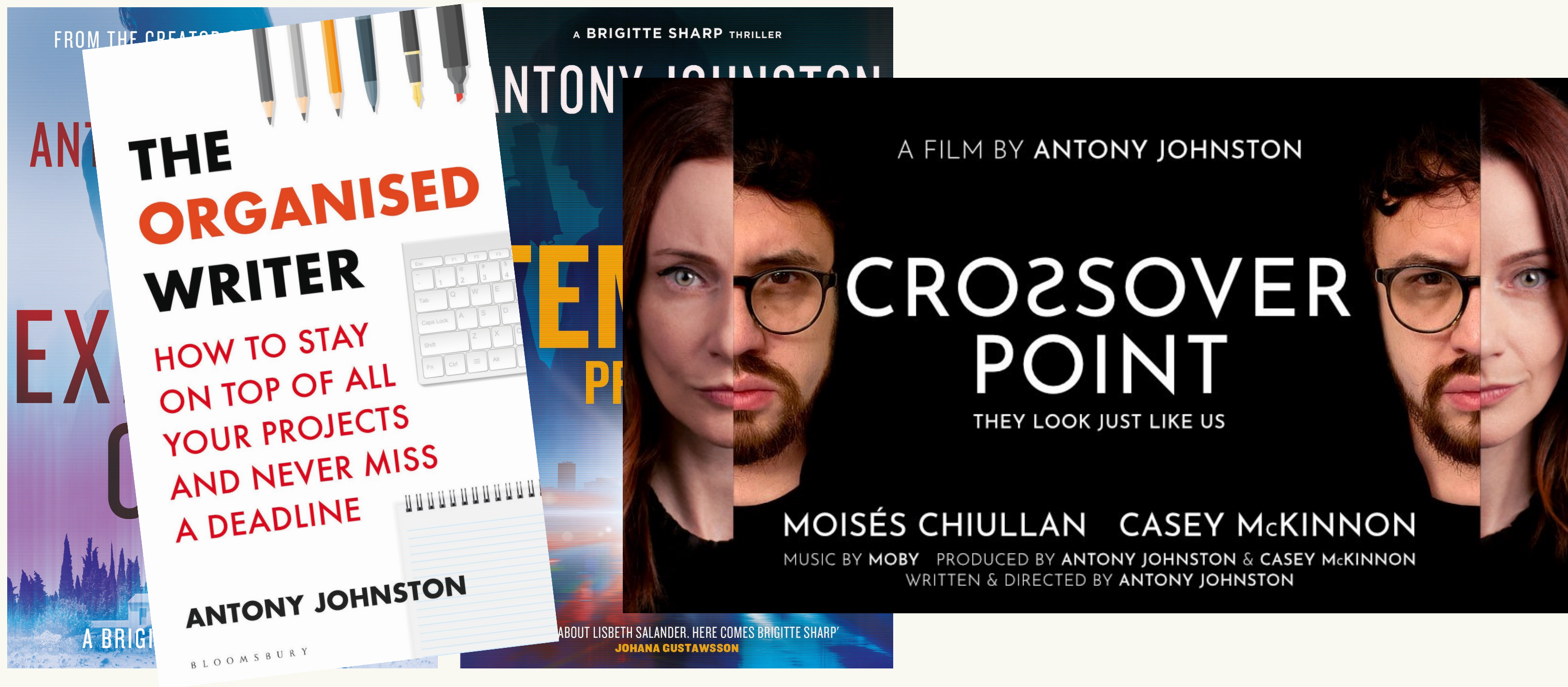
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