

CS 3660

The “Cinema” in Machinima



Avatar

- As of Jan 20, 2010:
- Estimated budget: \$200 - \$500 million
- Domestic box office gross: \$512, 852,205
- Foreign box office gross: \$1,172, 833, 529
- Worldwide: \$1, 685, 685, 734

Avatar

Did you **like** the movie?

Why or why not?

Why do we watch movies?

But why do we really
watch movies? (Hint: There are 3 reasons)

- Story

- Story

- Story!!!

Filmmaking is the 20th Century story art form.

Is interactive gaming the 21st? (NPR, MIT professor)

Key Elements of a Good Film

1. Create a meaningful story
2. Communicate that story effectively using visual language

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What makes a meaningful story?

- A good beginning, a good middle, and a good end, i.e. **structure**
 - **Cause and effect**
- A **premise/theme** that drives the action
- Believable and rich **characters**
- Increasing **conflict/tension**
- Sense of **completeness**

Story Structure

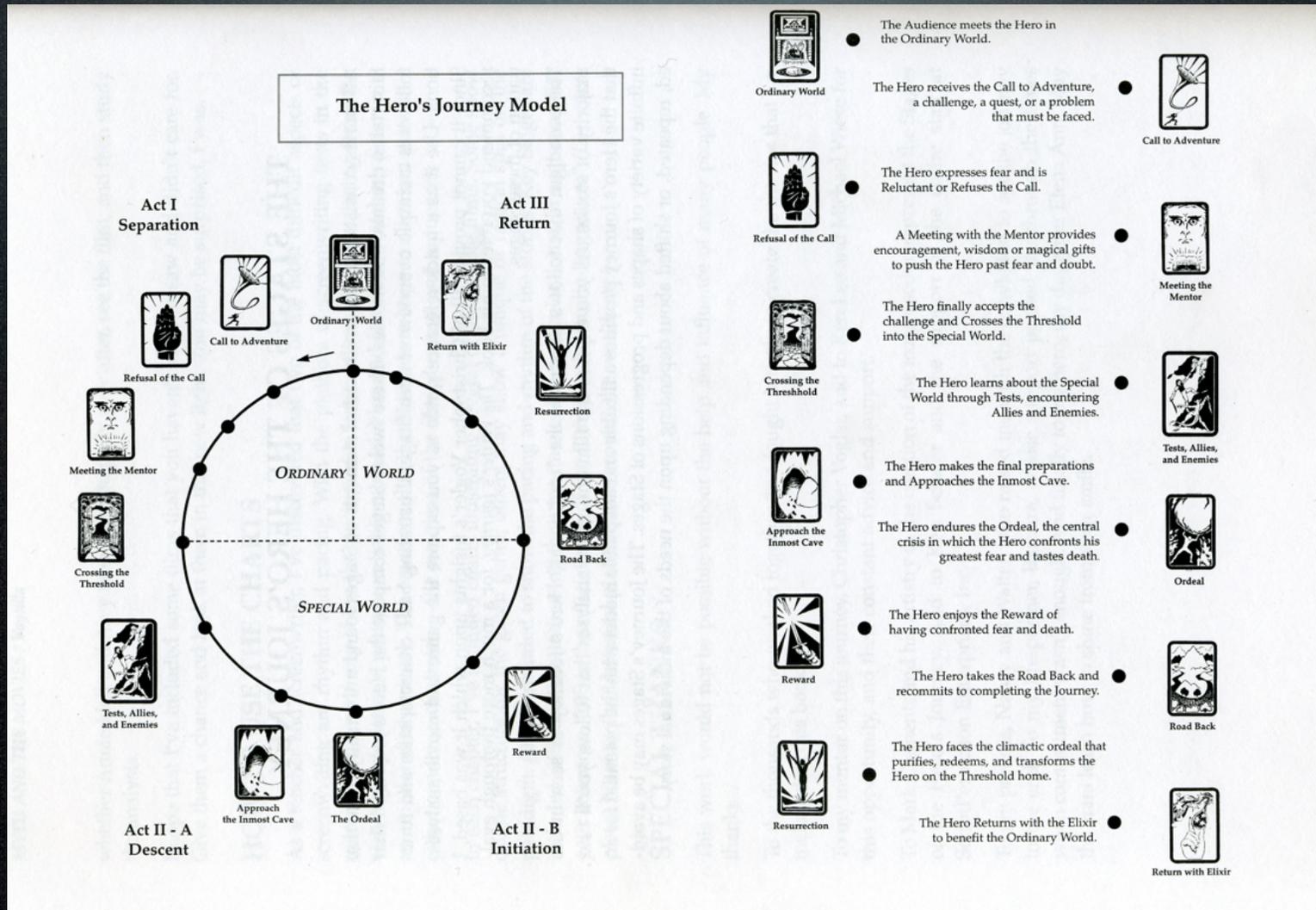
Beginning, Middle, and End

Typical Hollywood Story Structure



The Hero's Journey

by Joseph Campbell



Act Structure

- **Act 1:** introduces characters and sets the scene for ensuing conflict
- **Inciting incident:** catapults character into next act and onto journey
- **Act 2:** builds conflict to a climax
- **Act 3:** resolution of presented conflict
- **Tips:**
 - Start late, end early--Mamet

