



A Warm up

1. Match the action movie characters with their roles:

- a. The **hero** _____ usually the character most threatened by the villain and has to be saved
- b. The **villain** _____ usually male, is the agent who restores the narrative equilibrium
- c. The **donor** _____ gives the hero something, it may be an object, information or advice,
- d. The **helper** _____ sends the hero on his task
- e. The **princess** (the victim) _____ appears to be good but is revealed, at the movie's end, to have been bad
- f. The **dispatcher** _____ assists the hero in the task of restoring equilibrium
- g. The **false hero** _____ usually creates the narrative disruption.

2. Match the roles with the photos below:



B Vocabulary

1. Match the words from the Academic Word List with their definitions.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| a) donor | ___ a form of entertainment that allows people to forget about the real problems of life |
| b) blockbusters | ___ a state of emotional balance or calmness |
| c) escapism | ___ people who help and spend a lot of time with someone who is usually more important, |
| d) equilibrium | ___ easy to do or understand; not complicated |
| e) decade | ___ a person who gives or donates something |
| f) two-dimensional | ___ not having qualities that are like the qualities of a real person; overly simple |
| g) straightforward | ___ movies that are successful, and usually expensive to produce |
| h) sidekicks | ___ 10 years |

C Discussion

1. What's your favourite action movie?
2. Do you ever watch action movies at the theater, or only on TV/DVD?
3. Do you think action movies are too unrealistic?
4. Do you think action characters are two-dimensional?

Action conventions:

- Action stars are almost always male
- good guys vs. bad guys
- two-dimensional characters
- car chases, shootouts, fistfights and explosions
- final showdown between hero and villain

Todorov's Theory

1. story starts with a normal "equilibrium"
2. an event happens that disturbs the normal equilibrium
3. attempt (usually successful) to fix the disturbance
4. the normal equilibrium (or a new "equilibrium") is restored

D While Reading

Complete the following exercises while reading the article on the next page.

1. Fill in the blanks with the words from the vocabulary exercise.

Stories of Heroes & Villains

Action films have continuous high energy, lots of physical stunts, and usually include chase scenes, rescues, fights, battles, escapes, one-liners and bad guys - all designed for pure audience _____. Often action films are successful with audiences, but lack critical appeal because of their two-dimensional heroes or villains.

Early action films were usually westerns or war movies. In the 1960's, spy movies dominated the action genre, thanks to the *James Bond* (1962-present) series. 1970's action films were popularized by detective movies such as *Dirty Harry* (1971) in the west, and martial arts movies such as *Enter the Dragon* (1973) in the rest of the world.

The 1980's saw action films take over Hollywood to become the _____ they are today. The most successful actors from this period include Sylvester Stallone (*Rambo First Blood* 1982), Bruce Willis (*Die Hard* 1988) and Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Commando* 1985).

Women in action-films usually play the roles of _____ or romantic interests of the hero, although modern action films have featured some strong female characters in order to appeal to more audiences. Angelina Jolie (*Tomb Raider* 2001) and Mila Jovovich (*Resident Evil* 2002) are two successful female action heroes.

Why are action films so popular? Well, it could be argued that these kinds of movies are more

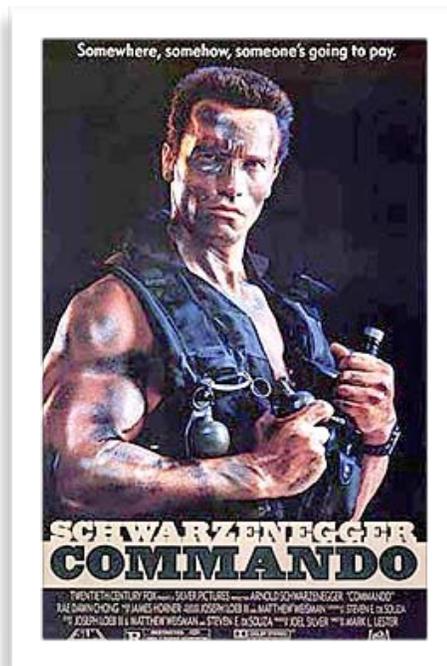
_____ than many other genres of film. Violence, unlike many forms of comedy is easily understandable in any culture. Also, many people watch movies to escape from reality and action films are certainly unrealistic.

The plot of most action movies can almost always be understood by *Todorov's theory of narrative*. The action story starts on a normal day, but some event throws everything into chaos. A hero undertakes a mission to restore the normal _____, and the film usually ends with that equilibrium being restored.

