

Generations

The title can be the best sales tool

Authors know that the three most important parts of a riveting work of fiction or nonfiction is the first sentence, the last sentence and the title.

On the other hand, when William Shakespeare penned his famous, "What's in a name" from Romeo and Juliet, scholars claim he meant that Juliet was arguing that it didn't matter that Romeo's name Montague was from her family's rival house and that names of things do not affect what they really are, for example, for Romeo, the love of her life (literally) and for authors the Pulitzer Prize.

That may be so, but in Hollywood, often a blockbuster's title that becomes synonymous with success and known throughout the world doesn't start out with a winning title. Take for instance the successful sci-fi classic "Back to the Future." That seems to encapsulate what the entire movie was about,

but the original title was "Spaceman from Pluto,"



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which thankfully was squashed by Steven Spielberg. Most of us are familiar with Julia Roberts dressed in a slinky, red,

off-the-shoulders gown standing next to Richard Gere with the words "Pretty Woman" not too far away. However, the original title was "\$3,000" symbolizing the amount of money Julia's john played by Gere was going to pay her for spending a week with him.

Fortunately, it became clear that putting the focus on the financial transaction was less likely to get people in the theater than getting audiences to focus on the gorgeous woman at its center.

No one can dispute that "Casablanca" was the perfect title for the

classic Bogart-Bergman, award-winning flick, but, originally, Bogey's bar had more weight than the spy-laden location. "Everybody Comes to Rick's" was the title of a stage play about an upscale Moroccan nightclub that becomes the center of tensions between members of Vichy French and German officers, refugees and the tough-talking American.

Though the play hadn't been produced for the stage at the time, it sold to Warner Bros. for the at-the-time record-breaking sum of \$20,000 and went on to be considered one of the greatest films made.

"Affairs of the Heart" sounds like a weepy girl gets guy, girl loses guy, and somehow miracles happen and they wind up a happy twosome. However, the actual movie was far from it.

After a weak response from the ticket-buying public, the film bigwigs changed the title to "Fatal Attraction" and the money started rolling in.

Giant movie star Samuel L. Jackson had a lot to say when the head honchos of his studio decided to change the title of his movie "Snakes on a Plane" to tepid-sounding "Pacific Air Flight 121."

According to moviedom history, Jackson thundered, "What are you doing here? It's not 'Gone with the Wind.' It's not 'On the Waterfront.' It's 'Snakes on a Plane!'" The brass thought that title gave too much away, but Jackson kept firm and the result was a million-dollar hit movie.

"Shoeless Joe" is the name of the novel on which "Field of Dreams" is based and that served as the working title of the movie. However, the new name helped make it clear that the movie was about something greater than baseball and a movie about dreams would appeal to everyone. It's still one of our most beloved films.

"Do Androids Dream

of Electric Sheep"? Perhaps, but this is the title of the Philip K. Dick story on which "Blade Runner" is based. Somehow the original title doesn't stir the soul or make you want to slap down 10 bucks a ticket for the dark, futuristic Harrison Ford drama.

Screenwriter Victor Miller used "A Long Night at Camp Blood" as his working title while drafting the script, but director Sean Cunningham was adamant that the finished product be called "Friday the 13th," which proved to be a huge winner considering all the sequels that came after this mega hit.

Originally called "The Babysitter Murders," the plot was about a psycho who decides to stalk, hunt and do away with babysitters.

When the film's producer pointed out that the film could be set on Halloween night and named after the holiday, which would ensure plenty of name recognition, co-writer and

director John Carpenter agreed, and the horror classic "Halloween" was christened. I'm not sure what number the next sequel will be.

Perhaps the most off-kilter, inappropriate title of all had to be the one originally used on the script, "The Ship of Dreams." No, it wasn't a movie about a cruise to a faraway tropical paradise.

Referring to the slogan used by the White Star Line of luxury ships, they eventually decided to keep it simple and shortened the title to one word only — the name of the ship itself, "Titanic," and the rest is history.

The original title might have applied more to the producers' and directors' bank accounts since the film grossed \$659 million or \$1.24 billion adjusted for inflation today.

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