Story Structure

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Short vs. Feature

- **Short** is more metaphor, haiku, or joke; doesn't allow for as much plot and character development
- **Feature** is many shorts--like paragraphs or chapters that make up a novel--allows for more plot and character development
 - ex.-Situation, problem/conflict, and punch line



Like a paragraph
Has it's own completeness

Cause and Effect

“The ordering of unrelated events or ideas or images in favor of an overriding preconception.”

David Mamet (*On Directing Film*, citing Jung)

TRANSLATION: We take events that happen and attach causality to those events in support of an end result or conclusion.

Cause and Effect



Wilber

Cause and Effect



Cause and Effect



Cause and Effect



Cause and Effect

“It is the nature of human perception to connect unrelated images into a story, because we need to make the world make sense.”

David Mamet (*On Directing Film*)

Subject vs. Theme

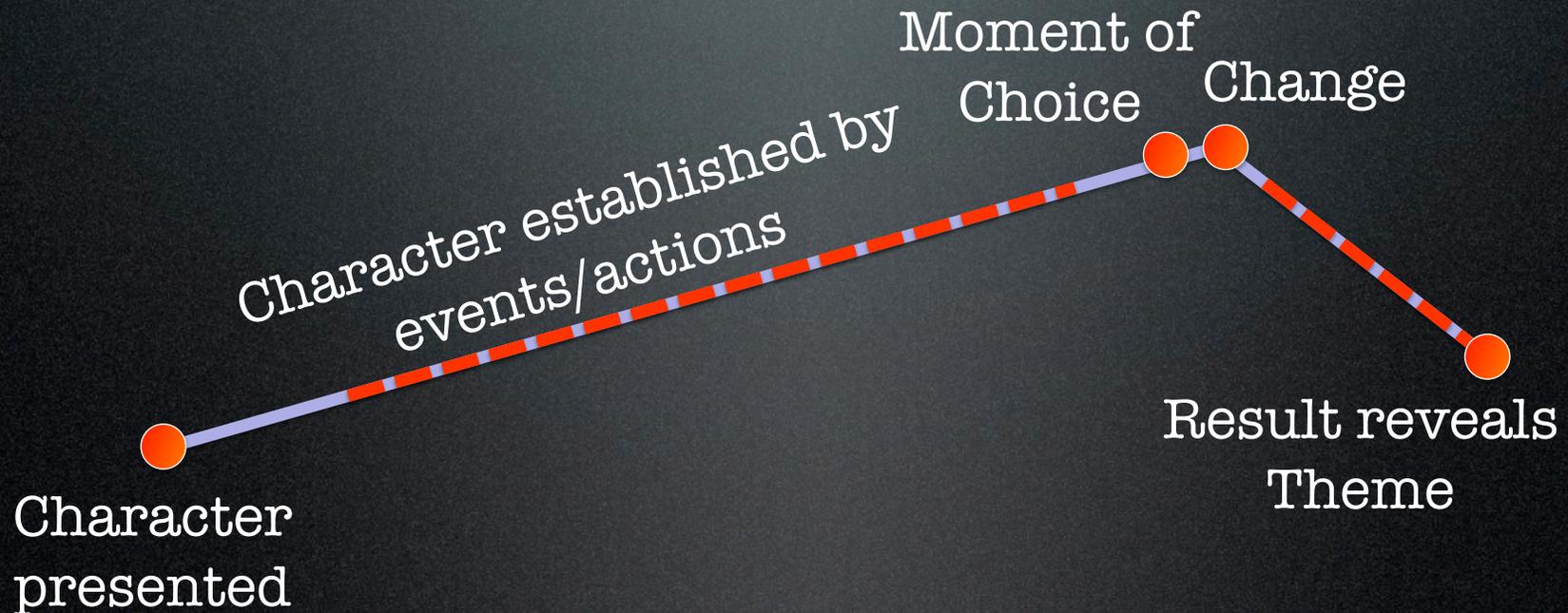
- **Subject** is what it's about
 - Ex. Groundhog Day – What is it about?
- **Theme** is what you're saying about what it's about
 - Ex. Groundhog Day – “So what”?
- If an idea supports the theme, use it, but if it doesn't, **murder your darlings**; tangents lead to detours

Character

- Actions and dialogue **reveal** character; setting and background further **define**
- Unique **voice**
- Fights for his/her beliefs; **concerned** for own well being
- Character is **coded**--show don't tell
- **Relatable**--someone you could know; based on real people

