

**HOW TO STRUCTURE AN
UN-PUT-DOWNABLE STORY**

ROBERT BIDINOTTO

ABOUT ME

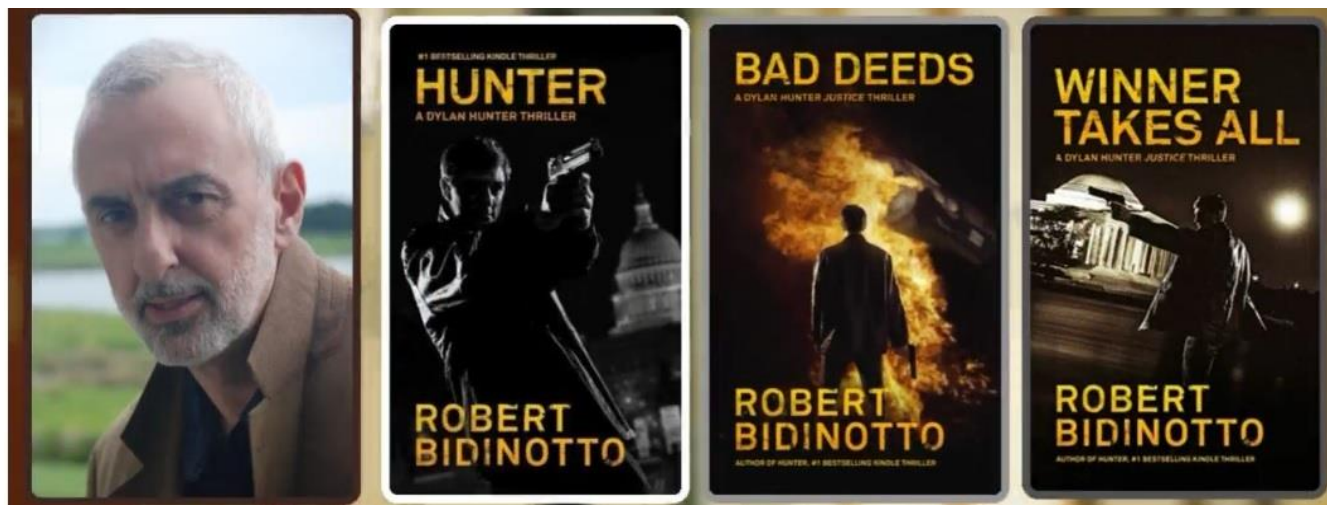


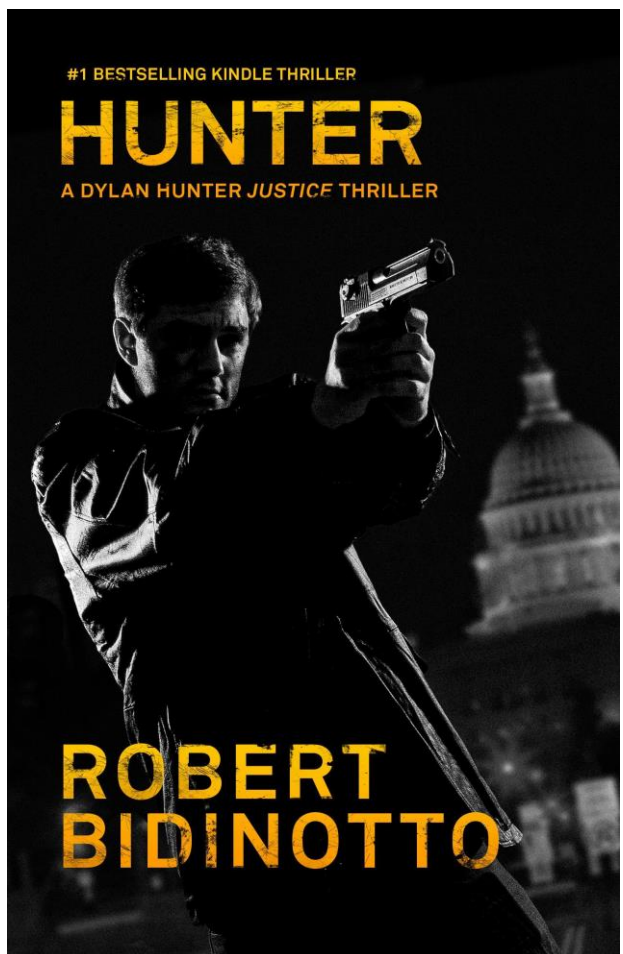
www.Bidinotto.com

- Five decades as award-winning nonfiction writer and editor
- Wrote high-profile investigative journalism for *Reader's Digest*
- Hundreds of articles, essays, columns, book and film reviews, editorials, interviews, etc.
- Wrote two nonfiction books about criminal justice system
- Award-winning magazine editor
- Bestselling thriller author.



**To date, I have published three
novels in my bestselling
Dylan Hunter
vigilante thriller series**





My debut thriller, ***HUNTER***, hit #1 on the Kindle “Mysteries and Thrillers” bestseller list, #1 in “Romantic Suspense,” and also became a *Wall Street Journal* “Top 10 Fiction Ebook.”

My second thriller, ***BAD DEEDS***, was an Audible “#1 Political Thriller.”

WHO IS THIS PRESENTATION FOR?

- **Fiction writers who wish to hook readers from the start of the story, then keep them spellbound throughout the tale.**
- **Fiction writers who want to entertain an audience of readers, rather than write *solely* for their own self-expression.**
