



Learning from the Masters

AN INTERVIEW WITH SCREENWRITER TED GRIFFIN

QUIZ & SUGGESTED EXERCISES

(RECOMMENDED FOR HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENTS)

“Ravenous’ was the fourth script I’d written, and it was the first one that I felt like, ‘this actually feels like I’m a real writer now,’ because I was not paying attention to the rules you learn about screenwriting.”

Ted Griffin

EXCERPTS FROM TED GRIFFIN'S INTERVIEW:

MIKE DE LUCA: *How do you find the space in a screenplay for the establishment of really memorable characters?*

TED GRIFFIN: I think that's the great challenge of screenwriting, which is why I think it's a comparable craft to novel-writing or poetry. You have to establish things with such economy. That's the thing I'm most impressed by in other scripts I read, when they can pull you into a story and into a character with such an economy of language, dialogue and scenes.

DE LUCA: *Do you decide what the plot of a scene is first, or the theme, or what's going on physically?*

GRIFFIN: I think you start off instinctively. I think if you intellectualize it, if you analyze it going in—

DE LUCA: *You could kill it before it starts.*

GRIFFIN: Yeah. That line about analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog, no one enjoys it and the frog dies. I usually have to start with story. I think the most important thing about writing is during the process, coming upon the clarity and simplicity of what the movie is really about. On "Ocean's Eleven," I think I was on page 100 before I realized, this is a story about a guy pulling off a ludicrous heist simply to show his ex-wife that he loves her.

DE LUCA: *So that came in late in the process?*

GRIFFIN: Yeah. I started off like, oh, this is a big heist movie...but then I thought, okay, this is actually what it's about.

QUIZ:

As you watch the interview, see if you can answer the following questions.

1. When did Ted Griffin first know he wanted to be a screenwriter?
2. What was the genesis of the script for “Matchstick Men?”
3. What attracted Griffin to writing the remake of “Ocean’s Eleven?”
4. What does he find most difficult about writing?
5. Does he outline?
6. What’s his attitude towards research?
7. Does Griffin show drafts to other writers for feedback?
8. What does he say is the difference between writing a movie star role and another type of character?
9. What does he like about doing on-set production rewrites?
10. Where does Griffin find inspiration for his work?
11. What prevented him from completing his job directing “Rumor Has It...?”
12. What does he say is the one thing a writer can do to safeguard his work?
13. How does he think his work has progressed over the years?
14. Does Griffin listen to music when he writes?
15. What does he try to accomplish when doing a pitch?

Bonus question:

16. What prevented Griffin’s script “Solace” from becoming a sequel to “Se7en?”

SUGGESTED EXERCISES:

1. Griffin says he made a creative leap forward when he stopped paying attention to the “rules you learn about screenwriting.” What does he mean? Do you think that commonly-taught rules are helpful or constricting, or both? Can you name rules that you have found to be one or the other?
2. Griffin argues that greatest challenge of screenwriting is to create compelling characters and situations with an economy of time and language. Challenge yourself by writing three one-page scenes in which you introduce characters in the briefest, most intriguing way you can.
3. Griffin says he often writes with actors in mind, whether living or dead. To see how this might affect your writing process, envision one of your favorite actors as a character trying to book a room in a sold-out hotel. Write that scene. Now think of an actor of a different age, race and gender, and write the same scene with this actor in mind. How does it affect the way the scene plays out?
4. An old padlock inspires Griffin to concoct a nail-biting thriller scene set in a swimming pool. Can you come up with your own scene or story featuring the same object?

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