

# Actresses on Heroin Don't Take Direction Well: On Shooting (Up) Sex Scenes

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## Blog Posts

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Sex scenes are rarely fun to direct. You have likely heard this before. Once you get over the fact that people are naked in front of you, it is mostly weird and, at best, mechanical.

*Okay, now arch your back, lean in. That's right, lean in and kiss. Now more thrusting.*

But sex scenes while an actress is nodding on heroin are truly unpleasant.

Picture this: you're making your movie. You cast the best young actors your money and script can get. You watch lots of interesting indie films, looking for interesting actors to populate your world. *Each role should be someone interesting*, you insist to the overworked casting director. And you find a young lady who is really solid in a film you admire. She plays someone pure and together in a movie

that is about characters who are anything but. She auditions and nails it. You meet for lunch and she's excited. You're excited. She's destined for bigger things.

Day one on the set: you think you see track marks.

*Can't be that*, you think.

In her first scene, she can't remember her line. Four words. They come out jumbled and slurry. You know you are fucked.

Some days, she is fine. Others she is...well, seemingly on heavy drugs.

And the sex scene looms.

Films have lots of reasons they get financed. Ego. Cash Flow. International deal in place. Star names. Ego. And elements like: Action! Sex! Horror! You know this. And sometimes getting some nudity in the film is part of what the money folks need. So the sex scene is pressing.

The first time we tried to shoot it, we couldn't wake her up and get her out of her trailer. She was passed out that hard. So we pushed to the next day. That next day was the last day on that specific set. The bedroom set. It had to be shot.

We had her come to set to shoot a dialogue scene and planned to keep her on set straight into the sex scene. This almost worked. As we started, she was able to do all of the lead-up smooching we needed. When she slipped off to pee (with a PA following to keep her from heading to her trailer), she seemed altered.

She arrived back on set and as we rolled, she nodded. Heavy headed, eyes fluttering. The actor she was making out with was literally holding her up and trying to undress her and make it look like they were both into it.

I cannot say enough good things about most actors because they possess skill sets you might never realize they have at the ready. This charming, educated, extremely well-built young actor was now all of those things, playing a truly complicated character, all while puppeteering a virtually dead actress.

I tried to shoot it and see how much I could use, but it just looked too weird.

I cut and she was "led" back to her trailer.

Fuck.

It is sometimes in those moments, with time burning through the little money you're stretching to make this film happen, and the producers are looking on as though you must have answers because you've done this a million times (but this is only your third feature film and you've had, maybe 50 days of actual experience on the set of a movie), and the crew is fully aware that the sex scene has to be shot before we can all go home, that inspiration strikes. Not always, but sometimes:

An "extra" from a scene that morning. She was super easy to work with. The crew loved her. She would do nudity in a heartbeat. And she was hot. Body nothing like the actress she'd be doubling. But hot.

And as luck would have it, she was still at the location. Within twenty minutes, the hair department had styled a wig on her and she was naked and writhing atop the lead. Soon, the sex scene led to buckets of blood being poured on them, as it often happens in sex scenes in my movies. And she

was loving it. And he was loving it. And the scene, despite not being able to see her face much, was really fun to watch, even on the set. And it made for one of the best scenes in the film in my opinion.

*Lesson learned:*

Always have a back-up plan. And sex scenes *can* be fun if the actors are happy to make out with each other while covered in blood.