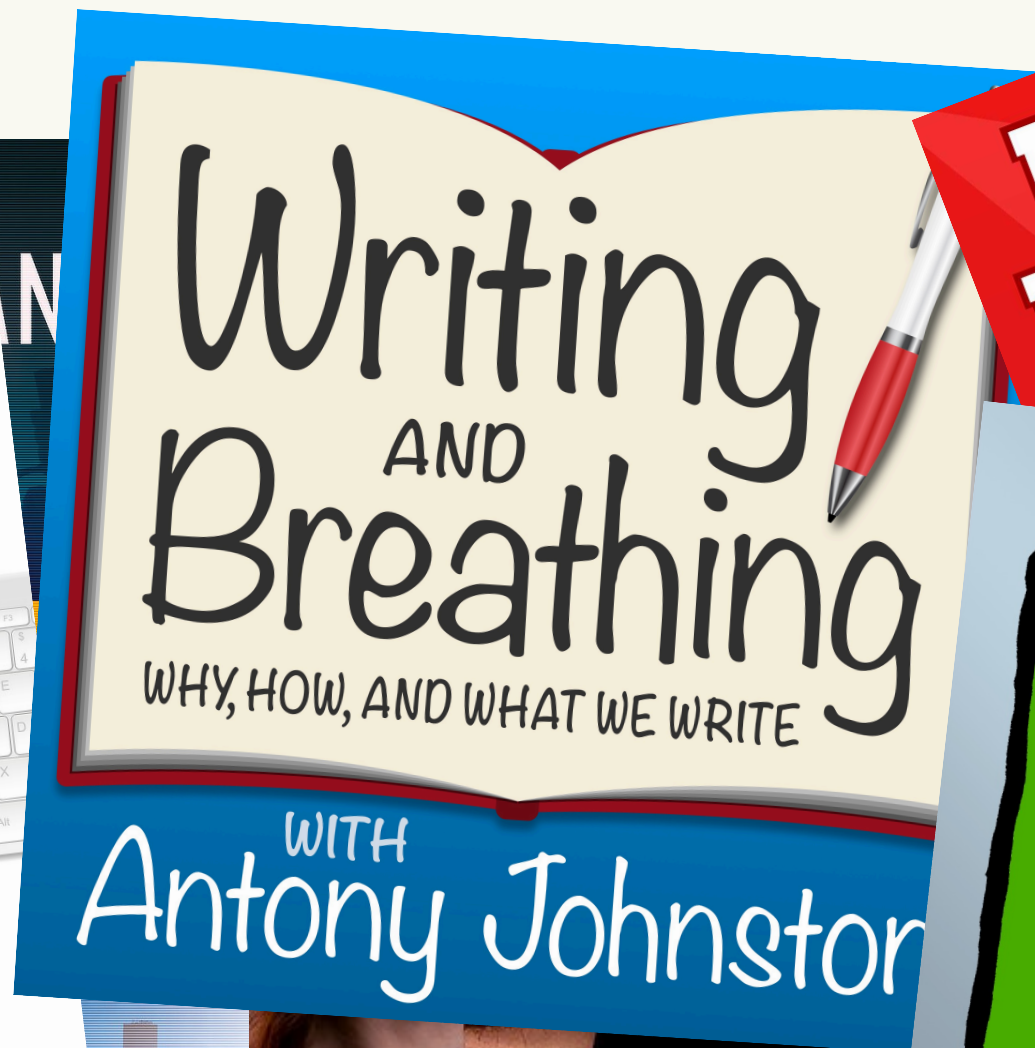
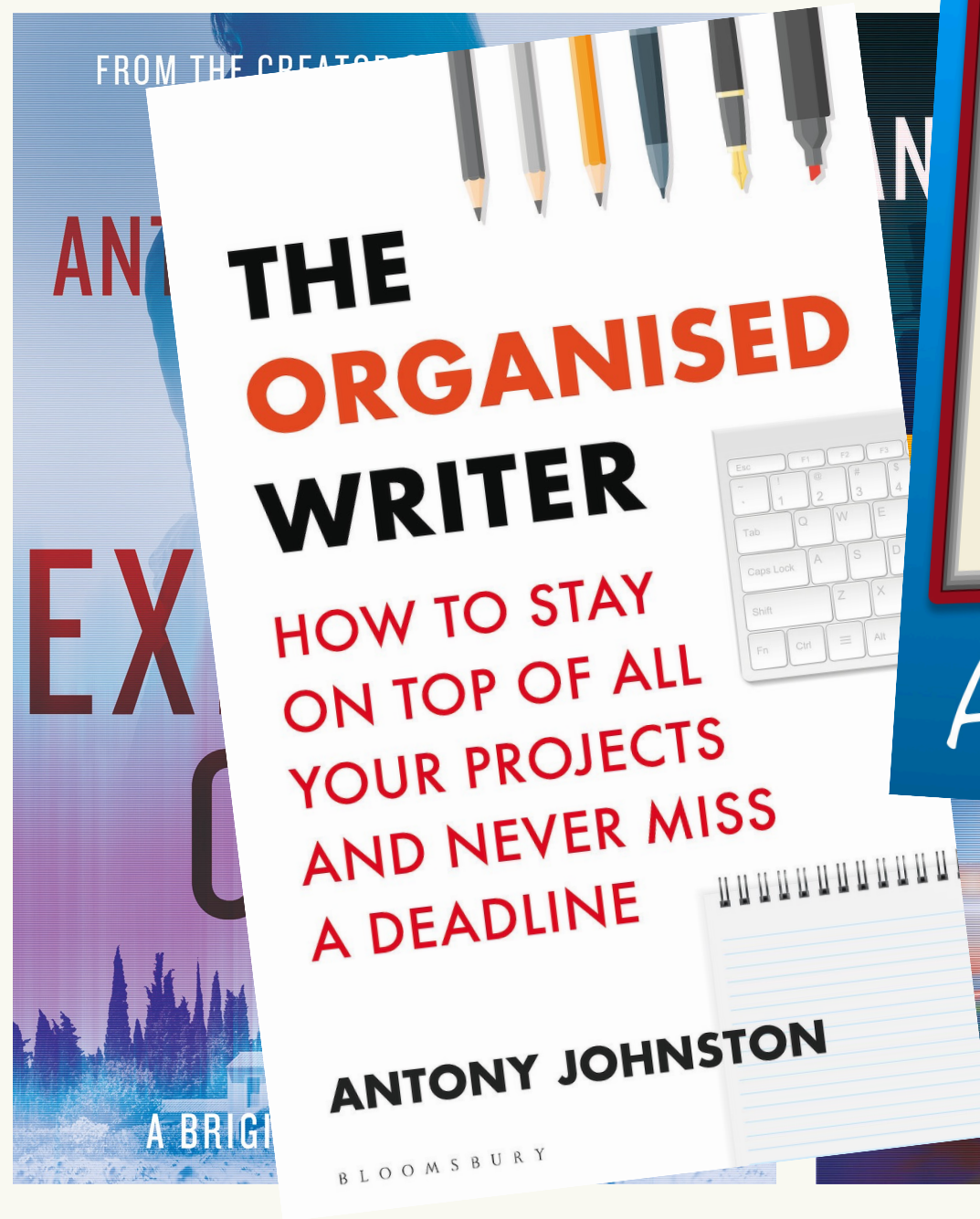
Who am I?



