

THE COMIC JOURNEY - Truby

Comedy poses a unique problem for anyone wanting to write a blockbuster. The studio has to be able to sell it outside the United States. Action stories and myth stories travel very well, because they are two genres based on a universal language. But comedy is notoriously stuck in its home of origin. What is funny in the U.S. may not cause a laugh in Germany, Italy and Japan.

Comic Journey gives you a number of advantages when trying to sell a comedy to the worldwide market. First, it lets you create the comedy out of the structure, not the dialogue. That's because it's using the storytelling strategy known as irony. Irony says that life is filled with failing to reach our goal or reaching a different goal than we intended. That goal is the spine of the story.

Why is this so valuable? Because dialogue is specific; structure is universal. Structure travels; dialogue stays at home.

A second advantage of the Comic Journey is that it gives you the benefits of the journey - such as story movement, heroic action, and character change - and adds the benefits of comedy - such as irony and laughter. This is a powerful and popular combination.

A third advantage of the Comic Journey is that it's an excellent way to make social commentary, since your hero encounters many different people from many strata of society on the route. That tends to give your comedy a stronger theme, which is always a good idea, and lets you people your story with a wealth of fun, quirky characters. That appeals to the parents, so they actually enjoy taking their kids out for those summer family films.

So how do you set up a comic journey? Begin by focusing on your hero. You have probably heard how important it is for comedy to come from character. In the Comic Journey, one of the ways you do that is to create a pompous person who encounters a harsh reality or a normal person who encounters pompous or insane people. Notice either way you get a comic contrast that allows you to drop the characters, to deflate them, throughout the script. This is crucial. Many movie comedies die after the first fifteen minutes because the essential comic contrast disappears.

Next, give the hero a goal that forces him/her to travel. This is the spine of the story and is the line on which you hang the comic encounters. Because the Comic Journey is inherently episodic, it's also a good idea to give this goal some urgency. The more intense the hero's desire line, the more comic encounters you can hang on the line without the line collapsing.

One of the best tricks for a great Comic Journey is to come up with a reason for the hero to take the family along for the ride. Again the episodic nature of the journey is your biggest problem. In the Comic Journey story, this quality comes from the succession of opponents your hero encounters along the way. Every time your hero meets and overcomes an opponent, that's a mini-story. Hence the episodic feel.

But if you bring the family along for the ride, the hero has an ongoing opposition that never goes away. You get a through line to the journey as well as characters other than the hero that the audience can get to know and invest in.

Above all, when writing the Comic Journey, make sure the hero's encounters create comedy, not just conflict. Laughs only happen when an inflated person is punctured. Structurally, there are only two ways for that to happen. A pompous person keeps running up against a harsh reality or a sane person keeps meeting and exposing a bunch of pompous or phony people. In every encounter, someone must be deflated or you are wasting the scene.

The Comic Journey is just one of hundreds of story techniques that you can use to be successful. The most important thing is to realize that success comes from mastering the craft. It takes a lot of work and a lot of study, but the rewards are tremendous.