- **In other words, this is for writers who want to be story *tellers*, not just story *creators*.**

**Your story makes a promise to the reader.
You're promising to take the reader on an
*interesting journey.***

**Strings of inventiveness, wit, and clever scenes
may serve as entertaining vignettes.**

**But if they *don't go anywhere,*
they will bog the reader down in...**

THE DREADED “STORY SWAMP”



YOUR “PRIME DIRECTIVE” AS A STORYTELLER:

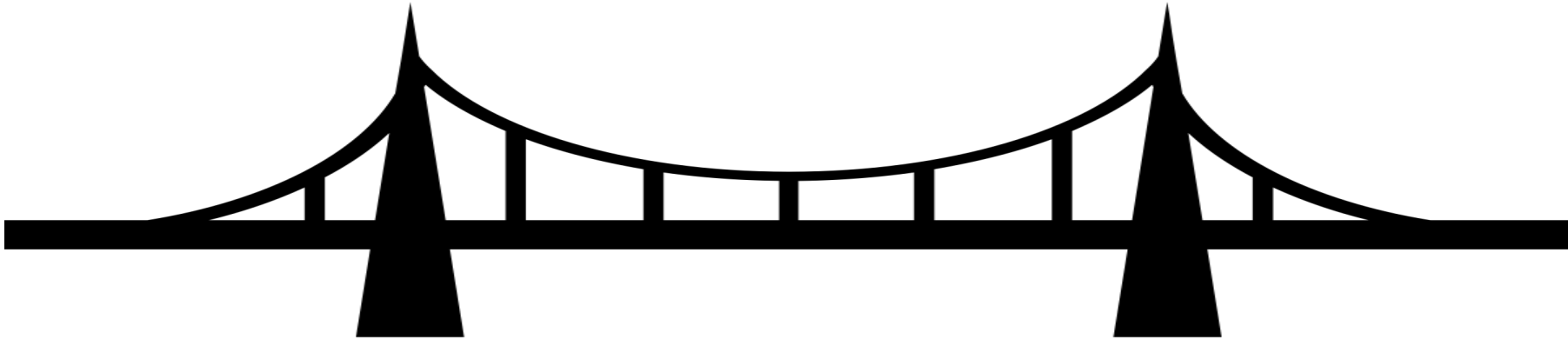
To create a Story World so compelling that your target reader is drawn into it—then, to keep your reader held in its spell and committed to the story journey until “The End.”

BUT HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

**There are many techniques and tricks
of dramatic storytelling.**

**But compelling storytelling really
comes down to doing
one thing well...**

Creating and Pacing ***SUSPENSE***



My topic here is **dramatic structure, so I'll only summarize some key points about suspense, to establish and explain the relationship between the two.**

SO, WHAT IS “SUSPENSE?”