Character

Character Arc



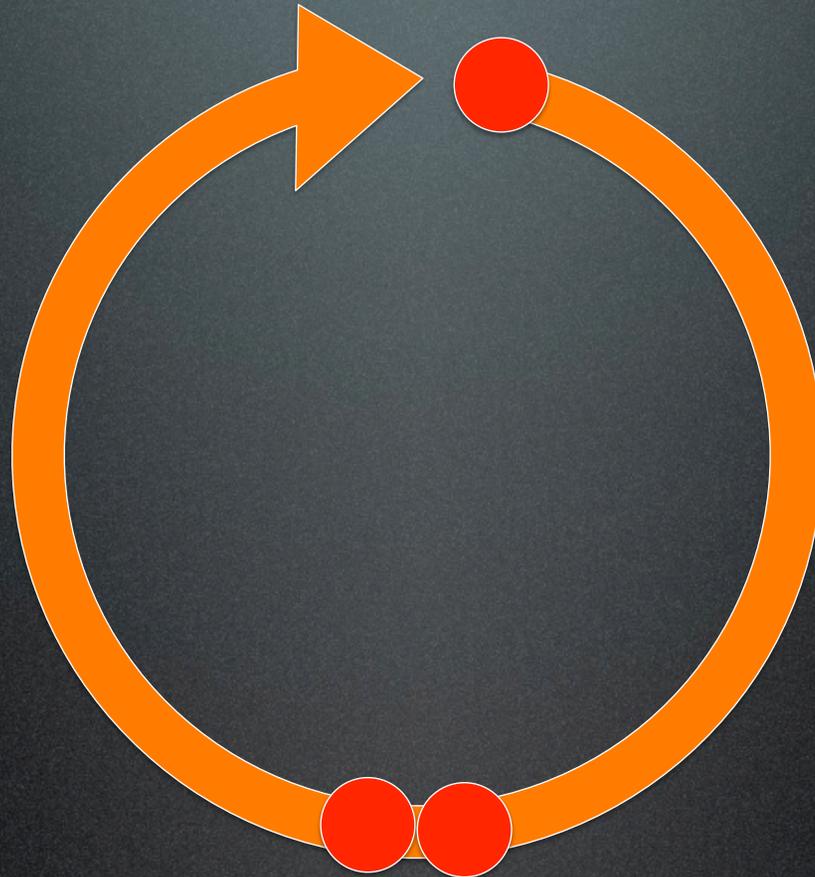
Story Structure

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Typical Hollywood Story Structure



Variety: As a reminder



Conflict/Tension

- Every **protagonist** (good guy) needs an **antagonist** (bad guy); bad guy can be one's self
- About finding ways to give your characters a **hard time**
 - Put your characters up a tree, throw rocks at them, and get them back down
- **Escalate** the action
 - Start with a knife, move on to a shotgun, and if a shotgun doesn't do it, launch a nuclear bomb
- Character should rise or fall; **change**

Key Elements of a Good Film

1. Create a meaningful story

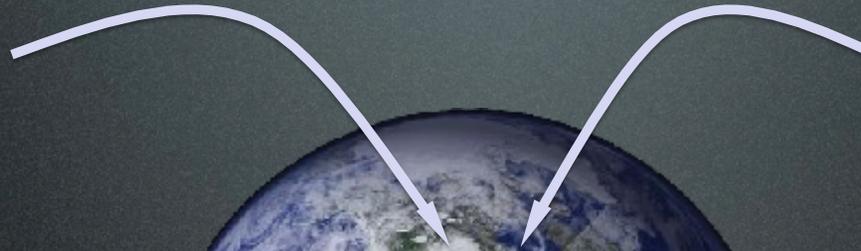
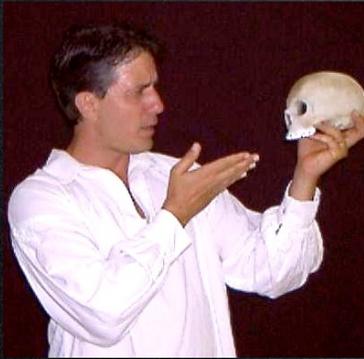
2. Communicate that story effectively using visual language

