

CS 5964

# The “Cinema” in Machinima



# A Few Facts

- **\$150 million** average budget for top ten big hits of 2008 (except Twilight at \$37 million)
  - Dark Knight (\$531 million box office domestic), Iron Man (\$318 mil) Indiana Jones (\$317 mil), Hancock (\$228 mil), Twilight (\$184.5 mil), Quantum of Solace (\$167.5 mil), WALL-E (\$224 mil), Kung Fu Panda (\$215.5 mil), Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa (\$193.5 mil), Horton Hears a Who! (\$154.5 mil)
  - Double or more those figures with worldwide sales, DVD sales can double that figure again
  - That's **more than \$1 million** for every minute/page of screen time
- 30 sec. spot during Super Bowl can cost **\$3 million**

# Why do we watch movies?

- Entertainment
- Something new, something familiar if you're a fan perhaps
- Actors → stars
- Eye-popping camera, special FX and music → an experience

# 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)

# What makes a good story?

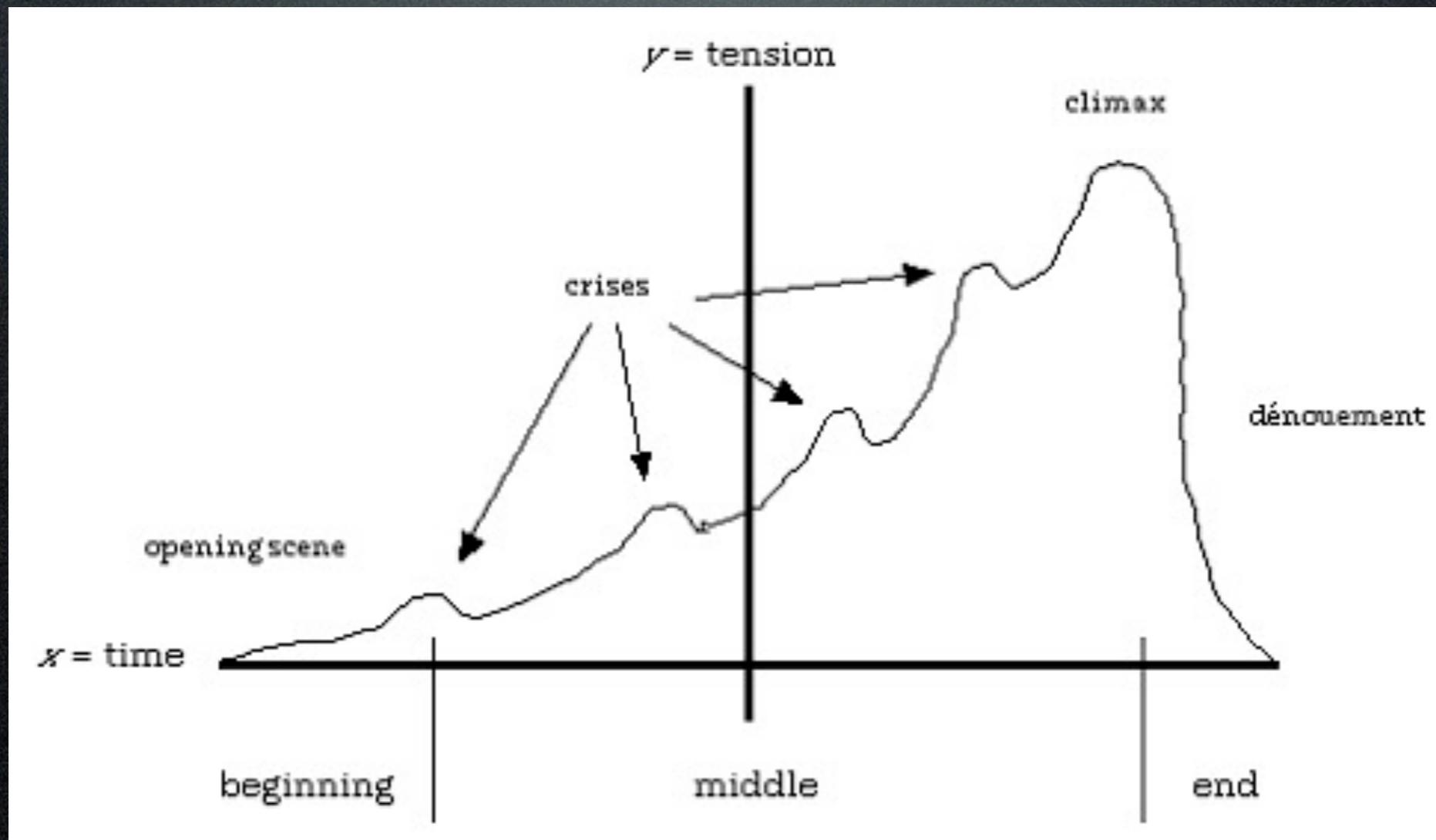
- A good beginning, a good middle, and a good end, i.e. **structure**
- A **premise/theme** that drives the action
- Believable and rich **characters**
- Increasing **conflict/tension**
- Sense of **completeness**