“...anxiety, apprehension, or anticipation resulting from an uncertain, undecided, or mysterious situation.”

**No matter what the genre or
type of story,
suspense is the key to
reader engagement.**

***Suspense* is what keeps readers
turning pages, eager to find out
what happens next.**

SUSPENSE REQUIRES SIX ELEMENTS

- 1. One or more characters that your readers *care about*, or at least find to be *intriguing*.**
- 2. The protagonist(s) must *value or want something* very important to them. This value or goal constitutes *high stakes* for them—and, by emotional transference, for your readers.**

3. Early in the story, your protagonist(s) must become vulnerable to an *extreme threat to themselves and/or to the thing they value*. This threat *usually* is posed by an *antagonist* who holds diametrically opposing values and incompatible goals.

4. The protagonist(s) must *decide to take extreme action* to counter the extreme threat to their values.

5. This decision puts them into *profound inner and/or external conflicts* that disrupt the status quo of their lives.

6. *The outcome* of their high-stakes decision and actions is *highly risky and uncertain*.

**If your main characters are unsympathetic or uninteresting...
...or if their values and goals aren't important to them...
...or if the threat to their values isn't extreme...
...or if they passively accept their fate, rather than fight...
...or if their decisions don't provoke deep conflicts...
...or if the outcome of events is predictable...
...then there is no suspense—and therefore, absolutely no
reason for the reader to continue past the opening pages.**

But suppose you *have* figured out these elements before beginning your tale.

What do you do *now* with your characters and the unsettled, threatening situation you've placed them into?

Unless you *sustain and increase the pace of suspense* throughout the story, then your readers will eventually lose interest and close your book.

**The most useful means for
pacing suspense throughout
your story is a sound
*plot structure.***

**Put another way:
The most important purpose
of a plot structure is
*to pace suspense.***

MYTHS ABOUT PLOT STRUCTURE

- **Plotting stifles creativity; it is “formulaic” and inflexible**
- **Plotting leads to cardboard characters and clichéd plots**
- **Plotting robs fiction writing of its joy, play, and spontaneity**

None of that is true if plot structure is properly understood and used.
To address these concerns, let’s begin by defining some key terms.

WHAT IS A “PLOT”?

A “plot” is a sequence of *logically* interconnected events within the story of a play, novel, film, or other narrative work.

A plot reveals the logical cause-and-effect relationships among the events that occur—not just *what* happens, but *how* and *why* the major events of the story take place.

A plot also presumes that people are *active causal agents*—that *they* make things happen by their choices and actions.

Plotted stories, in the form of myths, provided humans their earliest, most primitive forms of understanding the world around them.

Myths dramatized causal relationships in the world, offering simple explanations for natural phenomena.

Myths also dramatized human actions that resulted in good or evil outcomes, thus serving as the primitive basis for morality and moral inspiration.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “STORY” AND “PLOT”

“‘The king died, and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: ‘The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king.’ This is a plot with a mystery in it.”

— E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*

WHAT DOES A PLOT *DO*?

The plot structure orchestrates the characters, their values, their relationships, their conflicts, and reveals the *consequences* of their actions.

**The plot structure also orchestrates *suspense* about the outcome of the events of the story—
and thus keeps readers turning pages.**

