ENG 212
Advanced Screenwriting
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STORY OUTLINES #1

Select one of the following scenarios and write an outline for a short film. The story you’re to tell should be about 15 minutes long, roughly eight scenes. It must be a cinematic story.

Imagine how these kinds of stories happen, or might happen, in the worlds you know and draw upon those people and situations. Fight the urge – if you get it – to work with material out of your realm: prisoners of war, captains of space ships, etc…

The outline should be written in prose – not in screenplay format – and be two to three pages long. Though you aren’t writing an actual screenplay, remember that you are describing a story that will be filmed – so think in scenes and use the screenwriter’s tools. Give your outline a TITLE and write so we can see, hear, and feel it.

Note: Don’t write the phrases “Act I”, “Act II”, and “Act III” into your outline. Part of the challenge is to make these moments clear.

SUPERNATURAL SCENARIO

Act 1: We meet a character and learn his/her routine. Suddenly, this routine is broken by some supernatural occurrence (can be a person, a thing, an ability, anything…). You’ll find it easier if you choose something that strikes the character in an essential part of his/her routine – a baseball player’s ability to hit, a cook’s sense of smell, a psychiatrist’s hearing! The occurrence keeps intruding, making it impossible for the character to live his/her life. Act I ends when the character must do something about the occurrence.

Act 2: The character explores his options in the face of the growing problems caused by the supernatural force. What might he do? What are the ramifications? Act 2 ends when the situation becomes desperate and the character chooses what he must do.

Act 3: The resolution. What happens? The character has taken a stance and done what he must do. What are the consequences?
REBELLION SCENARIO

Act 1: Create a character that feels oppressed, repressed, bottled up. Get the routine of the character and make the audience feel the oppression. Choose an interesting, worthy source for the character’s feeling of oppression. Finally, the character can’t take it anymore and decides to rebel against his-her oppressor(s).

Act 2: The character plans and executes the rebellion. What are the complications and consequences of the character’s efforts? Act 2 ends with the rebellion.

Act 3: Resolution. What happens after the rebellion? What is the result of the fight? How is the character different?

CAPER SCENARIO

Act 1: We meet a character in his routine. He gets an idea to perform a caper. How did he get the idea? Who gave it to him…? You must show the germination of the idea, however it happens. Act 1 ends when he decides what he’s going to do.

Act 2: Preparations, planning… you must show a lot of detail here: the putting together of a gang, if a gang is necessary, the components of the caper, how will things go? What will work and what will get them caught? Detail and specifics. The second act ends when everything is in place.

Act 3: The carrying out of the plan. Did they make it or not? Is there an unexpected occurrence. A twist? The resolution…

ESCAPE SCENARIO

Act 1: A character is confined – some sort of imprisonment (psychological, physical). The character makes a decision to escape. Act 1 ends with his/her discovery of an opportunity for escape that sets up a deadline.

Act 2: The planning and preparations – obstacles and setbacks… e.g., steals a knife, sharpens it, only to have it found. The escape is supposed to happen at the end of Act 2 – that’s when the deadline arrives, but something screws up, and the character is forced to adjust his plan.

Act 3: Execution of the escape. What happens? Resolution. Did the character escape; is he okay? Was the escape a total success? A failure?