

Ep #50: Catching Attention and Being Surprising

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This is the Script Reader Pro podcast, hands on advice, insider hacks and deeper discussions for the screenwriters who are serious about breaking into the industry.

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My goodness. What was that? On this episode we're talking all about catching attention and being surprising, that

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is so surprising I can't wait. So listen in.

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Hey everybody. This is Desiree, and this is the Script Reader Pro podcast. Thank you so much for joining us. You're welcome. Hi, Scott. Hi. How are you today? I'm good. How are you bright and chipper? Chipper, chipper.

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I'm Scott. I am desert husband, first of all, and second of all, I'm a screenwriter, and I am one of the team here at Script Reader Pro. Just so you know, what makes us different is our team are all working writers in different capacities over the years, and we just love helping other writers. So that's why we're here to educate you, pass on information to hopefully make you understand something because of the way it was delivered that you didn't quite understand it before. And then desert is here for pure entertainment value, because she doesn't necessarily like to talk about screenwriting,

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not necessarily,

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not with me. Anyways, I'll hear her talk to other people

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about it for three hours over a month. Yeah. At least, at least, at least, yeah, oh yeah. Plus all the other time that you're like, oh yes, and then this happened, oh yes, this did. And then

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yeah, but so, but see, it's funny, because now we'll, like, watch a movie or something. You're like, that was such great writing. I really liked how they did that, and I didn't notice that.

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And don't tell the listeners these things. It's true. Now this is supposed to stay within hours. You've learned. You've learned some of the stuff. I've learned some I some of the stuff. I'm just like, it's still over my head, but I still show up. You do because there would be no podcast without me. Let's just That's true. There would not be no one would be here. Scott, yes, this episode, yes, we're talking all about catching attention and being surprising. Yeah, surprising. Lot of surprises, don't you get You're such the you're such a big baby with surprises. If someone surprises you or jumping, no, that's a scare, honey. Scary being surprised or different. If someone said surprise, you jump.

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Well, if they scared me so. But I love surprises in TV and movies, is what I'm saying, and books and stories, right? Surprises like, there's nothing that gets you hooked more than what? Right? Yeah, yeah. So that's what we're talking about today, how to get people to pay attention and how to get people to feel surprised. But what do we usually talk about when we start?

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We usually talk about what we've seen lately, yes, and it kind of fits in really well with being surprised and catching attention, because we just saw this, and it is very surprising, yes and thrilling, actually, when I watched it, it's called wake up, dead man. Knives out one of the knives out series, right? Third, knives out movie. Okay, so when I watched it, uh, investigator, Detective dude, Benoit Blanc, who I said, looks just like my uncle Darrell. Yeah, now that, now you're only gonna see, yes, does Daniel, Craig never looks like that, right in the first two movies. Very sharp. His like his suits, his hair, his face matched to that. So he was in bit of a mess, but long hair. And anyways, yeah, he looked, he does look like Uncle Darrell. I'll have to send this, to send him a screenshot of it. Well, then I'll have to send him this part of the podcast. Yeah, you should. And anyway, so I found it very interesting, because I thought this investigator dude is not that good, you know. And then you think, I have no idea, what is the point of him even being there? Yeah, he plays down a lot of time. Yeah, the police should just do their job. And then you find out he's a little

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smarter than every single thing he says has has a reason for there's a

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reason behind every single word, every single movement, every single choice. Yeah, there is a reason. And I find with these movies, these knives out movies, it always comes to fruition at the end. Yeah, and you think you figured it out, only to be surprised. Yeah, totally. And think, oh gosh, I did not have that even close to figure it out, right?

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Yeah, yep. So if you haven't seen it, pause the episode and go watch it, because we're gonna talk about some spoilers here, but yes, I loved it. Yeah, I did just, it's like, I really like smart storytelling when it's like, I'm paying attention to everything because I don't want to miss a single thing. Because movies like that are so much of a misdirection, right? Even him lead character,

he's saying something because he wants you to be looking this way or thinking it here, when he's he's trying to see what you're going to do over to do over there. But that's the thing I found interesting, though, is the first knives out was kind of a mixture between serious and light, right? Like the characters were light hearted on the train. No, that's So Desiree gets he's confused the Agatha Christie movies with the guy with the mustache. That he's parole. So that's murder on the orange Express. That's murder on I can't remember the murder at the castle, or whatever is the horror type one. Then that anyway. So two different series, but this is kind of like modeled after that. But the first one, yeah, it was in a mansion, and an old man died, and they tried to figure out, and there was, like, all the rich people who gets his money. Gets his money. That was the first one, called knives out. Second was called the Glass Onion, and it was on that island, and everyone went there, and, you know, it was someone died on the island who did it. That one was actually higher comedy. So that was a lot funnier. The main kind of villain, bad guy, he was ridiculous. So it was a lot more entertainment value is it was me designed to make you laugh. This one, I felt I was I was surprised, because the tone was so different. It was so serious, right?

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You know what? You know how I know I can't believe I'm gonna say this. You know how I know when there's great writing, yeah, yeah. Pretend I didn't say it. Okay? The fact that it was over two and a half hours long, and it did not feel like two and a half, oh, is that long?

