

HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER MOVIE

by Romana Annette 11/07/2007

This essay describes the elements of the plot structure that are needed to make a modern, made-for-television, monster movie. If everything comes together correctly, viewers will be carried along by familiar clichés that make scene after scene immediately identifiable, without the need for irrelevant or boring exposition.

The Monster

A monster movie requires a **real** monster. Killer sheep, such as in the recently released *Black Sheep*, are a little too ludicrous for the monster category. Vampires are also not acceptable, since they belong in the horror movie category. Features such as *Van Helsing*, that tried to combine monsters and horror, really do not work very well.

I think the best monsters are related to the crocodilian family, because these animals naturally show great strength and tenacity. After all, some of their ancestors even killed and ate dinosaurs. Mutant or prehistoric crocodiles work even better.

If one mixes crocodilians and genetic engineering, the possibilities are endless. Of course, the whole process would always be under strict control, with no possibility for any problems or collateral damage.

The ingredients for the creation of the gene-spliced monster could go as follows:

- **Salt Water Crocodile** – Salt water crocodiles make great monster without any modifications, but they could be made worse.
- **Shark Genes** – After crocodiles, genetically modified sharks are the next worse monsters. It would be especially nasty to add some frozen DNA from a *Megalodon* shark, to get those nasty five-inch teeth.
- **Avian Genes** – Birds are the dinosaur's living descendants; so, avian genes can be used to add dinosaur-related DNA. As a bonus, maybe one could even create a flying crocodile, something that has certainly not been seen before.
- **Alien Genes** – One hears about UFO's crashing all the time, and the bodies of the crew being spirited to secret hiding places. Tissue from one of these bodies could have enormous biological possibilities.

Monsters are too often portrayed unsympathetically, but the monster is supposed to be the star of the movie. Remember, *King Kong* generated sympathy, so there must be a way to generate it for any other monster.

Since *family values* are now so important, perhaps monsters could be shown in tender family situations, which means monster spouses and monster babies. Also the monster should be made to look **cute**, no small feat for a crocodile.

All monsters are expected to exhibit the following traits:

- **Voracity:** Monsters will try to kill or maim as many people as possible during the span of the movie.
- **Indestructibility:** Monsters are impervious to small arms fire.
- **Painlessness:** Monsters do not flinch when struck by bullets, since they have so few nerve cells in their skin.
- **Stiffness:** Monsters are so heavily armored, that they move stiffly and do not quite look real.
- **Toughness:** Monsters are really hard to kill.
- **Non-Uniqueness:** Monsters are like potato chips; no one can have just one.
- **Eating Habits:** Monsters never finish a meal, nor do they ever get full.
- **Noisiness:** Monsters have poor hearing, so they are not bothered by the incessant racket of gunfire.
- **Agendas:** Monsters always have extreme agendas of death and destruction.

The Mad Scientist

The scientist who creates the monster is not really mad; he is just a bit over-zealous in his attempts to create biological technology that can benefit all of mankind. Of course he makes mistakes; no one is perfect. And, like any parent, he will go to great lengths to hide and protect his creation. If there are problems, they can be ironed out.

Scientists are not usually noted for possessing a lot of social skills, especially in dealing with their own animate creations. It is understandable that they never see that situation coming, when their own creation turns on them and kills them. However, life is simply not fair.

Support Characters

Always remember that the monster is the star of the movie. In order to make the monster look good and last two hours or so, most of the characters should be somewhat inept, if not totally clueless. Since many characters will be maimed or eaten, we certainly do not want to be bothered with anyone we might care about.

Characters will always be caught up in the following stock situations:

- **Surprise:** Characters will never sense the monster coming, despite all the hints, especially in the background music.
- **Claustrophobia:** Characters will never have anyplace in which to escape, except to even more-confining places such as underground complexes with a lot of narrow corridors.

- **Flight:** No matter where the characters flee, it will always be the exact direction the monster is going.
- **Blinders:** No matter where the characters are, even if it is in a gigantic warehouse, they can never see any better than the audience, so a monster can easily sneak up on them and overpower them.
- **Visibility:** Monsters tend to stay just outside the scene, so they can sneak up on people. Monsters are very shy.

Weaponry:

The weapons will never be adequate to deal with the monsters encountered, and it will take the characters the entire length of the movie to figure this out. Any better choices, such as sniper rifles, armor-piercing bullets, or even tanks are not allowed, since they are so unfair to the monsters.

The available weapons are always used by expert marksmen, who never hit bystanders or background objects, and who have endless amounts of ammunition.

Finally, after two hours, people will realize that their weapons are useless, so they will resort to other devices, such as propane tanks, Molotov cocktails, dynamite, laundry bleach, trains, big trucks, fighter aircraft, and so forth.

Other Stock Situations:

The movie should be peppered with the following:

- **Ignorance:** Some characters never figure out what is going on.
- **Finality:** There is never an end to the story. There is always at least one monster left over.
- **Fatality:** Dead is dead only applies to people. An extremely mangled monster is seldom really dead, much to the chagrin of its next victims.
- **Duplication:** Characters are surprised to find out, while confronting a monster, that another has sneaked up behind them.
- **Danger:** Characters pick the worst place to rest, to sleep, or to pitch a tent. This is where the monsters make their most kills.
- **Backward Fall:** People fall backwards to the ground screaming, trying to fend off the monster by flailing their arms. It never works.
- **Reuse:** If an action scene filled with computer-generated special effects looked great the first time, it will look just as good the second and third times.

Closure:

No monster movie will ever offer closure. This creates enough dissatisfaction to keep the audience yearning for the next monster movie, or even the sequel, in the hope that all the loose ends will finally be resolved.