# Short vs. Feature

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

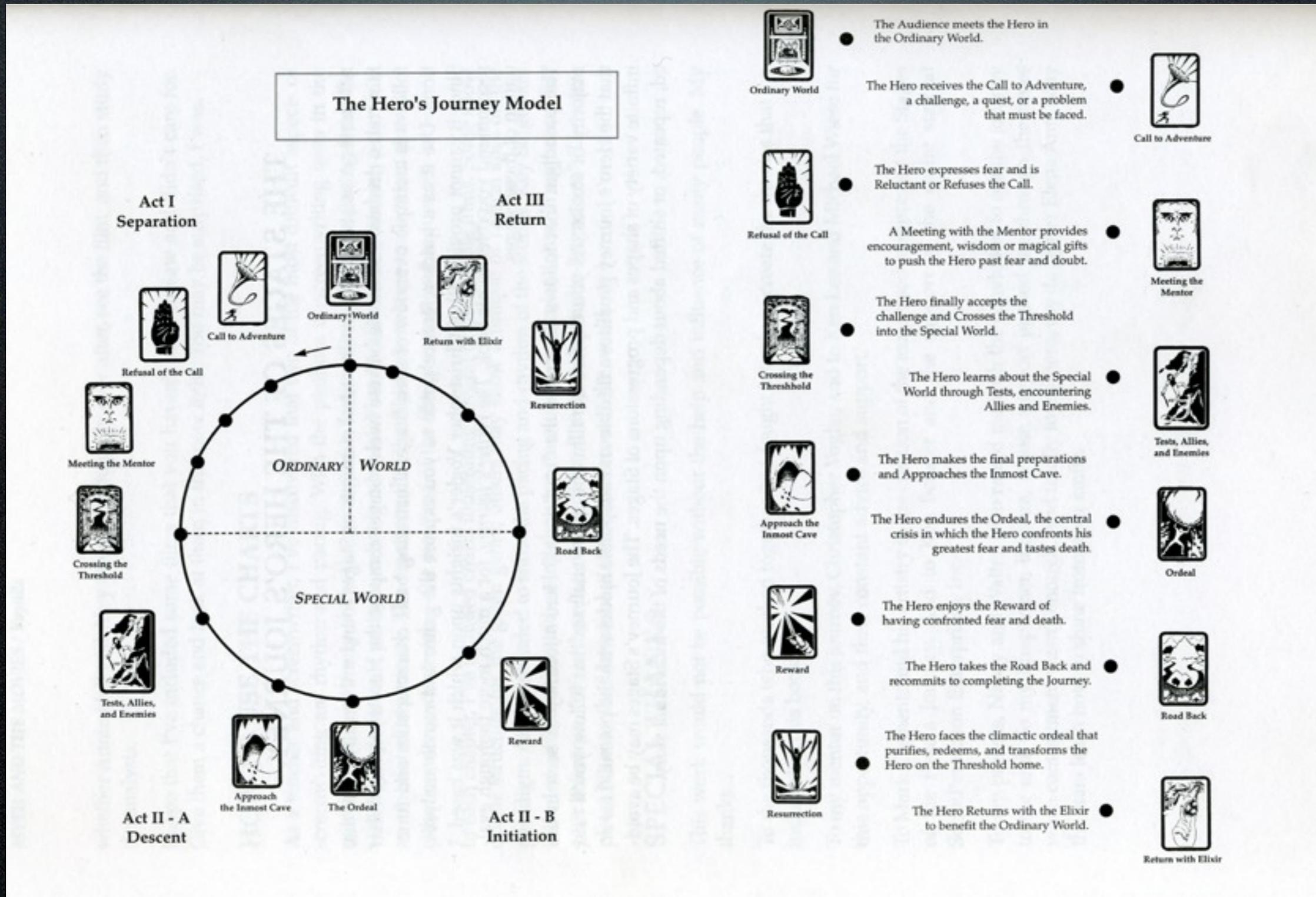
# Story structure

- Beginning, middle, and end (Aristotle)
- Typical Hollywood Story Structure



# The Hero's Journey

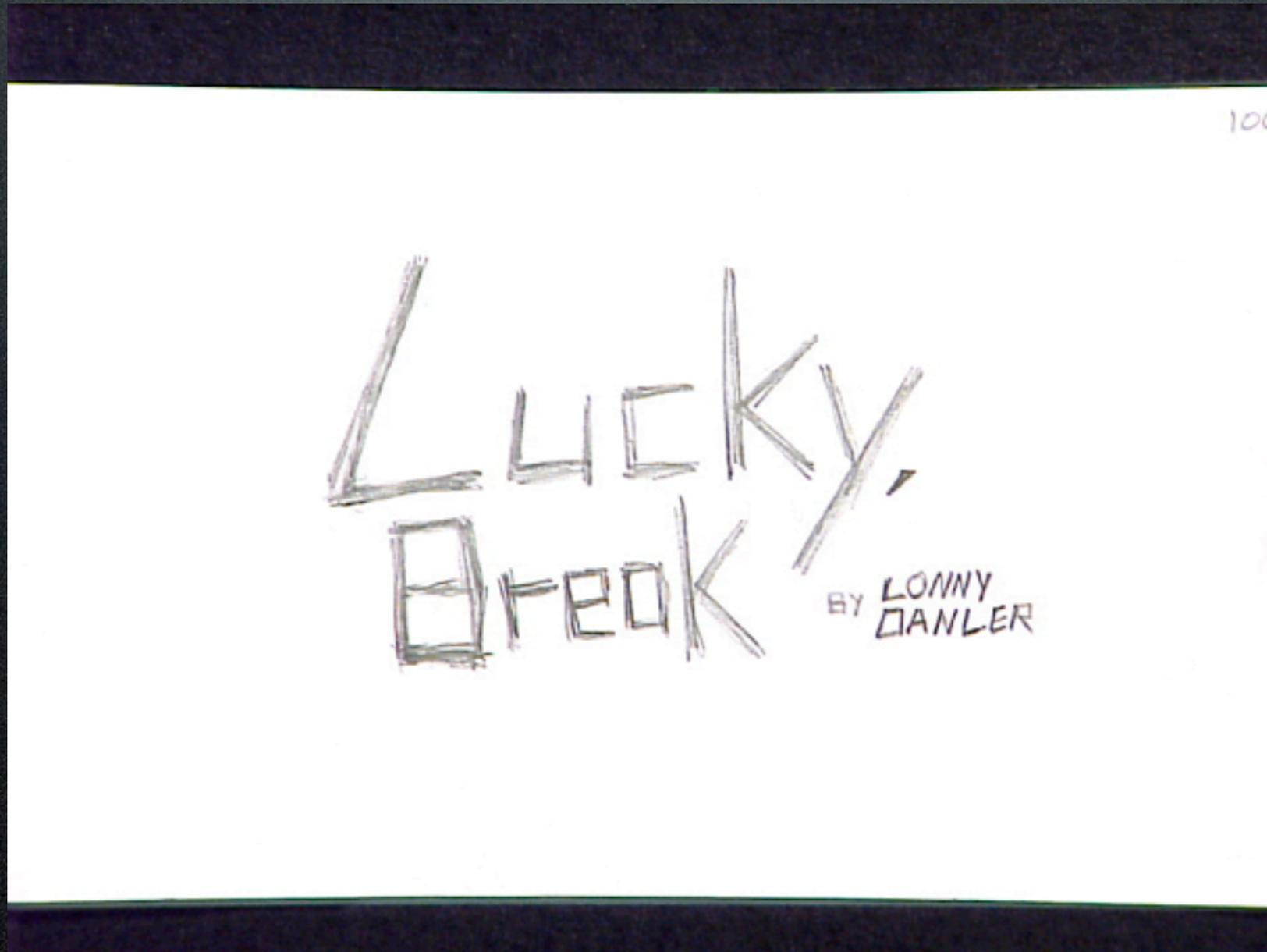
by Joseph Campbell



# 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

# How long is a story?



Like a sentence  
Title a good guiding force



Like a paragraph  
Has it's own completeness

“I’m a Ute and I’m a Cougar #1 (I Bleed Blue)”  
and/or  
“The Passion of the McCain”

Like a short story, poem, or joke  
Structure intact

# Subject vs. Theme

- **Subject** is what it's about
  - ex.- "The Passion of the McCain" is about McCain and Hillary, more specifically, their relationship
  - ex.-Ute vs. Cougar subject is team rivalry
- **Theme** is what you're saying about what it's about
  - ex.- Passion of McCain-"there's going to be some tough times ahead" for their clandestine relationship; fear of being discovered
  - ex.- Ute vs. Cougar-changes with each episode-"I Bleed Blue" theme is that everybody actually bleeds red, therefore supports Utes