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Yeah, yeah, it was good and kept you interested. But, yeah, watch it, because we are going to talk about, I have to talk about some stuff that was surprising, and why so, and why it worked, and why made us pay attention those kind of things. So gonna be talking about that. So I don't want to ruin the movie for I won't give it away and say who the HE WILL who the killer is. But yeah, just a note about this. So Ryan Johnston, who's that? It's funny because on our next episode, we are interviewing a writer. His name is Ryan Johnston, right. No, the writer of wake up dead man is Ryan Johnson. But anyways, so Ryan Johnson, so his first movie was looper, amazing movie. SO, SO GOOD TIME TRAVEL movie. Bruce Willis, anyways, fantastic. Sci Fi Crazy, right? You know how much I love those. I know, but it's so good. And then he then followed up and moved into directing the Star Wars movies, the newer Star Wars movies. And then when he departed from that, because a lot of people didn't like what he did with him, blah, blah, I enjoyed them, whatever he then came he was, like, doing knives out. I'm like, How is the guy who was like sci fi and Star Wars now doing like a murder mystery movie, right? And there's just wasn't sure how that was going to turn out. But you can tell that this guy is almost like a writer first, then director like he's so good at character choices, visualization and just the play with dialog and anyways, yeah, all of his characters are so

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different. He seems like he writes backwards.

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Well, for this kind of movie, I'm sure you would need to, right? You know

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what I'm saying? Though you know where you're going. There's no

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doubt about this anyways. So that's what we're talking we're gonna reference that movie a lot because it's just that's made me want to do this podcast about surprises, because it really did. So so that's what we're talking about today. So the first thing you want to keep in mind when you're writing a screenplay, because your first scene is your most important scene in your entire screenplay. And I always say, and you'll see a lot of the times you'll be like, the first scene in a script is so good, and then you keep going, and they're like, nothing's living up to that first scene I just read. You want to make like, I always say your first scene should be the best scene you've ever written in your life, the best scene in the script. And then your next scene should be the same you are. Then writing the best scene you've ever like it should get better, but your first page must hook your reader instantly, because they are thinking, Will, yeah, will the audience get hooked immediately? Okay, so the beginning of wake up dead man is so surprising and it gets your attention. It's a priest sitting at a table talking in voiceover, Oh, okay. A deacon of his church is talking to him and yelling at him, and you could tell he's just being rude to him, and this priest is listening. And then suddenly, what does the priest do?

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He punches the guy. He punches

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the guy in the face, yeah. And you're like, Okay, hang on, wait a minute. Why does it

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doesn't go together. It's exactly priest being a violent

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person punching someone in the face. Yeah. So it surprises you, because it subverts your expectations immediately. So here's a priest gonna be a good guy or whatever, maybe not, but you don't expect him to punch a parishioner in the face. So he punches in the face. And then we cut to a new scene where the priest is sitting there in the front of the in front of the bishop and others, yeah, and the, you know, he's telling his stories, swearing a little bit, forgets where he is, takes the Lord's name in vain. And you're just like, Okay, there's what's going on with this guy, right? It's surprising. And then it cuts to the next scene where that priest is talking to the bishop. Bishop comes out and the bishop, he's vulgar. He's even worse than the priest, right? Like, he's like, yeah, anyways, he's it just makes you go, Okay, I'm gonna enjoy this fun.

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It makes you think. Maybe priests and pastors can actually be humans, right?

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It definitely took them off of that altar, right, and brought them down,

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literally and figuratively. But listen, that's the thing with people. People are people before anything else. Yep, and people are broken. People are it goes to say whether your doctor a priest, whoever you are. And I think people forget a lot of times that we still function the same way as the next person.

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Example, doctors. People think doctors are like, I mean, okay, for your doctor, yeah, you're, you're obviously up there, right? You're, you're smart, you're intelligent, you're gifted, whatever. You wouldn't be in that position, especially like a surgeon, if you if you weren't the, you know, an elevated type of person for that field. Most people don't talk to like they get nervous around someone like that. They don't challenge them. They just sit there and they take their words for what they are, right? Desiree, Desiree, on the other hand, okay, so this is the thing, right? So Desiree has an entire team of doctors that she can text anytime she wants, because every doctor, specialist, surgeon that's ever done anything for her basically become friends with her. Yes, they highly respect her. She built rapport because she sees them as people. She talks to them as people. She challenges their choices. They'll say, Okay, we're gonna have to do this. And there's no, I don't think so, because I was thinking this, right? And and then, like, at first, they're offended, because doctors don't like to know, but doctors don't like to be told, right? Caught off guard, though, definitely caught off guard, because nobody does that,

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like my past, like my past doctor was just like, wow. You know, a lot of Yeah, yeah. And you don't expect that. They don't but the thing is, when you go and you go and you put them down on the same level as you so many things happen. You just

