Learning 3-act structure elements from watching films

For screenwriters who write intuitively

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my pocket guide FILM, TV & MEDIA

Introduction

Have you ever noticed, when you are watching a movie, how your emotions vary as the story unfolds? How you're immediately hooked in the first few minutes of a film? Or maybe disappointed? You often wonder what's going to happen to the characters--a feeling that's innate. And while you may not be able to consciously analyse all the writing techniques while you're watching the fim, it doesn't mean that they're not there.

In this guide, we will take a very original approach in teaching you the elements that compose the 3-Act Structure of most screenplays. We will use the emotions that you experience when watching movies and apply a sort of "reverse engineering" to understand the process and techniques used by the screenwriters to create those emotions.

This guide is dedicated to screenwriters who write intuitively; those who desire to learn more in-depth writing techniques to structure their scripts without compromising their inherent creativity. By leveraging knowledge built over time by watching hundreds of movies, screenwriters can create a significant advantage for themselves when it comes to writing their own script.

Curtains up

It's important to note that there are many arguments against the 3-Act structure as one can find films that don't adhere to a classic structure. However, if you look at the 3-Act structure on a higher level, every story has a beginning, middle and end (even if the end may be ambiguous).

Let's take a look at the first 20 minutes of a film.

Assuming that you are watching a movie whose genre is the style you like to write, if you lose interest after a few minutes, it means the movie hasn't hooked you, that the story doesn't contain enough elements to grab your attention or interest. On the other hand, the opposite is equally true. If you're hooked after a few minutes, it means that it fulfills the elements you need to keep watching.

So what are these triggers that are in the beginning of a movie designed to hook you into the story and make you want to continue watching?

Here are the 4 main elements you will find in the first 20 minutes of any movie:

A catchy **opening scene/sequence**.

This sets the tone of the movie and characters. By the end of the scene or sequence, you'll be saying to yourself that