

Jason Bourne: Script Learning Curve

Jason Bourne is a known entity – It is a highly successful franchise: The Bourne Identity, The Bourne Ultimatum, The Bourne Supremacy, The Bourne Legacy, and now – Just plain Jason Bourne because that's all we need. The name says it all.

The genre that audiences love – Action/Thriller fully delivers, with a shaky-cam that can sometimes drive an audience to dizziness. Every single scene starts late and arrives early. In other words: The party is already in full swing when the guest arrives; a door slams and the guest is in his getaway car. The camera cross-cuts to the various story lines with record-breaking speed and then, we get a rap-up or mop-up in the last sequence of the story.

The story is compelling: A loner with a mysterious past. He's been dealing with amnesia, but through all the Bourne movies, he's slowly gotten his memory back. The plot has revolved around the fact that this Hero is looking for his past so he can understand his present and then hopefully, move on to a future. This is the compelling notion about crafting such a Main Character: Most of the people in the audience can certainly identify with his quest for self-understanding, as the journey most of us take through life involves connecting these three core elements: Past, Present, Future.

The problems with this script were not enough to make the film a failure, but there were problems, and if you can identify what they were, it will help to make you a better writer.

First of all, Nicki, the potential love interest and ally is knocked off at the end of Act 1. At approximately the 31 minute mark, she dies from several bullet wounds. Because the writer chose to kill off the potential love interest and Bourne's only ally at the end of Act 1, no time was invested

in any type of relationship between the Hero and his love interest, who did have a vested affection for Bourne, as was established in prior films in this franchise. The audience doesn't feel emotionally involved by Bourne's loss in this film because there is simply no set up for it. If the writer was counting on every viewer having seen the prior films, that was an error. She could have been killed off on p. 75 which would set up the eventual show-down with the Main Opponent, the Tommy Lee Jones character.

Instead, the Vikander character appears as Bourne's new ally. She is a fake ally, as will be revealed in the Climax. But again, this is a "dropped in" contrivance of the writer. The audience is sucked in to thinking she's the new ally, and she is set-up nicely for this because the Opponent is aware that she is helping Bourne, but finds her conveniently useful to advance his own Plan – to take down Bourne. Suddenly, she turns and wants power and the whole thing about being Bourne's ally hits the dust. He is on to her though, as he is a "superman warrior who misses nothing," and we are given this little "twist" at the end of the Climax, into the New Equilibrium sequence of the story. All of this at the end was contrived and predictable and highly irritating because audiences are not as stupid as Hollywood thinks they are.

By the end of Act I, Bourne has figured out his identity and he has also gleaned remarkably new information about his father. This was powerful stuff and certainly could have sufficed to catapult him into Act 2 to avenge his father's murder. Instead, as already noted, Nicki, the love interest is the "new information" that pushes him out of his Ordinary World of fighting in bars and just existing in hiding into the C.I.A. world of high gadgetry, action, more murder, car chases, more opponents – All the stuff that audiences love in this genre. The high-tech guru, with heady references to Snowden and identity theft, also on today's audience's minds, takes a bullet on p. 75 instead of Nicki, the love interest.

Maybe the writer toyed with this idea. What was lacking here was what the high-tech guru had as a relationship to Bourne's character development – I couldn't find it. It made for a big disconnect. It was not a good feeling to see the guy felled by a bullet, but it was a plot contrivance and it was predictable. Yes, it was set-up when the high-tech guru had his meeting with the Opponent, the Tommy Lee Jones character. But again, unless the high-tech guru character either challenged, supported, or negated the Bourne character, he should have been rewritten in this script.

Then we had, per an interview with Matt Damon, approximately 170 cars demolished in this film. Kudos to Las Vegas for allowing all this craziness on the Strip. But 70 cars demolished would have been enough. The massive pile-ups were staged to the point of looking like an animation. And why not take the money from the savings of buying 100 cars and then smashing them up and give the money to some out of work Vegas people? All the casino employees who lost their jobs when the bubble burst in 2008 would have loved a lottery to win a car from Jason Bourne.

This brings me back to the compelling Weakness/Need of the Hero who is trying to connect his past with his present so he can move forward into his future. He's been used and abused by a corrupt system within the C.I.A., a common mantra these days. The audience identifies with this Hero. I'm not discounting the acting of Matt Damon, a very lovable, believable "All American" kinda guy. And the genre of Action/Thriller is a crowd-pleaser. But certain elements in this action-packed thriller could have made the character even more compelling and elevated the story line to a much higher level. Fancy camera work, cross-cutting, and superb high-tech gadgetry aside, it's the story that everyone remembers. It's the inner struggle, that term called the "character arc," that audiences remember. It was a bit thin in Jason Bourne.