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build rapport. And I mean, not everyone could do I can't do that. You are a very special person. That way you build rapport. You have such charisma. Set 10 seconds into a conversation, people just want to talk to you and tell you everything about their lives, but they're people, and I think that's what this script does so well, is that every person in this script, whether they're a lawyer or a priest or a doctor, they all

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have flaws. They're just people, and they all have they all have flaws, and whether they always do, and

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whether you're like whether you're you believe in God or whatever you believe in or not, in this movie, it makes you realize this person, this priest, is struggling with his faith. And it's like he's he's he just doesn't know he wants, he thinks he's supposed to be this person. This is where God's led him, but he's this other kind of person, and that other kind of person keeps

contradicting who he's trying to be. So it makes you pay attention, and it's, it's subverting those expectations of what you think a priest would be

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and not in speaking in a larger context. Watching the first 10 minutes, I was like, Okay, so is this like a religious movie? Yeah, that was another surprising part. And then you quickly realize, no, this is not a religious movie. It has aspects, of course,

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around the church, what takes place in a church, yeah, the priests and but the the larger picture is not, no, it's the larger picture is about belief. Yeah, right, that that's the theme belief. Because every single character is dealing with some sort of belief they have about themselves and what they are meant to be, and they're challenging it, right? And that's overcome their flaws, yeah, and that's the great thing about and this is another good example, if you have a question of, How does theme work, the best thing you can do is find your theme and have every single character in the entire story be dealing with that theme. Because in this movie, every single character does, they all are dealing with what they believe their life should be, what they believe they should be, and and not quite meeting it, and they're lost, right? So it's very much, very, very well done. Great writing, as desert says, so that movie hooks you immediately. So things to think of in yours, right? Attention, especially these days, man, attention is not guaranteed, right? 1520, 30 years ago, you you probably had about 20 minutes to get someone to pay attention to something in a movie. Now you have seconds.

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That's because the whole movie industry has changed so much too, with technology and AI and what they can do on the screen, right? Well, and

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you never had a back button before, no, right? You You sat down watch them at home as you either rented it, you paid, paid for it, or you paid a lot of money to sit in the movie theater because there were no other options. You can't hit a back button, so you're stuck there.

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You also can't fast forward through commercials exactly like it's exactly the day it was walked it's on TV. And yeah, everybody waited for Friday night movie. Yeah.

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So you only have seconds now, because if someone isn't caught, caught in there, in a few seconds, they're hitting that back button and going the world. The way of the world has changed, yeah. And now readers have so many screenplays to read, if you don't hook them in those first couple pages, you're done. So you. It's not guaranteed. You have to earn it, post it note on your computer. Modern audiences decide immediately if they keep listening or reading. I found this. I've read this article a while ago about music, and they said, within five seconds of hearing a song, you'll know if you know if you like it true. Five seconds, yep. And and for

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me, it's the if it's a heavier, a heavier beat and faster paced, I'm on to the next one because I like the slow indie folk.

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But you'll know, like, you'll hear that guitar chord or the piano or the melody or something, it'll be like, ooh, like you just know, right? And so it's turning that way with books, with scripts, with with watching things, you know, mean, we do it all the time. Last night, we were picking a Christmas movie, and within like 30 seconds, and we're like, are you done with this? Yeah, okay, so quickly. So your job as a storyteller, okay, if you're doing this and you're taking it seriously, these are the things you you have as a job. Okay, you are the orchestrator of this, so you are there to manage the tension curiosity and the emotional payoff of something and surprises. That's about managing tension. It's about creating curiosity and paying off the emotions that someone is putting into something, right? So that's the kind of thing that you want to keep in mind of why getting someone to pay attention matters, okay, so what makes something attention grabbing? So let's go over those three things. So tension, first of all, Desiree. What makes tension attention grabbing? What about tension is attention grabbing?

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Tension like You mean, like in the story, tension or

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tension in the story, tension

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between characters. For me, I would say something, I guess tension would be something unresolved, yeah,

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unresolved or unstable, right? Something is wrong, something doesn't feel right, yeah, characters are in the middle of an argument. A little kid won't kiss their mom goodbye anymore when they go into the school, you know, like something is happening there that makes us go, oh, what's happening? Yeah, like, couple of holding hands. Someone walks in the room, the girl

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pulls her hand away. Or, what

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about, ooh, what about, that's a surprise, right?

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What about at a concert where a guy has his arms around this woman, and then it spans over to them, and they appear on the Jumbotron, and then all of a sudden, she ducks down, and he spins

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around, disappears. That was surprising. There's tension there, right? And it's peaks curiosity, because we're all like, what, right? So it's those, it's tension, it's curiosity, and it's emotional payoff, just like, oh my gosh, they're cheating, they're poor spouses. I feel bad, right? It sounds that was such a great example of the blue,

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honey, you also have here, contrast, yeah, contrast.