# Premise/Theme

- Put it into a **few words** or a **sentence**
  - ex.- Cougars bleed red, literally
- Should drive the piece; use like a **road map** to get you from point A to point B
- If an idea supports the theme, use it, but if it doesn't, **murder your darlings**; tangents lead to detours
  - ex.-Ute vs. Cougar—doesn't need to get into how well the Utes did this year, the Ute mascot debate, or the MUSS, unless it supports the fact that Cougars bleed red too

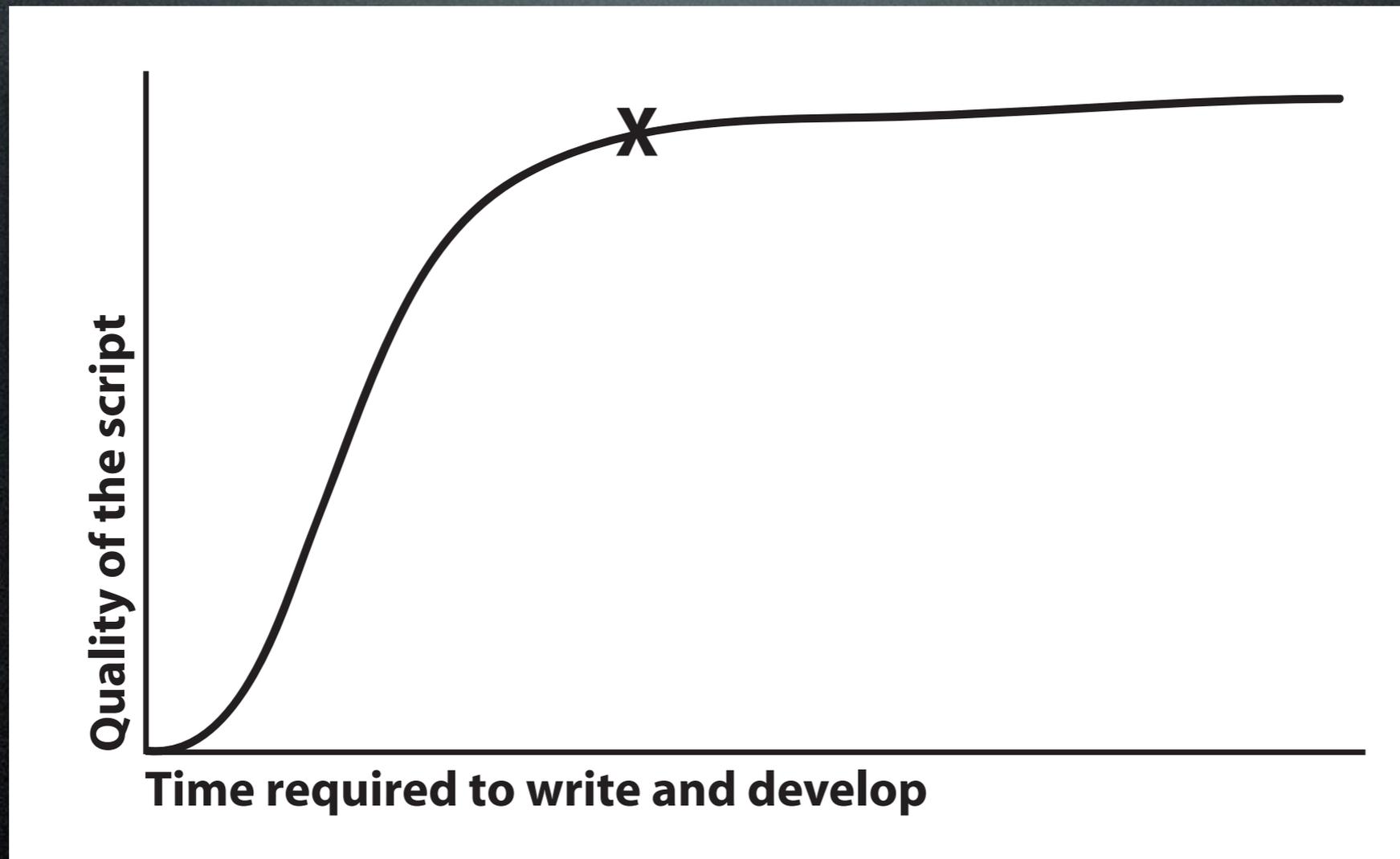
# Character

- 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
  - ex.-Ute vs. Cougar-Cougar has a "Y" on his face (says he's a Cougar too, but using formula and it's only a guideline)
- **Relatable**--someone you could know; based on real people

# 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**

# How do you know when you're done?



# 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](http://www.celtx.com) for FREE screenwriting software
- iWork Pages template
- Macros in Word

## 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*.

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.

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 total)  
Midnight.  
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 total)

left margin  
15 spaces  
(1.5 inches)

Courier New 12-point font

# 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