Action movie characters tend to be _____ and can often be classified as either *hero* (good guy) or *villain* (bad guy). Other common characters in the genre are the *helper*, who often accompanies the hero as a sidekick, the *dispatcher*, who sends the hero on his mission, the _____, who gives the hero something to help him on his mission, and the *princess*, the person who must be helped or saved by the hero. Often there will be a *false-hero*, someone

who seems to be a good guy, but turns out to be a bad guy. And of course action movies usually have *minions*, groups of bad guys whose only role is to be beat up or killed by the film's hero.

Recent advances in filming technology have helped another action sub-genre become very popular over the last _____: the superhero movie. With comic book adaptations of the *X-Men* (2000-), *Batman* (1989-) and *Spiderman* (2002-) leading the way, it appears superhero movies are the future of the action genre.



E Check Your Understanding

Answer the following questions about the article.

1. What are action films designed for?
2. What sub-genre(s) did most early action films belong to?
3. Why are action films so popular?
4. What common character types appear in action movies?
5. What sub genre of action film has grown extremely popular in the past decade?

F Iconic Scene

1. Watch the following scenes from the action movie *Commando* (1985).

In the first scene, John's daughter has just been kidnapped by a group of bad guys who want John to do a mission for them.

In the second scene, John has just successfully rescued his daughter and killed all the bad guys. He is about to leave the island and is saying goodbye to his former boss, who has just arrived with the rest of the good guys.

J: John, **BG:** Bad guy

J: Where is she?

BG: Mellow out man. We can't talk business with you waving guns in people's faces. Your daughter's safe, Colonel. Whether she stays that way is up to you. My people have got some business with you, and if you want your kid back, you have got to cooperate. Right?

J: Wrong!

J: John, **GF:** General Franklin

GF: leave anything for us?

J: Just bodies

GF: I'd just like you to start up your unit again, John. All it would take is your coming back.

J: This was the last time.

GF: Until the next time.

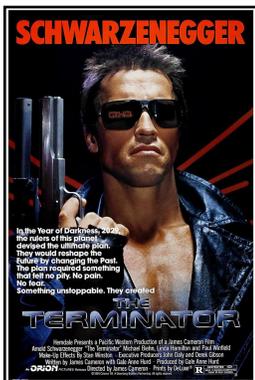
J: No chance.

Natural expressions:

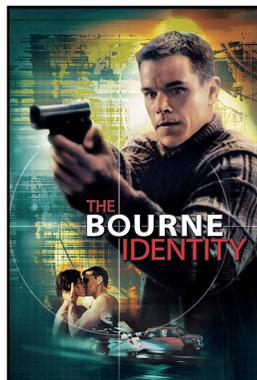
mellow out
talk business
no chance
waving _____ in my face

G Movie Poster Focus

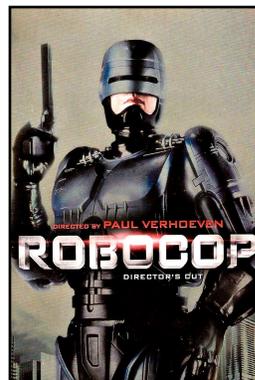
1. Have you seen any of the “must-see” action films listed below? Which ones?



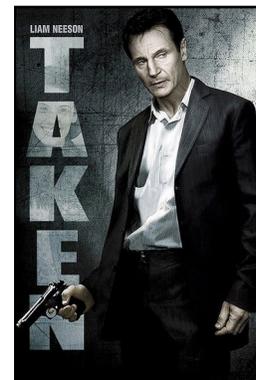
1984
James Cameron



2002
Doug Liman



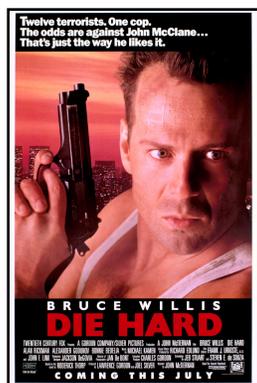
1987
Paul Verhoeven



2008
Pierre Morel



2015
George Miller



1988
John McTiernan



2000
John Woo



1994
Jan de Bont

2. Match the one line synopses with the movie posters above.

1. In a future Detroit filled with crime, a terminally wounded cop returns to the police force as a powerful robot.
2. A human-looking indestructible robot is sent from the future to kill a waitress, whose son will lead humans in a war against the machines.
3. A man suffering from amnesia races to escape assassins and regain his memory.
4. A woman in postapocalyptic Australia searches for her home-land with the help of a group of female prisoners and a man named Max.
5. A policeman tries to save his wife and several others that were taken hostage by terrorists during a Christmas party
6. A young cop must prevent a bomb exploding aboard a city bus by keeping its speed above 50 mph.
7. A secret agent is sent to Sydney, to find and destroy a genetically modified disease called “Chimera”.
8. A retired CIA agent travels to Europe to save his estranged daughter, who has been kidnapped.