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Contrast is a great way, like we said, right? The priest punching guy in the face. That's a contrast. Oh, yeah, right. So two ideas, right? Of what we have, of something colliding in a different way, or two people, you know, you know one person's arguing for this and arguing against this, right? Or you're in a courtroom, you've got your defense attorney and you've got your person, they're cross examined, right? Like you've got contrast between things and then emotion. So, favorite part, favorite part, so, curiosity, humor, fear, empathy, anger, frustration, happiness, sadness, like emotions, right? Anything that sparks a feeling that is going to make you pay attention, like we talked about in the last episode, you see someone crying, what do you immediately, you're like, Oh my gosh. Why are they crying? Some people like, I'm going this way. I don't I don't deal with that. What do I

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do when they when someone's crying, you'll just go up and

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hug them here, yeah? Like, yeah. And I'm just like, I'm like, looking sideways, back and forth, like, that meme, like, Please don't make that contact to me. I don't want to, right? So anything, some kind of emotion makes us pay attention, right? The biggest way to make people pay attention, which is what this is all about, is the surprise principle. Okay, so I love this true surprise isn't random, right? If it's a good surprise, it's not just something random. There's something there's there's a reason for it, right? It's delightful inevitability, okay, not necessarily delightful, no, but it's delightful for some, for an audience, right? Whether it's a scary or a bad thing, like, oh my gosh, what he that's not her dad, no, right? But it's,

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I was thinking more of a woman crossing a road, stepping off without it being able to be changed, and then bus coming and almost hitting them or killing them, right? And it was, it that's not delightful,

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but it's delightful experience for an audience, right? It's a delightful inevitability. The story is going to do it anyways, right? Think of it that way. You're going to do these things in your story. You want to make sure that it's enjoyable, whether it's horror, whether it's comedy, whatever it is that audience is looking for something specific in that kind of movie or TV. V show, yes, right? So it's, you're delighting them, like the example of the boys, right? The very first like sequence in the boys, Huey is standing there with his girlfriend. They're talking, but how much she loves them. She kind of steps off the sidewalk a little bit, and then all of a sudden, bam, her entire body explodes. And then it cuts to a guy stopping. He's in the superhero costume, and he's like, I can't I can't stay. I can't stay. And then he's like, a speed runner, right? So he's, bam, he's gone. And then it cuts to Huey standing there, covered in blood, looking down, and his girlfriend's hands are still in his hands, but that's all that's left. And it's shocking. And you're, you know, or like, the Gen V, I explained to you how it opens with this young girl getting her period, and she has, like a power with blood she can't control, and all of a sudden her mom comes in, she has a period, and her blood explodes in the room and kills her parents, right? But it's, it's, yeah, it's gross, right? It's gross, it's awful, it's brutal, so in a while, but it's delightful, because that's what I'm looking for in that kind of show. So it's delightful, inevitability. You are going to lead us somewhere, give us surprises that delight us.

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I think the big thing too is that it's like with the unexpected. Even though it's unexpected, it makes sense.

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Yeah, right, yep, it does. Yeah. And because you know, it's when you when something happens and you're surprised like that, and you can look back and put it all together, yeah? You're like, ah, that makes sense. Because the first time, sometimes you're like, Okay, wait, I Why would he do that? And then you're like, oh, because it told us he murdered a guy in the boxing ring earlier, and now we're understanding that that's why he carries so much guilt, yeah? So in hindsight, when we get that surprise, it makes sense, right? So that's, yeah, that's a great way to look at it. And then surprise works best when it breaks a pattern, meaningfully, right, where we're going a certain way, we're going a certain direction,

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like it flows all linear, and then something

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happens, yes, but it makes it more interesting. Yeah, right. It's meaningful.

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It makes sense to have it where it is. Because I think the thing too, people can throw in these surprising moments or these attention grabbing moments, and you're just like, that didn't fit. Yeah. Why'd you throw

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that in there? Exactly like in Wake up, dead man, there's this great moment. So this one girl, and she's in a wheelchair, and she's not, she doesn't have she's not disabled. Oh, if she was living in Dubai, which you told me yesterday, which was really cool, in Dubai, they don't call people disabled. They say people of determining, people of determination. Which is fantastic. It's beautiful way of saying it. Anyways, this woman was a person of determination. She was just in a wheelchair because of severe pain. But halfway through the movie, all of a sudden she stands up. All of a sudden, this woman in the movie, the movie screams, and you're like, why is she screaming? And the girl in the wheelchair is standing up to get a cookie from the table. And then she's like, you're walking. And she's like, she's been praying for being healed, and she's like, Yeah, I can walk. It just hurts a lot, but it was like, it was surprising, you're just like, okay, and then it's meaningful, because you're like, Ah, okay, it deepens it. It's like, oh yes, it reminds So, anyways, that's a great example from that one.

