

Audiences know

When Frank goes to movies, he can sometimes predict when people will get up to use the bathroom. A lapse in the action, half an hour in—one character says to another, “So, what made you want to become a cop?” Frank believes that moviegoers, in an almost Pavlovian way, have learned to recognize “baldly expositional” writing as a sign that they might safely sneak out for a

element of surprise. The exposition in his scripts is often imparted by an eccentric minor character, in an unusual milieu: in “Dead Again,” Robin Williams, in a bloody butcher’s apron, talks to Branagh and Thompson about reincarnation, upon which the plot hinges; in “Minority Report,” Tom Cruise sneaks into a greenhouse, where a comically brusque botanist divulges secrets about the police state they live in. To hold the interest of a jaded audience, nothing is more important than unpredictability—a promise that if you look away you might miss something.

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