Communicating Story

**1. Make sense for the
Character**

**2. Make sense for the
Audience**

Accessing the Film



Meaningful Cinematic Story



visually

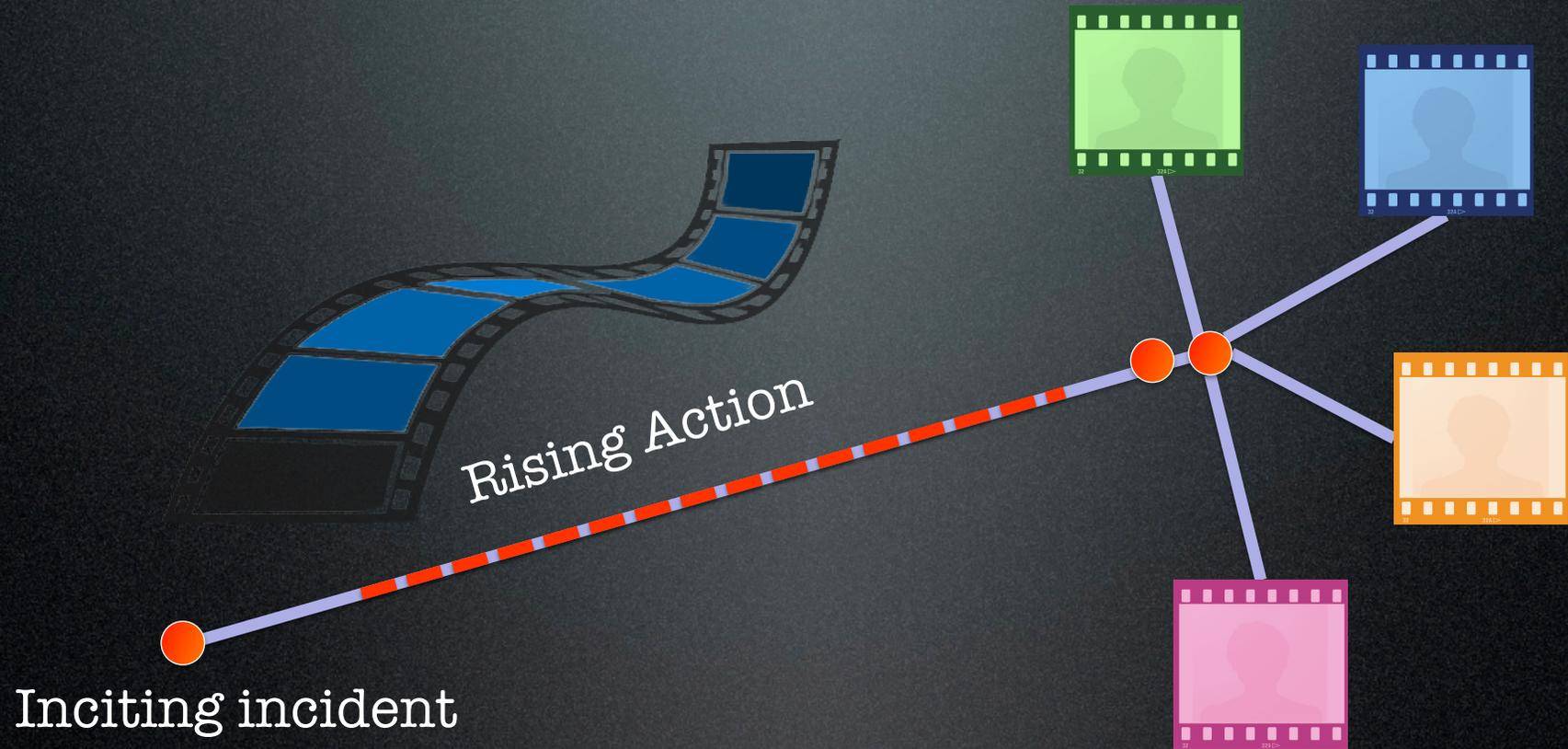
Example & Practice

Birds of a Feather

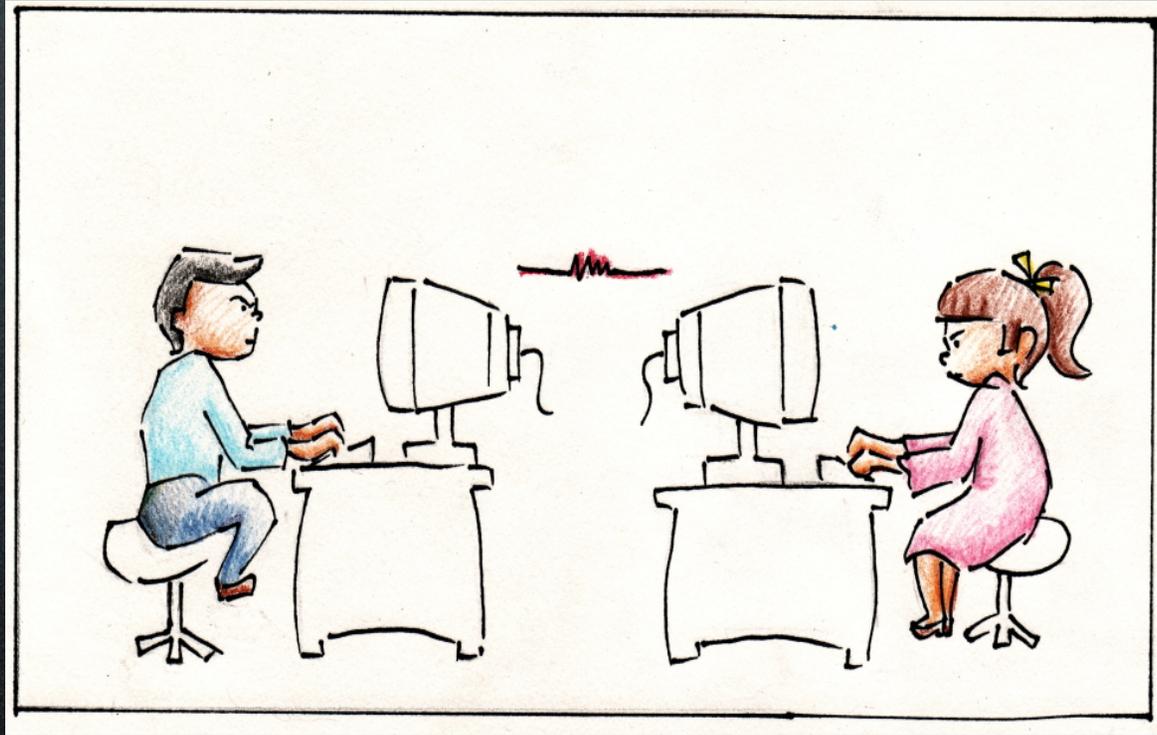
Birds of a Feather