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Okay, then the next thing you have here, how to create meaningful surprises,

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yes, so, so again, right? Meaningful. So you have to have thought in it. There has to be a reason for it too, right? So you want to establish a pattern, like you said, everything is kind of going along a certain route, Desiree, and then you reinforce it, because you make us think that that's life, that's how it's going, that's how it is. How do you reinforce it having? So if it's going a certain way, it's going a certain you know, along a certain line, you're having things that remind us, yes, that is important. That character is there, that character is on their way home, and they do certain things every day, and so now they're going to stop. And so now they're gonna stop and they're gonna get their takeout, and then they're gonna head home. They're gonna get in their car, they're gonna park it, they're gonna go upstairs. And every time they go upstairs, their spouse is waiting for them, and they get upstairs, and they go inside, and their spouse is gone, and there's some blood on the floor, and something is cracking the pattern, right, right, yeah. Then you do it by breaking it at that maximum impact point. So if we seen like the film, nobody, do you remember the film? Nobody, nope. Is about the guy and his boring life, and he turned out to be an assassin. Does he have a family? Yes. So that movie starts with him, taking out the garbage, going to work, doing all these things, right? Normal, everyday things, right? And then something happens that changes his pattern. He ends up killing a, you know, beating the hell out of a bunch of guys in a bus. And we're just like, what? It's a surprise, right? But you built a pattern. It's about maximum impact. That's the moment, if that, if it started that way, and you just beat these guys up in a bus, and be like, Okay, you wouldn't

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understand that. They do. Understand the big deal, right? But it was because he shows the the whole person as being like this dad, who's just a family man, you know, every

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and he's and he doesn't stand up for himself, like all these things, right? So it built the pattern, and then it broke that pattern in a very meaningful way, and it made you go. What?

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And it also showed his character more.

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Yeah, it did. So that's, that's the way to do it, if you can show the character more their truth of who they really are, right? That's what makes it surprising. That's a contradiction in what they are. You see all the time, like, Oh, here's this guy. Oh, he's got this wonderful family, and he's so good to his kids and his wife so loving. And then all of a sudden you see him in a hotel with a hooker, and you're like, Okay, that's not who I thought he was. This is who he really is, right? Everything else is an act. So that kind of thing, right? Is it? Though? Well, who knows? Maybe the hooker thing is, who knows, but it tells us more about the character. It shows us who they really are.

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Writing of hookers. The next section says fast hooks that capture attention,

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lead with a hook, or lead with a hook, question that sparks

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curiosity. What fast hooks? What question?

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Or even like, like, in, in Wake up, dead man, right? Like the first thing he says, but not, not a question, but a hook. I got to take you back to the to, you know, to the days before the black or before the Good Friday murders. You're like, Good Friday murders. What priest punch a guy? Okay, right? It hooks with that question of, what, wait, what? It's not asking us a question, but it's making us go, okay, black or Good Friday murders. What? Right? So you want, you can, you can hook us with a question, or hook us with something like in the beginning of Wolf of Wall Street, for example, one of the first thing he says is, last year, I made \$51 million million dollars, and it pissed me off because it was only a million shy of a million dollars a week. And you're like, holy crap. Okay, what like? And then to be that guy who's like, ah, yeah, I got 51 million, but frickin Why can't I have 52 it makes you go, okay. I want to know how he got there. I wonder who this guy is, right? So something

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that's interesting, it forces us to have interest and curiosity. Exactly, yep.

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Another way to capture attention as as you and this isn't like the opening, but like as

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you go, I know what this is going to be. What's that you start? We talked about this before starting in the middle of something, instead of at the very, very beginning,

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exactly, yeah, yeah, a scene, right? Scene or a moment? Yeah, a moment. Scene. You start in the middle of something important, right? Not? You're gonna have an argument. You're gonna have a married couple having an argument. Don't start with her walking up the stairs, pissed, following her, throwing her clothes, getting her jacket off, him coming in, looking all sheepish. Oh no, I screwed up. What am I gonna do? You know? And then they're like, puts a foot in around, and then it happens, no, you put us in that room where she slams the door in his face, and he's on the outside of the door, and being like, look, I, you know, I didn't mean to, like, right? Put us in. It's like the moment in the coffee, in the shock, and it makes us pay attention, right?

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Like, wake up, dead man. Is the punch, yep,

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yep, that's the punch. But in a lot of the scenes, you go in in the middle of something, right, like all of a sudden, the characters, the priest, walks into this room, when all these characters are having a conversation, and he turns and the the other priest grabs his Bible and throws it at him. Get out of here, right? And you're just like, Whoa. What's happening, right? But you're just like, Okay, what's going on? What? What were they talking about? Right? It makes you pay attention, right? It's like starting a scene with a scene with someone slapping someone across the face, and you're just like, whoa, like it just and then you're like, Why? Why do you like? It makes you pay so. So get us in the middle of something that keeps our attention. Don't let us be bored by sitting around watching what we don't need to watch. It's not real life. Look at even reality shows your 90 day fiance stuff you watch. It's like they don't they start us in a moment every time, here's the new scene, and, you know, they've set it up and they got lighting, and they're sitting on a why are they sitting on a beach on a super windy day, having a conversation? Okay, I got to talk to you about this now. Well, obviously there's a bunch of stuff that we don't see it. We see the moment, right? So doing that is great, and then you want to flip the expectations, right? We talked about that subvert the expectations. You're a perfect example of this and how broken society is. Society sees you, and the first thing they see is your wheelchair, and they expect you, because when you usually see someone in a power wheelchair in society, you think that they are mentally disabled as well, right, that they're cognitively, right? But big difference for people like yourself with muscular dystrophy, you're just happen to be sitting down, there's, there's, there's nothing else going on, right and so, but people just expect, right? Oh, what? Oh, and what will she be having? Or Would she like a drink with her meal? They'll ask me, and be like, ask her, ask her. She's right there, right? But people just have expectations, and you flip them right, and people just don't know well. People get uncomfortable. They don't want to talk to people with disabilities. They. You're just like, I'm gonna flip that. I'm gonna talk to you. We're gonna have a great conversation. They stop seeing your chair, right? And so it's that's the thing is, you want to give people you understand what people expect. We expect a priest to act a certain way. So have him punch someone in the face.