A STORY'S PLOT MIRRORS A REAL-LIFE JOURNEY

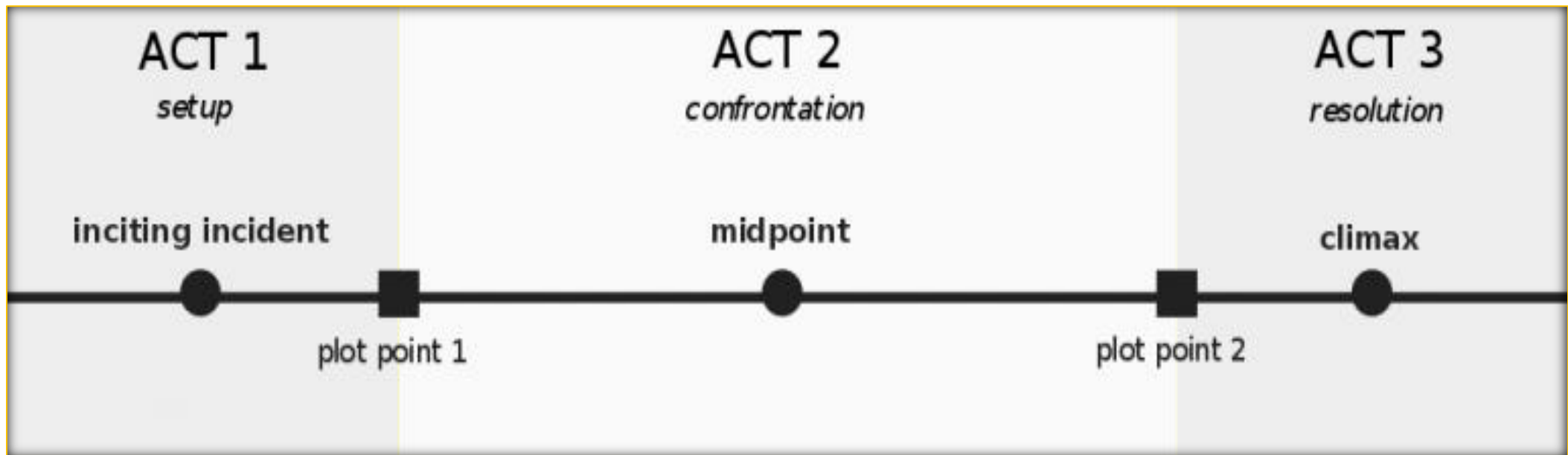
- **Every exciting journey starts with preparation or preliminary setup, which plants seeds of anticipation and suspense.**
- **The second stage is the trip itself—the long middle period of traveling, with interesting and exciting events, characters, twists, turns, and obstacles along the way**
- **The third and final stage is the eagerly anticipated arrival at the destination—the journey's satisfying conclusion.**

A PLOT PRESENTS A THREE-STAGE CAUSAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- **the *story's beginning*, which plants the seeds for the subsequent disruptive events in the lives of the main characters.**
- **an *extended middle*, which shows how those seeds grow into ever-mounting conflicts, complications, and crises for the characters.**
- **a *climactic ending*, in which they finally confront the consequences of their actions and choices, and resolve their conflicts.**

**First defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*,
those three stages—beginning, middle, and ending—
have become the basis for
*the classic three-act dramatic structure.***

THE CLASSIC THREE-ACT STRUCTURE



20% of a novel
25% of a screenplay

About 50% - 60% of a novel
50% of a screenplay

20% - 25% of a novel
25% of a screenplay

ACT ONE

- This is the “setup” or “preparation stage” of the plot.
- The protagonist is introduced within his/her normal, ordinary life.
- The protagonist holds a certain important value, perspective, or goal.
- A initial disturbance, “inciting incident,” or “call to adventure” rattles the protagonist’s status quo, threatening his chief value or goal.
- The protagonist reaches *a point of no return* (a.k.a. “Plot Point #1,” “First Pillar,” “Disaster #1,” “Gamechanger #1”).
- In pursuit or defense of the key goal or value, the protagonist decides irrevocably to cross the threshold from the comfortable status quo into a world of adventure.

