

Horror feature 2019

Character

Conflict

Clarity

Protagonist, Settings, - forest, cabin,

Length 90 pages.

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The best horror stories grab something and make it – you guessed it – *truly horrifying*. That's why so many horror stories involve PENETRATION and PREGNANCY. Both these things are okay, even pleasurable and desirable in the "proper" context, but out of that can be VILE. That's why the facehugger and chestbuster in ALIEN is so effective, even 35 years later: it's VISCERAL because it's a deadly violation

BREAK NEW GROUND. They will take something "pre-sold" like murder or aliens and then TWIST it. Crucially, they'll do this "left of the middle" though, rather than total "left field" though!

effective characterisation

1974 – 1980 (The Shinning under 2hr length.

The 'Good Writing' Trinity

I've been working with writers a LOOOOOOOONG time now. Over the years I have started to notice patterns in the projects that tend to get notice from agents, producers, filmmakers and publishers. These projects that get notice have just THREE elements that tend to mark them out as a good bet for development (and hopefully, production or publishing):



That's right! Just 3 Elements:

1) Concept

Not so long ago, writers were insistent it was 'the execution that counts'. Thankfully, those days seem to be fading away. More and more writers know their stories have to be ROCK SOLID at concept level ... This is not only because pitching is so important, but because [without a bombproof concept, your draft will go wrong](#).

But writers are not out of the woods yet. Too often, writers' concepts are just not good enough. But what does THAT mean ... Well, a good concept is 'the same, but different' to what has gone before it. Unfortunately, too many writers concentrate on the SAME and not enough on the DIFFERENT, leading to samey stories that feel generic or worse, completely rehashed.

HOW TO AVOID THIS: Totally immerse yourself in stories LIKE your concept. Don't just check out your medium – look at all of them: movies, TV shows, novels. Identify the threats versus and the opportunities, by working out what is the SAME as yours and how yours can DIFFER. Read who is making what, plus find out what the 'buzz' is. Talk to any pro writers, agents, publishers, filmmakers etc you know, or follow them on social media.

2) Characters

It's said that good characterisation is the most important thing in any script or novel. (To be honest I think good plotting is just as important, but you certainly do not want to skimp here). Your target audience needs to connect with your characters, but this does NOT mean going overboard with backstory or obsessing over what your characters had for breakfast.

Craft-wise, there are just 2 things that count when it comes to good characterisation. The first is motivation, ie. what characters need or want. Writers tend to understand 'motivation', [but forget about the second important thing: role functions](#). If writers don't know these two things inside out, their characters run the risk of being dull at best and even offensive at worst.

HOW TO AVOID THIS: Research! Role function covers WHO the character is; WHAT they do in the story and WHY. Key role functions are protagonist and antagonist, as well as secondary role functions like mentor, love interest, henchman, ally and so on. (**Note:** role functions should not be confused with tropes, which are recurring motifs such as Kickass Hottie, who may or may not be a protagonist or antagonist. More in my writing books, especially the one on [Diverse Characters](#)).

3) Structure

This is probably the one that 'kills off' most interest, the quickest. It's also the element I find writers do the least work on in terms of honing their craft. They may start off with good intentions and read books, do courses etc ... Or they may try to wing it! Alternatively, they may learn one medium's style really well, but then try to cram it into stories that need a different approach. As a result, this means [writers may fall into 'obvious' structure-related pitfalls](#). These include starting too early; 'running on the spot'; overly long scenes and page-counts; meandering drafts and overly hasty or contrived resolutions.

HOW TO AVOID THIS: Whatever the case, it boils down to this: [writers NEED to do more work on structure](#). You need to develop a vocabulary for how YOU see structure working. This means – you guessed it – more research. Read more than one book. Check out more than one visual or worksheet. Check out [plot breakdowns](#). Plus you also NEED to ensure they stay up-to-date and keep adding to their knowledge base all the time. You might find it boring, but it's 100% necessary. Sorry!

Last Points

So, good writing is the (obvious) end point here. So be honest with yourself:

- How good is your concept? Is it REALLY 'the same but different'? How's your logline?
- Do we know what your characters want (motivation) AND what they're doing AND why (role function)?
- Do you REALLY know how your structure works and why the story works out the way it does, or are you just hoping for the best?

If you can't answer the above questions honestly, without glossing over anything, then you need to do more before your script or novel is that considered fabled 'good writing'. Best of luck with your pitches and submissions!