You're making us go, Okay, what? Right? So just that's a great way to get our attention. Okay, use micro mysteries, which are essentially little details that don't fully make sense yet, right? Which is the same thing the setup payoff thing, give us really interesting little setups. Like, okay, why did he just kick that knife under the couch? Okay, there's no murder scene like, what? What is he right? Maybe come back later, then it comes but, but things that don't yet make sense, right? Give us a lot of little things like that. And murder mystery movies, they do that all the time. Yeah, right. Like wake up dead man had 1000s of them. Yeah, right. So you want to make sure that that's, you know, it doesn't matter what the genre is, little bits and pieces, right? And then a great way to flip those expectations, to create contrast and questions is to combine elements that shouldn't go together, right? We've talked about that priest punch right? Like it's such a perfect opening because you it makes you pay attention to go, Okay, wait, I want to know why that's happening, right? So anything that you can do to to create a contrast is going to make us pay attention, because it's not what we expect. Okay, couple more things. Why do you think surprise works? Desiree, what do you think? What do you feel when you're surprised? Why does it work for you when you're surprised?

31:34

For me, it just makes my heart stop. I'm just like, like, it makes you catch your breath almost, yep, you

31:41

feel your blood pumping like winter. You're scared in a movie or whatever it is. But a lot of times, the science of the engagement is that it gives you a dopamine hit. You'll hear it all the time. There's all these influencers, oh, dopamine, dopamine. Like, that's what we get when we go on social media, and what we share. Like, there's science behind you know, like, the most important moment these days, I heard this. Matthew McConaughey was talking about this in a podcast. All right, all right, all right. And he said, these days, the most important moment, the moment we get the most joy from the way our brains over act and our dopamine spikes, isn't moments anymore. It's not being in a moment. It's not taking the picture of that moment. Now these days, it's hitting the Share button that, gee, they've that there's science there that says that's the moment people look are waiting for, is to share it to everyone. That's weird. You're not No. People aren't in the moment anymore, right? So surprise triggers the same thing, right?

32:39

Notice that too, when I did a Instagram post that ended up being, I think there was 4300 views, which was crazy for me. It's interesting to look at the stats, though, too, and see, when do people leave my video? And you know, the interesting thing is, very few stay longer than, like, seven seconds, and then they're gone. So it's like, you got to catch them.

33:05

Catch them fast. Wow, that's interesting. Yeah, there you go. Seven seconds. That's when someone makes a decision,

33:11

and that's why, if you notice with specifically Instagram videos, they're short. Oh, very short, yeah, very short to the point. Yeah, this funny thing. And then you watch the whole way through. As soon as it's longer than a certain amount you've already lost your audience. That's the same thing for surprise, right?

33:27

Totally, yeah, and surprises, it increases your attention and makes you want to continue. It also the science that says it actually hits your memory more and you will remember those moments. So a lot of times, when I see a movie and I have that kind of memory where I can recall every single thing I've just seen, and so I will remember all those beats. And all the beats that make me remember are the surprising moments, everything that changes, things that happen over the course of the story. So they it increases our attention and makes us remember that beat. You might not remember everything character said in a scene, but the surprising thing that happens, you will remember, right? So it is, it can help you stay connected to the story.

34:06

It'll also remind you how you felt during that moment too, definitely. Yeah, emotion that feeling, yeah.

34:13

So the brain is also wired to notice when a pattern breaks. So break a pattern, surprise someone, they will remember that and take it forward to get to the payoff, right? But, yeah, like you said, emotion is everything, right?

34:28

That's what then, how do you add surprise though through character?

34:32

Then, well, you can give them, give them like

34:36

moments that are surprising. But how do you add surprise through character. What's the main guide?

34:43

I would say the I would say the best way is contradictions. Okay, right? Give that character something that contradicts what people would expect or assume about them, right? You know, you, you, I don't know. There's endless things that you can add in there, but just have it contradict. What? With what people might think of them, right? Example, again, I know we're saying it again again, but a priest punching someone, that's a contradiction, right? They're not supposed to be physically violent, right? So you want to have have that there. You want to avoid randomness, though, right? You want to have any surprise that happens be a deep core truth for that character, right? The surprise isn't something random. The surprise is there because that's

how they're built. That's who they are. The person is that's or they have a secret they're hiding. They make a choice based on that secret, and because, not just randomly,

35:37

because of who they are, their choice is inevitable for them as a person, and make it delightfully inevitable. That's who they what they have to do. There's no other choice, because that's who they are.