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Who am I?



. . . Don't be a dick.

What is a Writers' Room?

Aims of the Room

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- Assemble a staff of good writers
- Create a space for ideas to flourish
- Encourage collaborative brainstorming
- Produce consistent, unified material
- Meet the producers' needs

**1. Assemble a staff
of good writers**

Hiring the Room

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Diversity = Better Work

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- Diversity of Experience (how long in games?)

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Hiring the Room

Diversity = Better Work

- Diversity of Experience (how long in games?)
- Diversity of Résumé (what types of games?)
- Diversity of Approach (how do you work?)
- Diversity of Personality (can we get along?)

2. Create a Space for Ideas to Flourish

Running the Room

Running the Room

- **Establish ground rules**
 - Nobody stands on ceremony
 - Don't wait for good ideas
 - My virtual door is always open
 - Don't be a dick

Running the Room

- **Establish ground rules**
- **Be the visionary... or a proxy**

Running the Room

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- **Short daily check-ins**

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Running the Room

- **Establish ground rules**
- **Be the visionary... or a proxy**
- **Short daily check-ins**
- **Know your goals**
- **Be the loremaster**
- **Online collaborative inbox**
- **Direct and communicate clearly**

**You're not a mind-reader,
and neither are your staff**

3. Encourage Collaborative Brainstorming

Breaking Story in the Room

Breaking Story in the Room

- **Assign a note-taker**

Breaking Story in the Room

- **Assign a note-taker**
- **Stay on target**

Breaking Story in the Room

- **Assign a note-taker**
- **Stay on target**
- **Stand back**

Breaking Story in the Room

- **Assign a note-taker**
- **Stay on target**
- **Stand back**
- **Encourage the quiet ones**

Breaking Story in the Room

- **Assign a note-taker**
- **Stay on target**
- **Stand back**
- **Encourage the quiet ones**
- **Quit while you're ahead**

4. Produce Consistent, Unified Material

Produce Consistent Material

Produce Consistent Material

- **Play to strengths**

Produce Consistent Material

- **Play to strengths... *and* throw curveballs**

Produce Consistent Material

- Play to strengths... *and* throw curveballs
- To rewrite, or not to rewrite?

Produce Consistent Material

- Play to strengths... *and* throw curveballs
- To rewrite, or not to rewrite?
 - Be the guardian

Produce Consistent Material

- Play to strengths... *and* throw curveballs
- To rewrite, or not to rewrite?
 - Be the guardian
 - Show your edits

Produce Consistent Material

- Play to strengths... *and* throw curveballs
- To rewrite, or not to rewrite?
 - Be the guardian
 - Show your edits
 - Don't be a credit hog

5. Meet the Producers' Needs

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- Your producers and you

Meet the Producers' Needs

- Your producers and you
- Represent the writers' room

Meet the Producers' Needs

- Your producers and you
- Represent the writers' room
- Represent the producers

“Defend your ideas vigorously...”

**“Defend your ideas vigorously...
but recognize when someone else
has a better idea.”**

Q: Is it Worth the Money?

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(duh)

It's cheap.

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AAA:

- **4 veterans x 1 month = 80 working days @ \$50-60k**

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AAA:

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- **4 veterans x 6 months = 450 days @ \$300k**

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Is it worth the money?

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- 4 range of xp x 6 months = 450 days @ \$200-250k

Indie/AA:

- 3 varying exp x 4 2-day weeks = 24 days @ \$30k

What's in it for us?

Look to the Future

Thank You

@AntonyJohnston

And if you don't believe me...

Javier Grillo-Marxuach

(Lost, Dark Crystal, Middleman, lots more)

Twitter: @OKBJGM

Podcast: 'Children of Tendu'

Treatise: The Eleven Laws of Showrunning

Thank You

@AntonyJohnston