ACT ONE EXAMPLES

INCITING INCIDENT

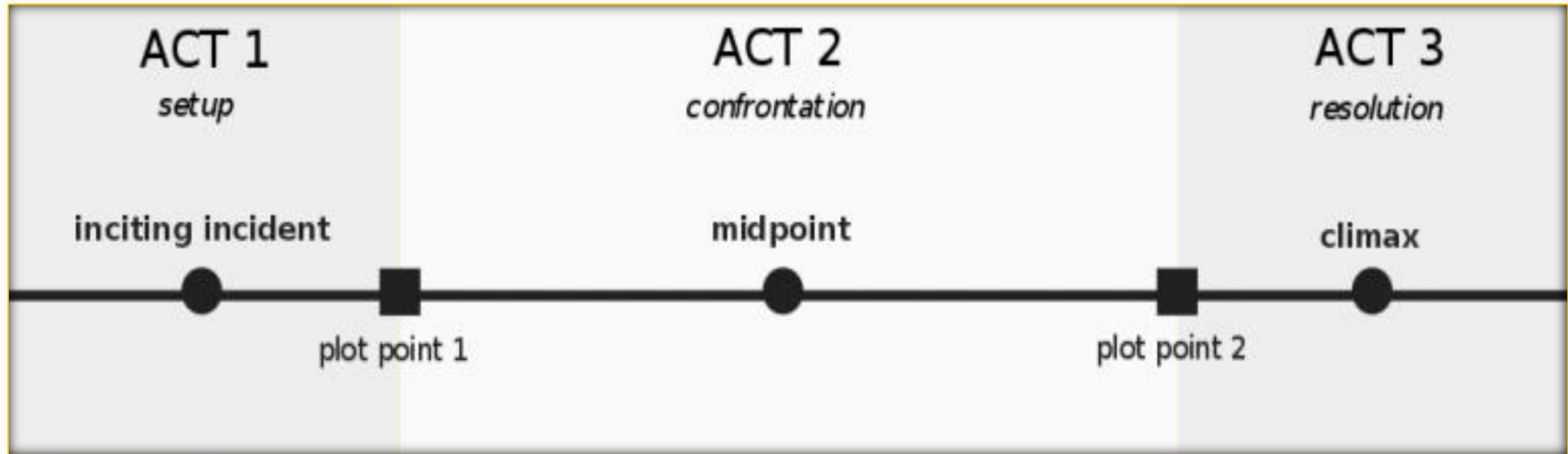
- ***Close Encounters of the 3rd Kind***: Roy Neary has a UFO encounter.
- **Rick Blaine in *Casablanca*** acquires two precious exit visas, which allow free passage of travelers out of the Nazi-held area.
- **In *The Matrix***, Neo gets a message on his computer: “Wake Up, Neo.”
- **Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*** runs away to save her dog Toto.
- **Scarlett O’Hara** learns that Ashley Wilkes, the man she’s infatuated with, is going to marry Melanie instead.
- **Bored farm boy Luke Skywalker** meets Obi-wan Kenobi and receives a holographic plea for help from captured Princess Leia.

ACT ONE EXAMPLES

POINT OF NO RETURN #1 (“Plot Point #1”)

- **Plagued and obsessed by a haunting vision after the UFO incident, Roy Neary in *Close Encounters* loses his job.**
- **Rick Blaine is stunned when Ilsa Lund—the lover who abandoned him inexplicably—enters his café with anti-Nazi activist Victor Laszlo.**
- **Challenged by Morpheus, Neo chooses to take the red pill, and thus irrevocably leave his comfortable world of illusion.**
- **Knocked out during a tornado, Dorothy awakens in the Land of Oz.**
- **Scarlett O’Hara learns of the outbreak of the Civil War—harbinger of the destruction of her way of life.**
- **His aunt and uncle murdered by Imperial storm troopers, Luke joins Obi-Wan Kenobi to rescue Princess Leia and fight the evil Empire.**

THE CLASSIC THREE-ACT STRUCTURE



ACT TWO

- **In this “confrontation stage,” the protagonist is confronted by ever-mounting challenges, threats, setbacks, and enemies—including a formidable main villain. Inner conflicts and doubts emerge.**
- **While getting his bearings in this unfamiliar world, the protagonist may encounter a helpful mentor and allies.**
- **A subplot may blossom, posing its own complications.**
- **At the story’s midpoint (“Mirror Moment”), a shock or crisis rattles the protagonist, forcing sober reflection and a test of resolve.**
- **Then a terrible disaster brings the protagonist to his/her lowest point.**
- **An unexpected event (“Plot Point #2,” “Second Pillar,” “Doorway #2,” “Gamechanger #2”) gives the protagonist sudden hope and moves him/her toward the climactic Final Confrontation of Act Three.**

ACT TWO EXAMPLES

MIDPOINT (“MIRROR MOMENT”)