Birds of a Feather



The Story

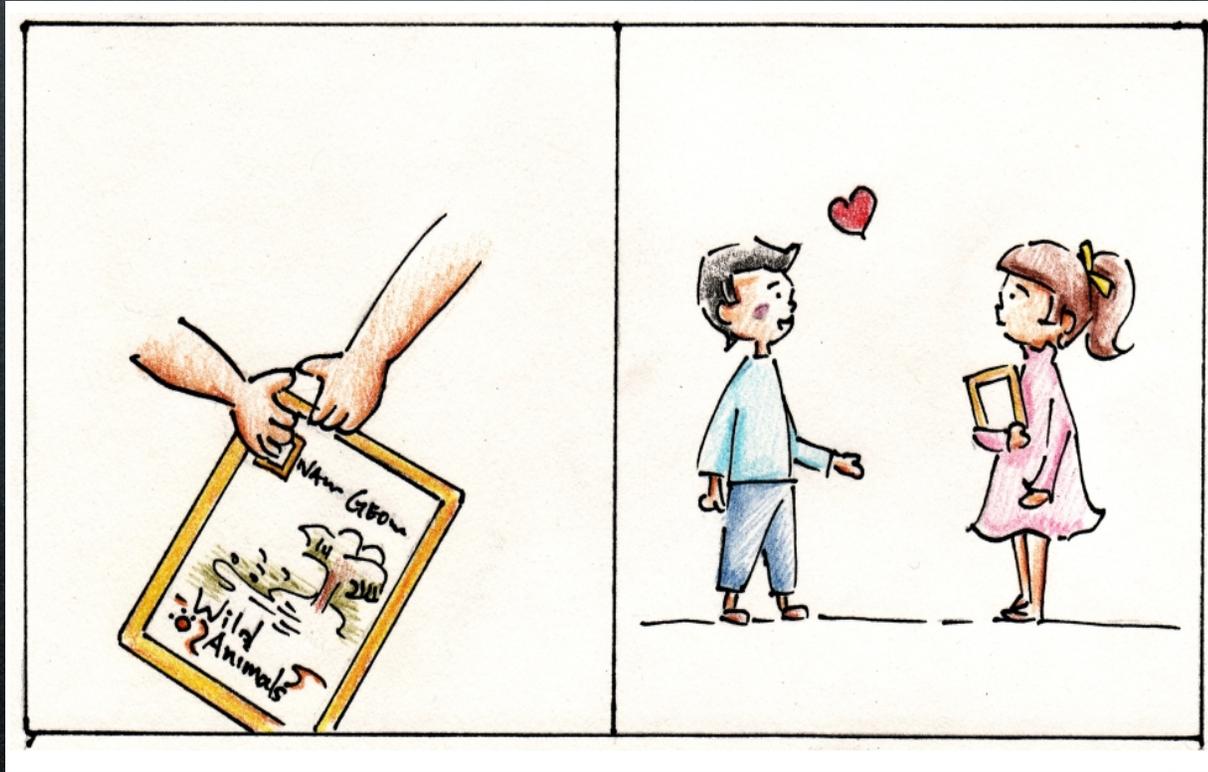


Scenario: **Gabriel** and **Shelly** are both taking the same computer programming class.

The teacher announces that whoever **finishes** the final programming assignment **first** will **get** a guaranteed **A** in the class.

