

Writing the Romantic Comedy



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According to Billy Mernit, all the Hollywood studios--and most major actors--"are actively seeking romantic comedies." But the same studios and actors reject hundreds of romantic comedies a month. Mernit should know. As a story analyst who has read nearly 4,000 screenplays in the last 10 years, Mernit has seen the good, yes, but also too much of the bad and the ugly. With *Writing the Romantic Comedy*, Mernit presents his UCLA Extension rom-com writing workshop in book form. Believe it or not, it's not enough to have Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks play the leads. You actually have to create characters for them--characters that an audience will believe "absolutely must end up together." Mernit manages to lay down ground rules without seeming rigid: "he can't be in it only for the sex"; "she can't be in it only for the money"; "at least one scene or sequence [should be] laugh-out-loud funny." Mernit offers five ways to bring your characters to life and seven basic romantic comedy "beats." He has chapters on chemistry, humor, dialogue, and sex ("in romantic comedy, there's nothing sexier than sublimated sex"), and he draws generously upon the surprisingly small canon of great romantic comedies to demonstrate his points. Finally, given that the conflicts in romantic comedies are internal, you needn't look far for inspiration when you feel stuck. "Think of one of the most painful, humiliating, embarrassing things that ever happened to you with someone of the opposite sex," he says, and go from there.

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