

Video script

The time is ticking, the villain got the girl, the hero is surrounded. But don't worry, our heroes trained, athletic and a one-man army. This is the action hero.

Action heroes have been around for nearly 100 years of cinema. Starting with the swashbucklers like Douglas Fairbanks (Cinefix, 2015). Action heroes have had the ability to capture the dreams and imagination of audiences for decades. And still to this day with the likes of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and Tom Cruise have carried on this mantle of action hero. Action Heroes are some of the coolest in films and inspire a huge amount of people the world every year.

But what is an action hero,

uh..... Some guy? OK well, he isn't just some guy. He's the guy. Its the guy everyone wants to be. Its the guy that gets the ladies. It's the guy who defys death.

But um. What is an action hero?

Well the action hero is the guy who does the action, he fights, he kicks, he drives, he shoots.

But Liam. What is the action hero?

Well OK, the action heroes I'll be discussing are mainly those classed in the genre of films called Action Adventure. A trend of output from Hollywood which Steve Neale explains is films like Alien, Indiana jones, Rambo that came around the 1980s and 1990s. (Neale, 2007) Although the genre is quite board in a sense it, a lot of the patterns that is familiar of the Action Adventure genre stem from the main hero in our story. A story about a protagonist starts with special skills or develops them to "overcome insurmountable obstacles in extraordinary situations to successfully achieve some desired goal usually the restitution of order to the world invoked by the narrative." (Neale, 2007)

With that being said. From top.

Looking at multiple lists of top 10 movie action heroes (Lay, 2018) (Ranker, N/a) (Barone, 2012). It's not surprising as much of Hollywood casts white males in most Hollywood films (Bahr, 2017). Yet its more their athletic builds that create the super human fantasies that many people aspire to. Take Schwarzenegger for example. What made him popular was the almost herculean proportions that made him great for higher concept and genre films. It was fun to see him tackle more out of the ordinary situations and pitting him against more alien opponents like the Predator or the T-1000 (George, 2015). The hero needs to be athletically able to do the task ahead. Stunt work is all a part of the action genre along of emphasis on hard body which were more popularised in the 1980s after Vietnam and the Reagan revolution. (Neale, 2007, p. 266). Although muscular stars do date back to 1920s suggesting that this isn't a particularly modern trope. (Neale, 2007, p. 267) Indeed, Films like Indiana Jones takes a lot from older adventure serials with the only difference being the budgets. In fact, Dr Jones is more akin to Swashbucklers than our other type of action hero (Tasker, 1995), the survivalist which is more for war films, prison films and disaster films for example Rambo. (Neale, 2007)

Morally speaking then, heroes are usually the good guys. They believe in the upholding the law or in moral justice. Even if their body counts are along the lines of mass genocide. Compared to the villain,

they are the better people. However, a study called *Crafting a Compelling Action Hero Movie* states that audiences noted that:

“altruism seems to involve helping a group of people directly – there is a sacrifice, but it is more sharing what you have than sacrificing yourself... While heroic acts are always in some sense altruistic, an act of altruism isn’t always heroic” (Lam, 2015).

Whilst a lot of movies are about policemen or soldier doing their job, there usually is another motive to make the story more personal to the character. Like a friend or family member getting involved being an obvious trope carried over from things like the medieval tale (Neale, 2007). This makes the stakes more personal to the hero and increase the tension as there is a risk of the hero losing something close to them.

Action heroes are endlessly entertaining to people around the world, box office numbers for the top movies worldwide consist of loads of movies classified as action movies.

But what’s the point of an action hero. What makes them different from every of hero that exists and why should I care.

To explain the appeal of Action heroes, we need to go back to the 1970s. Films like *Rambo First Blood Part 2* and *Commando* were response to the loss of the Vietnam war and the changeover to Reagan presidency. It was way to get back, it was a way to settle the score. Cinema has the ability to draw from desires and dreams as well as experience of narcissistic identification (Steven Cohan, 1993, p. 10). Identification allows a audience member to identifies with the male Protagonist not for the erotic look but because the Protagonist is in control of Narrative and is omnipotent, he has some significant authority. (Steven Cohan, 1993, p. 13)

In *First Blood*, Rambos fuels his rage by blaming American society for the loss of Vietnam. However *Rambo First Blood Part 2* sympathises with Rambo allowing to go back to have the victory that he deserved. Rambo in the sequels opens up about his anger over the Vietnam not through his words but instead through violence. This is something that Michael Rogin calls the Amnesia of US political spectacle. Something that echoed in sequels of the 1980s like for example *Lethal Weapon* where Riggs suicidal guilt is over his wife death in the first film is not only explained but externalized in *Lethal Weapon 2*. (Steven Cohan, 1993, p. 246) the success of these films at the box office suggest that there was a need for representation and marketing of US Masculinities in this period. (Steven Cohan, 1993, p. 247)

Action adventures are the pinnacle of cinema at the moment. Superheroes have filled the gap of omnipotent action heroes and now people are looking for identification in groups that are under represented in cinema. There is some sort of fantasy about being an action hero. Even Arnold Schwarzenegger said that he signed onto the *Last Action Hero* because of that fantasy. It awakens that childlike frenzy in all of us. Even though *Indiana Jones* isn’t on the same power level of *Rambo* it still awakes the fantasy of being an omnipotent hero. The on-screen heroes in some way represent what we could be, it’s the best forms of ourselves. And with an increase in interest for other forms of on screen dedication, it seems that now more than ever, everyone wants to be an action hero

You just wanted to stare at Stallone’s naked chest. Ha

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