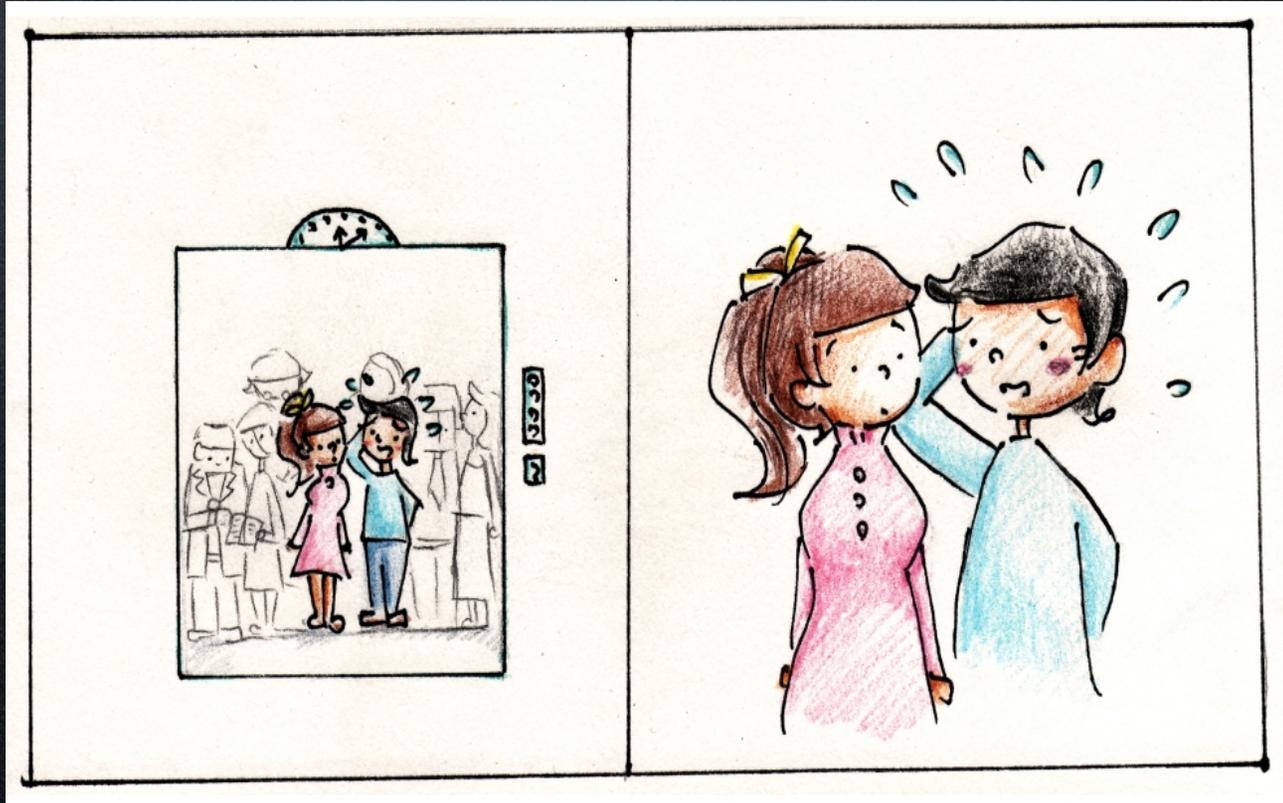
They both want to win and **recognize** in each other their main **competition**.

The Story



Gabriel loves **nature** and wild life and finds out one day that **Shelly**, the competition, **also loves nature** and wild life. He instantly falls in **love**.

The Story



However, **because Shelly** is the **competition**, **Gabriel won't admit** his **love** or act on it, even as he **can't deny** his feelings.

Too bad he always runs into Shelly when least expected.

