ENG 212
Advanced Screenwriting
Instructor: Michael Schilf

STORY OUTLINES #2

Once again, 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.

PRACTICAL JOKE SCENARIO

Act 1: We meet a person who is always the brunt of practical jokes. (You’ll probably want a scene in which he’s the victim of one.) Finally, he can’t take it anymore and decides to play a joke of his own. Who is the target: one of the perpetrators, a person more helpless than he, a particularly difficult victim that would impress his tormentors, e.g., a teacher, a boss, a cop? Act 1 ends when he makes the decision to play the practical joke.

Act 2: The preparation and setting up of the joke – recruiting accomplices (if any), securing locations and resources for the joke, etc. This should be difficult: the scenes full of obstacles, surprises and feelings of anticipation. We should hope that he’s going to do it and fear, vividly, that he might not be able to pull it off. The second act ends when the joke is all set to go.

Act 3: The resolution and repercussions of the joke. If you’ve prepared us well for this joke, you do not necessarily even have to show it. But if you choose this route, you must have made what might happen so clear that we can imagine the joke exactly. What are the results for the joker? This can be made surprising, e.g., a twist – the joke has some undesired (not necessarily negative) effect.
REVENGE SCENARIO

Act 1: A character experiences some offense. He feels an overwhelming need for revenge. What is the motive for revenge? What has been offended: his pride, his sense of dignity, his professional reputation? You must know the character’s Achilles heel. (Think of people whose buttons you know how to push). Who is his target: a customer who has publicly insulted his cooking, a painter whose mural sized portrait of the character is less than flattering? And what does the character want to accomplish – specifically? The first act ends when he makes the decision to act.

Act 2: The preparation and setting up of the revenge – recruiting accomplices (if any), securing locations, equipment, etc. This is the meat of your story – where we see how determined and resourceful your character is. Make it hard for him to set up the revenge – lots of obstacles and surprises. And make us anticipate the outcome – we should be dying for the revenge to happen. The second act ends when the act of revenge is all ready to go.

Act 3: The resolution and repercussions of the revenge. What are the results for the person seeking revenge. This can be made surprising, e.g., a twist – the revenge has some unexpected (not necessarily negative) effect. How do you want us to feel about the character’s efforts? All in vain? Misguided? Justified?

REVOLT SCENARIO

Act 1: We meet a character who is submissive, always willing to compromise. It is seemingly impossible that he would revolt. Then something hits him. Something happens to change his view of his situation: a person, an occurrence, a death. The first act ends when he or she realizes the situation he’s been in – all the compromises, all the unrealized ambitions or dreams.

Act 2: He can’t take it. Present the routine as still going on, but it is becoming progressively more difficult. At every turn that he would normally have compromised, he feels more keenly the desire to break free. Finally, the character’s emotions take over, and he makes a declaration of what he’s going to do.

TRIP WITH DESTINATION SCENARIO

Act 1: A moment of routine is suddenly broken by a trip. Introduce a character in his routine. Something happens that compels him to take a trip somewhere. Establish the necessity — the strong need for the trip and the destination. Also establish what the character expects to find when he arrives. Act 1 ends with departure. (Plant some weaknesses of the character — things that will challenge the character on his trip. Does your character have bad eyesight? A fear of high speeds? The wrong outfit?)

Act 2: Three stops along the way, each with a new set of people or different circumstances, each increasingly dramatic. Each stop makes it harder for the character to get where he is going, until finally, the third stop, the audience figures that it’s impossible for the character to make it...

Act 3: The character does make it and the arrival should be surprising, not what the character expected… Some twist. Our character has learned something along the way. He now views his earlier expectation in a different light.

LOVE SCENARIO

Use the character you developed in the Character Development Assignment #2 or create a new character who is unable to love, and write an outline based upon the following scenario.

Act 1: Get your character in his/her routine. The “point of attack” is the presence of another character whom your character realizes is a present danger to his/her isolation, e.g., he or she is falling in love. He’s forced to love. Your character feels threatened. (Note: the new character must be REAL to be able to break down the defenses of your character.)

Act 2: Your character fights with the realization that he’s in love, fights the feeling. The other character continues to pursue your character and so hampers his attempts to block the feeling of love. The other character may be motivated by love, by curiosity, by the desire for a job, whatever — but it must be specific. Finally, something must be done; they can’t go on the way they’ve been. We have the confrontation between the two.

Act 3: The resolution. What happens? Is your character able to change? Or does he lapse back into his shell?