



Learning from the Masters

AN INTERVIEW WITH SCREENWRITER JONATHAN HENSLEIGH

QUIZ & SUGGESTED EXERCISES

(RECOMMENDED FOR HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENTS)

*“[T]he pictures I made with [producer Jerry] Bruckheimer ... are not the pinnacle of taste, but they’re well-crafted action pictures. And I think they’re a cut above a lot of the dogs**t that is currently coming out of the studios.”*

Jonathan Hensleigh

EXCERPTS FROM JONATHAN HENSLEIGH INTERVIEW:

MIKE DE LUCA: *Did your writing process change, once you became a director [on “The Punisher”]?*

JONATHAN HENSLEIGH: I didn't think it would. I arrogantly thought that in previous movies, that I was writing as a visualist, as a director. But I found that that wasn't really true. As soon as I did have the director's job on “The Punisher” and know I was gonna be visualizing everything I was writing, I did have a bit of a schizophrenia there. I'm over it now. But that first go-round was odd. Different.

DE LUCA: *Because you had to write to a budget?*

HENSLEIGH: Well, I always was writing to a budget. No, it was more like I'd write a scene and then I'd reread it the next day and I'd say, “What's this gonna look like?”

DE LUCA: *So you'd write at night, and reread as the director the next day, and say, “What's this guy giving me?”*

HENSLEIGH: That's exactly right. This f**king idiot writer has left me this scene and now I have to alter it to make it visually more interesting. And so I'd have to fire the writer.

QUIZ:

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

1. What did Jonathan Hensleigh do before becoming a screenwriter?
2. Why does he say that people outside of the industry give better feedback on scripts?
3. Does he believe in outlining before writing?
4. What's Hensleigh's attitude towards "formula" screenwriting?
5. Does he recommend classes or schooling for screenwriters?
6. What does he say made working with George Lucas a good experience?
7. What motivated him to become a director?
8. How has he handled writing dialogue for actors of varied ethnic backgrounds?
9. What's Hensleigh's one rule for writing action sequences?
10. What does he think is his best work?
11. What was the main challenge of adapting "Jumanji" into a feature film?
12. How did an "executive shift nightmare" affect Hensleigh's job on "The Hulk?"
13. What characterizes "the gulf" between "Lethal Weapon" and "Lethal Weapon 3?"
14. How does Hensleigh assess the pros and cons of working with producer Jerry Bruckheimer?
15. How does he feel about the Writers Guild process of awarding screen credit?

Bonus question:

16. What is "Mad Dogs and Englishmen?"

SUGGESTED EXERCISES:

1. Jonathan Hensleigh discusses the idea that action sequences should be based in character. Can you think of some specific backstory or character traits that might inspire effective action sequences? How would these action sequences serve to reflect and amplify the particular traits or circumstances you've devised?
2. As a fledgling writer, Hensleigh recorded people in the subway to help develop his ear for dialogue. Try this yourself by recording and then transcribing a conversation between two people. Looking at the transcribed conversation, how does it compare to dialogue you've written in the past?
3. Hensleigh says he sometimes goes to specific locations to observe details that might find their way into his script. See if a location can inspire you, also. Select a place that strikes you as particularly cinematic, then go there and write a scene on the spot, incorporating details and, if you like, people that you see around you.
4. A thrift-store shoe leads Hensleigh to concoct a gripping and elaborate sci-fi thriller. Can you devise your own story, using the same object?

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