The Story

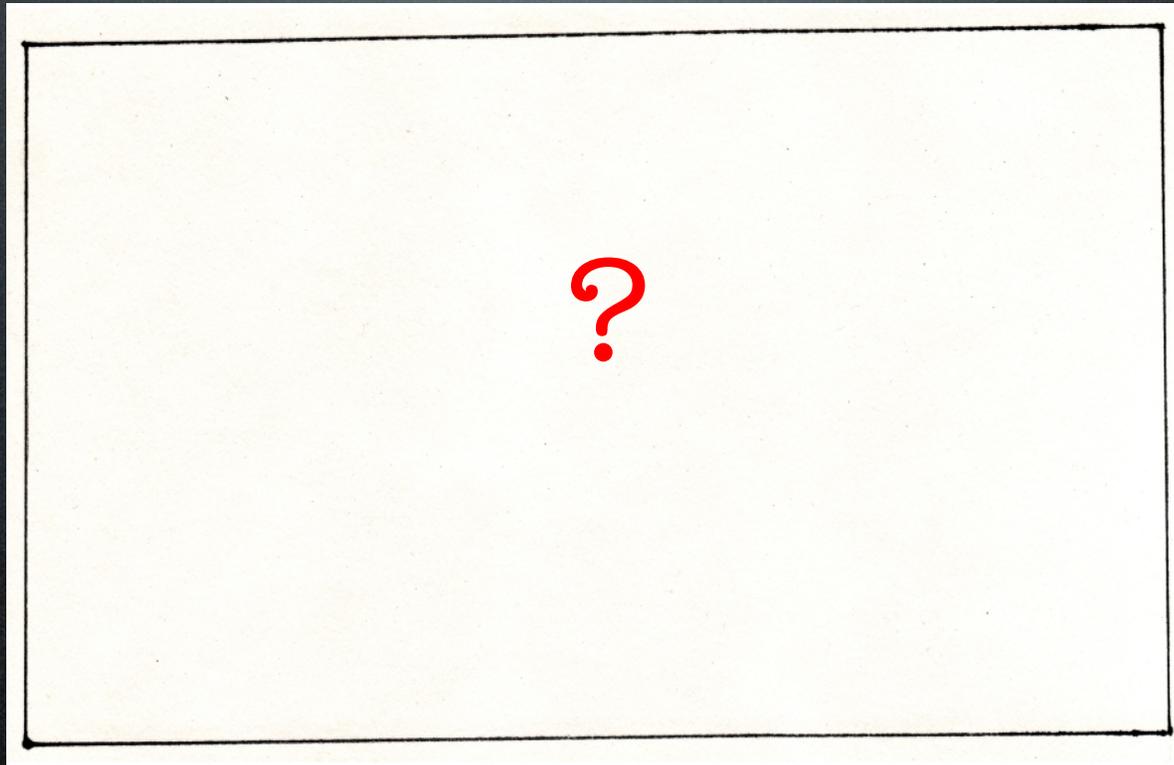


Gabriel attempts to **ignore his feelings** in hopes that they will fade away. He buries himself in his work.

But his **feelings for Shelly only increase** in intensity.

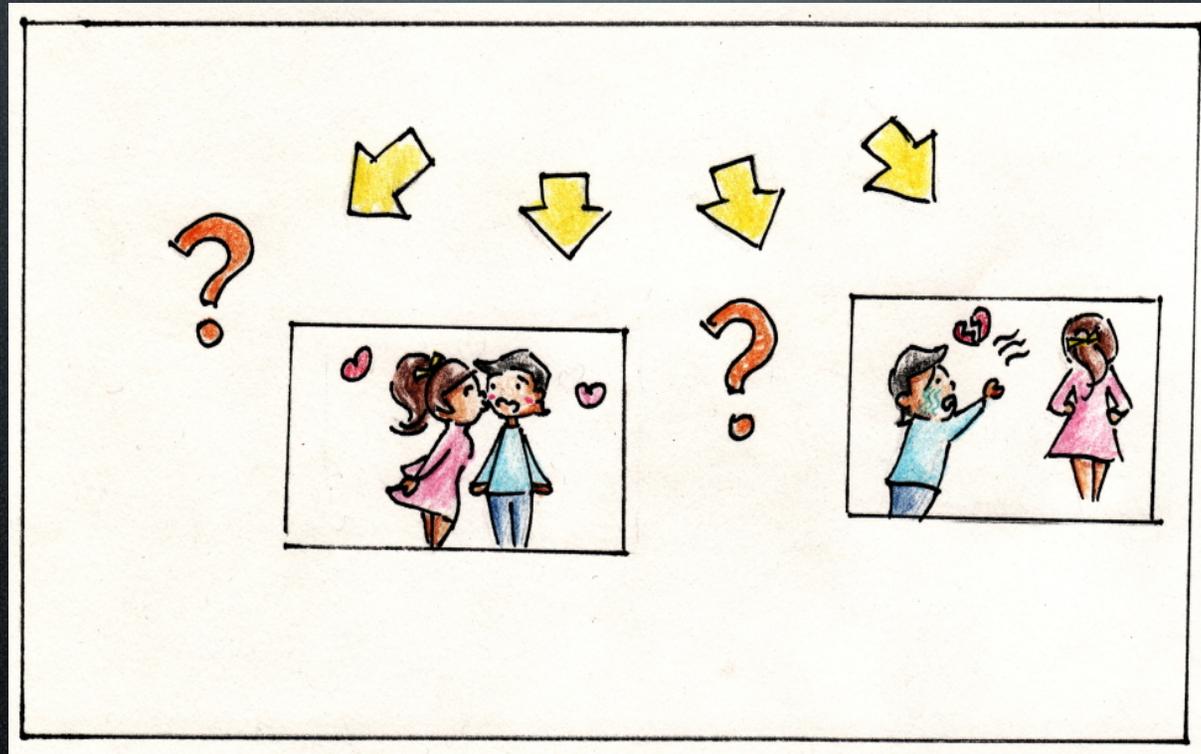
Gabriel cannot go on in this way forever. He is reaching a point of **crisis**.

Moment of Choice



What should **Gabriel** do? **How** must he **change**?
Will he **go for the girl**?
Can he **win** the class competition and still **get the girl**?

Conclusion



How will events conclude for our love-torn protagonist?
Are you a **romantic** or a **realist**?