35:47

Man, you can just do the podcast from now on. Hey, no, thank you. Come up with these pearls of wisdom. I'm just like, well, I just talked about that for 10 minutes. You could have just said that.

35:56

I know, I know. You just talked about, I know. And I'm like, Okay, let's Yeah, I know. I know. I'm awesome. I'm the best. No, I'm more like, Yeah, I know, but you talked about this for 10 minutes, so let's continue on.

36:06

Yes. So anyways, let those surprises that happen actually expose those pieces of those characters, right, their fear, their desire, their vulnerability, their brokenness, their secret, their shame, whatever it is, right, emotionally tied. Have those surprises work that way, and that's it. So we started, that's it. That seems like a lot of information. It is a lot of information. But we last, last in our in our four part series, we just had these like exercises at the end of the episode, which I thought that's actually really cool. That's something that is a little more interactive and fun and and how to take what we're doing here and make it actionable. So a couple little exercises. Do you want to do some exercises?

36:46

Desiree, no, I hate exercise. You want to read them. Many exercises for listeners, you have here, the flip take a

36:51

trope, yeah, which we've talked about tropes, which is the expected things of certain genres, right?

36:57

The expected outcome, what you think is going to happen, or what typically happens, and then flip it to something else. Yeah. Okay, so the flip, take a trope, write the expected outcome and then flip it. That's it. Okay. The second thing you have is a one sentence hook, write a single surprising line that makes someone say, Wait, what? Yeah, great exercise. One more time, one sentence, hook, write a single, surprising line that makes someone say, wait, wait. What?

37:33

Just like you do for your like the concept, right? Makes you go, wait, what? Okay.

37:37

And then the final one is contrast, building pair two mismatched elements and explore the story possibilities. So, like we talked numerous times,

37:48

like Batman and Joker, right? Here's two complete mismatched elements, good guy, bad guy. Put them in a room, right?

37:56

Vivian, and what's his name, Richard Gere Vivian, and I mean, pretty woman. What's Richard Gere's name in Pretty Woman? That's what I'm wondering. I don't remember anyway. That would be an example of pair two mismatched elements,

38:13

yeah, a hooker with a heart of gold and a ruthless billionaire, right? Put them together and see what happens that. See, you're so smart

38:20

the car, the car turns like it's on rails. Yes, it does. Yeah. That is the one that I can recite the whole beginning to end. Yeah. And same with Dirty Dancing. But I cannot remember what Richard Gere's name is. I don't either. It's fine. Moving on.

38:35

Moving on is so anyways, those will be in the show notes as well, but those, I think, are really great exercises to play with surprise and attention and see what you can come up with. So, so that is, is kind of our thing. So things to kind of just take away from here. Attention is a trade, right? It's a trade off. It's not a gift. It's a trade. You are revealing the surprise to get attention. Okay? You keep it by creating curiosity. Breaks in pattern, the emotional truth of it all, and that it's an earned surprise. It's not just random. It's earned you've done the work and now you're surprising us. And then show the audience something they don't expect.

39:10

Okay, you want to know something else the audience doesn't expect. What that I remembered what his name is. No, you didn't.

39:15

You Googled it. I did. Soon as

39:17

I hear it, I'm gonna be like, Oh yeah, it was Edward. Oh yeah, Edward,

39:23

you said Dirty Dancing. Dirty Dancing has my absolute favorite character name I've ever heard in any movie. Really, Johnny castle. Come on, that's the coolest name ever. Johnny castle, and he's cool, even though he wears tight black pants and shiny pointy black shoes,

39:41

if you even looked like a quarter of Johnny Castle, wow.

39:45

That's surprising and unexpected that you would say that to me, very unexpected. Anyways, that's the end of our episode, so hang tight. We got some questions. We're just gonna do a quick promo, so be right back.

39:58

Feel like you've taken your script. As far as you can on your own. We know how frustrating it can be sometimes to get the great ideas that are in your head properly on the page, but imagine having a professional screenwriter jump in and rewrite it for you to create a market ready script. Send us your script for a rewrite proposal, and the pro of your choice will write up a page or so of notes on exactly how they'd approach a rewrite head on over to www.scriptreaderpro.com/rewrite and use the code rewrite 15 during checkout for the rewrite proposal to get 15% off.

40:41

Okay, in this part of our episode, we always take the questions from those listeners who have submitted them previously. And as a reminder, you can submit your questions to Hello@scriptreaderpro.com As usual, we have four questions today. First question here comes from Joey from Syracuse, Syracuse, Syracuse, oh, maybe there's a typo. Syracuse, Syracuse. Is it New York? Yeah, Syracuse, typo. And today, the first question comes from Joey from Syracuse, New York. And the question is, how detailed should my biography be for my protagonist

41:29

biography? Yeah, as detailed as you feel,

41:31

what is this? What does this mean? How detailed should my biography be for my protagonist? So a

41:35

lot of times for your leading character of your story, some some teachings have said you should have you should know your full biography of your character. You should know every single thing about their life, all their likes, their dislikes, their favorite colors, right? And, yeah, as much as you feel it helps you know your character. There's no rule, right? Some people don't do any some people know two things, right? Some people learn them as the story goes, it's just all depends on you. I've said before, and I'll say it forever, the best thing you can do about your

biography is know that defining moment in that person's childhood or youth that made them who they are going forward in their life, right? Knowing that, knowing that, that moment, that time, that defines them, that will help you understand how they will react to everything else.

