

WHAT MAKES A ROMANTIC MOVIE SCRIPT

By Sally J. Walker

Men and women don't agree on what constitutes romance. That's a given. However, they do agree that a degree of attraction and the concept of a satisfying relationship are essential for romance to exist.

In the world of film making, when the words "romantic elements" are used to describe a movie or a script, the audience/reader expects to encounter entertaining escapism, but a successful relationship despite the story trials.

For a romance to be credible there must also be strong, dynamic Male and Female leads, otherwise "Who cares!" Consider the concepts of Alpha = Dominant/Physical and Beta = Sensitive/Intellectual. Sociologists and anthropologists have mapped the perpetuation of the species based on Alpha males seeking Beta females. However, I contend that in today's society audiences/readers want to see the genders respond according to the challenges they face. Put that model into a romance and you've the Alpha-Beta Male being impacted or influenced by the female he wants. In turn the Beta-Alpha female is empowered by either or both the male and the environment to affect change in her circumstance. I'm not saying the female has to have the male to be empowered. I'm saying the male in a romance motivates her.

Without this Alpha-Beta and Beta-Alpha balancing act to create tension, there's no romantic story. Blatant actions contribute to either humor or threat, but the key to mounting romantic tension in any genre of movie is the element of subtle hints and gradual acceptance of the need for one another.

The final "stage" of a romantic story is where men and women usually diverge. Going back to the fundamentals of male-female instincts, males seek to procreate and females seek to nurture. The logical conclusion is males seek pleasure and females seek security. For a romantic story to "work" on screen, the romance needs to culminate in a committed relationship. If the male-female relationship disintegrates or is disrupted by the movie's end, it's NOT a successful romance. It's a dramatic tragedy. There's nothing wrong with that. It merely is not a satisfying romance.

Sexual tension of attraction is created with the concept of "Push-Pull." The characters keep pushing one another away, but cannot resist being pulled back together. The attraction and rebuttal can be woven into the plot events of any genre movie. Obviously, the more pages or screen time given to the relationship, the more important the romance is to the resolution of the movie's driving "Story Question." If a romance is to be an element in the plot's tension through complications, it deserves it's own plot line to assure continuity and satisfactory resolution. In other words, the writer must think where and when to appropriately insert the "Push-Pull."

Through subtle actions and succinct, pointed dialogue filled with innuendo, the writer must show both male and female. Feelings, awareness, denial, wanting, rejecting, needing. Both genders must weave their way through the relationship maze according to two things: their own motivations and the circumstance they face.

The writer must carefully plot insightful moments of revelation, skewed perspectives, and emotional triggers. An excellent means is the dramatic tool of "Repeat Images." Visual triggers instantly communicate with the audience and involve them in the building tension between the couple.

When the writer commits to weaving in "Romantic Elements," the separate plot line assures two things: the relationship will be shown gradually developing and it will be relevant to the main plot line. Holes in logic develop when the writer does not attend to plotting the romance. The

credibility of the relationship's commitment and culmination is lost if not shown developing because of the plot events and growing out of the motivations and values of the couple.

Writers have to decide what "kind" of movie they want to create. Who will the audience be? Is this a man's movie? A "Chick-Flick?" G-Rated family fare? High Concept box office hit? All of these can have romance incorporated into the plot, but with differing emphasis.

In a "Man's Movie," the romance must appeal to the essence of masculinity, that image of the procreator. When the romance is the main plot line, it must focus on the actions of the male lead, demonstrations of power, the physical images of prowess. If romance is inserted as a subplot then the scenes show sexual attraction, how the couple compliment or enhance one another's abilities, and the blatant need to be together.

Women's movies or "Chick Flicks" demonstrate the classic concept of the power of romance to influence life's events. With romance as the main plot, the pivotal events in the script show the pair as they meet, misunderstand, separate (whether physical or emotional), but ultimately commit. A romantic subplot in films directed to the female audience shows how the relationship impacts the main plot line, plays off subtle sexual tension, but, once again, ends in a commitment that solidifies the resolution for a nice "After Story" glow.

Moreover, even G-Rated family fare can use romance. After all, isn't procreation, the perpetuation of the species, the nurturing of children based on the male and female unit? That's the key to weaving sound relationship values into family-oriented movies. For this audience, a main plot romance needs to develop through communication, demonstration of values, and the ultimate commitment to the children and the family unit. Certainly day-to-day life can provide adequate resource material of that type of drama. When the romance is woven into a family story as a subplot is must function as a complication to the main plot line, delivered as nuance, and still contribute to the commitment to family in the end.

High concept box office hit type movies tend toward action and events which influence an entire culture or community. Therefore, a high concept romance as a main plot must function as the catalyst to the plot events, being as intense and dramatic as the powerful story it causes. The relationship is interwoven and interdependent with the catastrophic events changing the world around the couple. Obviously, a romantic subplot in a high concept movie acts as a complication to the main story line providing tension and choices for the main characters.

The bottom line: Never dangle the carrot of romantic possibilities, but use subtle visuals to tell the audience that romance can contribute to the wholeness of your "Bigger-than-Life" characters.

Sally has been a professional writer for sixteen years. Her plays are published by Canada's International Reader's Theater. Her first audio book was runner up to *Star Wars* for best audio in 1994 and will be reproduced soon as *To Touch, To Belong*. After contracting a second audio book and several novels with The Fiction Works, that company hired her as a copy editor and promoted her to Editorial Director in 2000. She is currently writing projects for a well-respected New York film producer while her agent markets several completed scripts. When time permits, Sally teaches an occasional writing seminar in the Midwest.

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