Ideas

- Start with what **interests you**, if it interests you, it probably interests others too
- Notice what catches **other people's** attention--makes them laugh, cry, do a double-take
- Dreams, journals, memories
- News, literature, theater, movies, and games--**recycle a good idea, adapt it**

Put it Down on Paper

- **Act of writing** produces more ideas
- **Brainstorm**; green-light yourself
- **Storyboard** with pictures for camera angles
- Make **notes** on dialogue and music
- **Sketch** scene flow
- Let it be messy, clean up later

Script format

- www.celtx.com for FREE screenwriting software
- iWork Pages template
- Macros in Word

What follows is an example of the three parts of a spec screenplay, the three parts of a master scene heading, the three elements of narrative description, and the three parts of a dialogue block.

Courier New 12-point font

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The moon shines on the pale, serene face of ELEANOR SAWYER.

ELEANOR - name 37 (3.7 inches)
(softly) - parenthetical 31 spaces (3.1 inches) (2 inches wide tab)

Midnight.
dialogue 25 spaces (2.5 inches) & does not extend beyond 60 spaces (6 inches)

She mounts a horse and rides into the darkness, the hoof beats muffled by the leaves and flora on the forest floor. (3-3.5 inches wide tab)

left margin 15 spaces (1.5 inches)

Formatting in a nutshell

There are three parts of a screenplay: *headings*, *narrative description*, and *dialogue*.

1. Headings (slug lines)

There are three types of headings.

A. Master scene headings, which consists of three main parts:

1. Camera location (EXT. or INT.)
2. Scene location
3. Time (DAY or NIGHT)

B. Secondary scene headings

C. Special headings for flashbacks, dreams, montages, series of shots, and so on.

2. Narrative description

The word "narrative" loosely means *story*, and it consists of three elements:

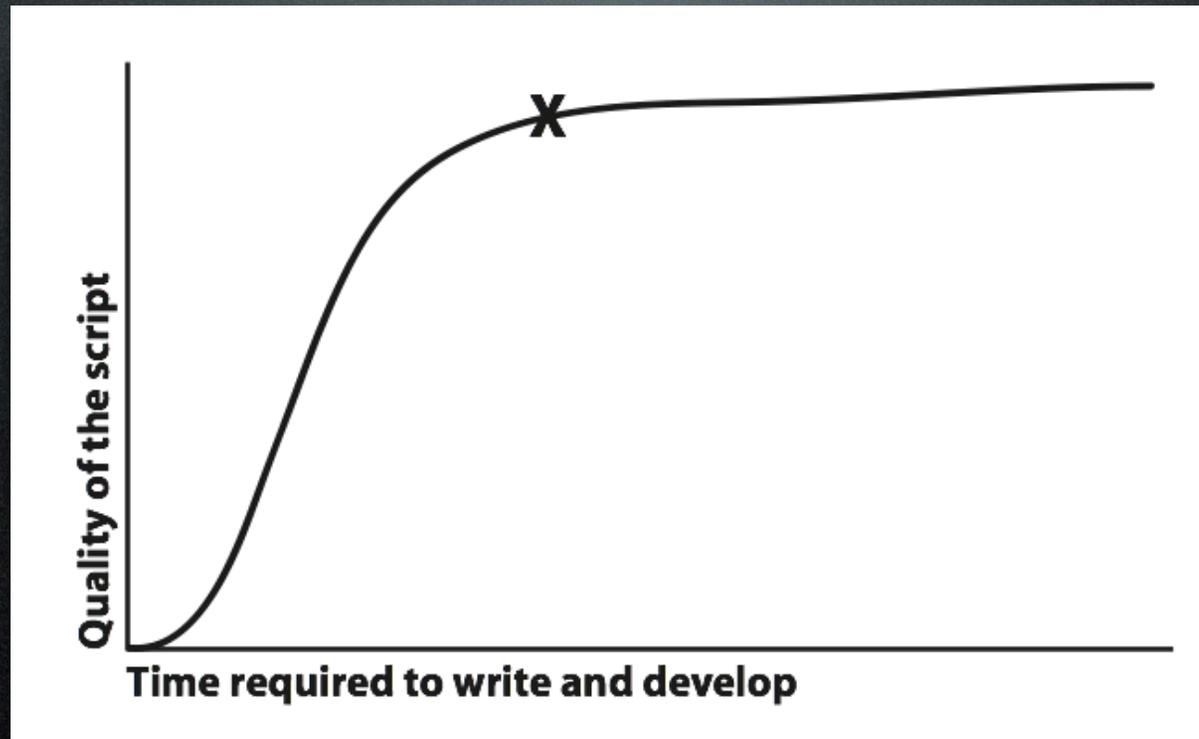
- A. Action
- B. Setting and character (visual images)
- C. Sounds

3. Dialogue

The dialogue block consists of three parts.

- A. The *character cue*, or name of the person speaking, which always appears in CAPS.
- B. The *parenthetical* or *actor's direction* or *wryly*. This is optional.
- C. The *speech*.

How do you know when you're done?





Parting Words

- **Rule #1:** Keep it interesting
- **Litmus Test:** Is it something you would want to watch?
- **Passion:** Is it an idea you're willing to log hours and hours on?
- **KISS Principle:** Keep It Simple Stupid