42:24

Makes sense. I hope that answers the question. Question number two, how can I approach an author of a book I love and try to option or get movie rights to it that comes from Kenny in Toronto, Canada, we've had this one before.

42:39

I don't think I've had that specific author of a book. I've heard people say, oh, I want to adapt a book, adapt, but if so, I did this not too long ago. There's a book I love that I read long time ago always stuck with me. No one's ever done anything with it. Was one long like a major series book or anything, but it was a very specific, niche book. And I actually emailed her and said, Hey, I'm a huge fan of your book. I've created a production company. I'm looking for some material for with IP, is your book currently available for option? And she quickly responded, and she said, I'm glad you know, thanks. Thanks for reaching out. I'm so glad that my book stuck with you. You can contact my agent here for any questions. But it is not currently optioned. And I was like, okay, so I'll email and find out what would they be interested in, what they're looking at, right? So that's all you'd have to do, right? If it's a major book, like huge, Harry Potter, yeah, or something that's, that's big, that you're like, oh, I want, I would love, turn that into movie. Go ahead and try. It might be ridiculously expensive. Or, if you're not somebody with a huge, you know, movie studio behind you, they may not even balk at it, but yeah, so you just reach out to that author and see what they're see what they're doing. Some will option it for free. Some same thing with, like, you read a story like, oh, I would like the life rights to that story. Contact the person and see if they'd give it to that's all okay.

44:02

Next question comes from Joanna from Billings Montana, why are so many of the bigger contest companies and websites shutting down?

44:12

Which I know, I think AI is a big part of it, or maybe people aren't entering contests as much. I don't think that's it, but yeah, we've seen some of the bigger companies and sites like. It was a big, big site that had like, 20 different contests a year. They've just gone my my feeling is that they're all going to conglomerate, because they're a lot of them are all bought by the same company, and they're going to come up with like, a big, monster version of themselves. So you might see that, but I think it's just, yeah, it's, it's, it's the markets contracting. Things are done differently. Now, AI is taking over a lot of stuff, but I mean, still, like, still need contests. Like, you don't need contests, but a lot of times that's how people will know if a script is worthwhile noticed, right? So, I mean, makes it harder. But yeah, I wish I knew the exact answer.

44:58

Okay, final question. Is from almond, almond rock from Pakistan. Cool, okay, from Pakistan. Can I write a screenplay in my first language and then have it translated to try to sell it in Hollywood?

45:14

Oh, I assume they mean translated to English. Okay, so, because it's Hollywood, yeah, yeah, why not? I mean, of course you can, right, write it in your language and leave it in your language if you want, and try and sell it if you obviously, you're trying to sell it to an English speaking market, and it's not written in English, it's going to be difficult for that person to understand it. But be careful, because not all, obviously, I don't, I'm not a linguistic professional or something, but a lot of languages don't translate properly to English, right? And so, so you can't just transfer translator or run it through a program, or get someone to do translation and have it think that's going to be ready. You'll probably want to get someone with experience, a coverage company or something, to read it and give you the feedback on the dialog and the wording and how everything if, if it's naturally, it feels natural in English, that's the that's the only kicker. So yeah, why not just make sure that it's gonna read as though it was only written in English? Or people are gonna read and think, okay, this person is bad writer.

46:12

Yeah, it doesn't make sense. Yeah. I noticed that too with a lot of movies, because I really love the ones that are dubbed. Dude loved international movies, and I read the closed captions because, let's face it, I'm getting older, and I just like the closed caption. And a lot of times what they say is different than what the words are on the screen. Yeah, a little frustrating.

46:30

Yeah, yeah, you can tell they're just not there.

46:33

Yeah, hey, guess what? That's the end of our episode.

46:35

That's it. Okay. Well, if you liked our episode, What should these listeners do?

46:39

You should subscribe to our podcast, and should give us five stars.

46:43

That would be wonderful if you were entertained, if you were felt educated, if you learned something, if my hope. I mean, we do this because we want to, want to help writers understand things that are sometimes difficult to understand. I mean, I've listened to a lot of podcasts read a lot of like books and and videos and stuff, and I'm just like, I don't, I don't get it right? Like Robert McKee story, for example, that book was way over my head when I first read it, and I, you know, so I try to describe things and explain them in the ways that maybe you haven't heard before that. And if they make sense to you and they help you out, then great, you know. Anyways, if you did share it with your friends, you know, subscribe and come back. Check out

our website. We have everything you'll ever need. Scriptreaderpro.com, endless services. We're here to help because at Script Reader Pro, we are here to help writers craft wonder one page at a time.