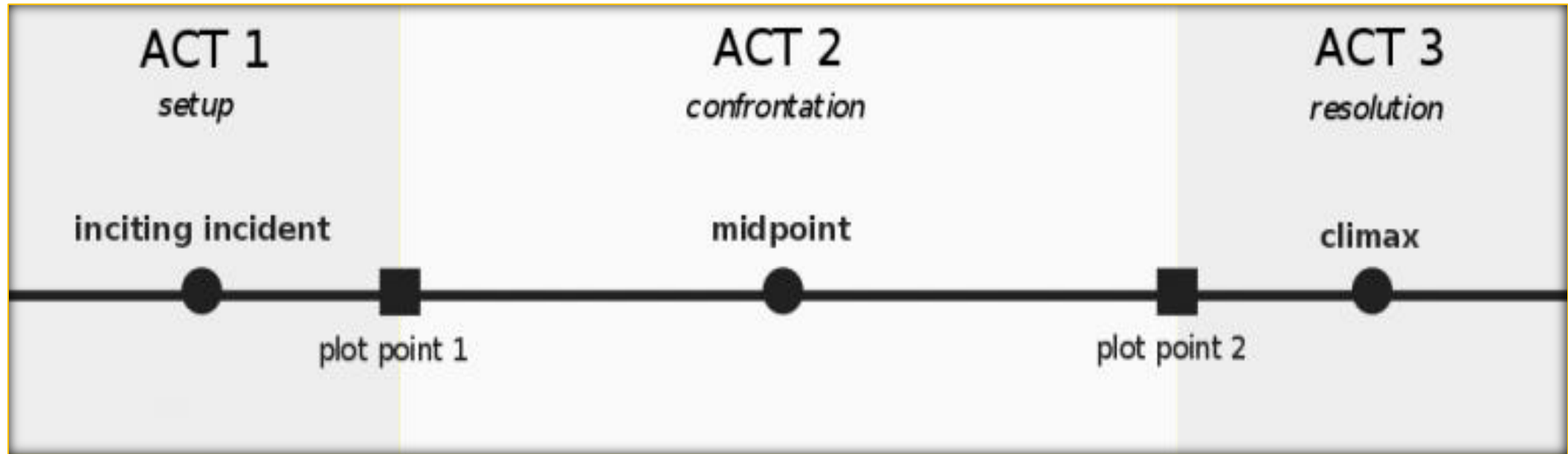
- Roy Neary’s UFO obsession chases away his distraught wife and kids, leaving him alone and miserably contemplating the ruins of his life.
- Rick Blaine gets drunk and insults Ilsa, driving her away and causing him to realize how low he’s fallen.
- After the Oracle tells Neo he is *not* “the Chosen One,” he learns Cypher betrayed the crew and Agent Smith captured his mentor, Morpheus.
- In Emerald City with her three companions, Dorothy is desolate when the Wizard gives her a terrifying, hopeless task before he’ll help them.
- Scarlett returns to her beloved Tara to find the plantation in ruins, her mother dead, and her father deranged. Sick after gnawing on raw radishes, she shakes her fist and vows she’ll never be hungry again.
- Luke is devastated after he watches Darth Vader kill his mentor, Obi-wan, and contemplates the terrible odds now stacked against them.

ACT TWO EXAMPLES

POINT OF NO RETURN #2 (“Plot Point #2”)

- **Roy Neary realizes the haunting vision plaguing him is of Devil’s Tower, Wyoming, and he decides to rush there for answers.**
- **When Ilsa explains to Rick why she had abandoned him in Paris, he realizes he must decide whether to help her escape with Victor Laszlo.**
- **Neo decides to go rescue Morpheus from the deadly Agents.**
- **Dorothy is captured by the Wicked Witch, and her three terrified companions decide to mount a mission to rescue her.**
- **When Scarlett’s husband dies, leaving her a widow, she decides to marry Rhett Butler—setting up the final battle in her heart between him and Ashley Wilkes.**
- **The Death Star is nearing the base of the Rebel Alliance. Abandoned by Han Solo, Luke decides to go on a virtual suicide mission to stop it.**

THE CLASSIC THREE-ACT STRUCTURE



ACT THREE

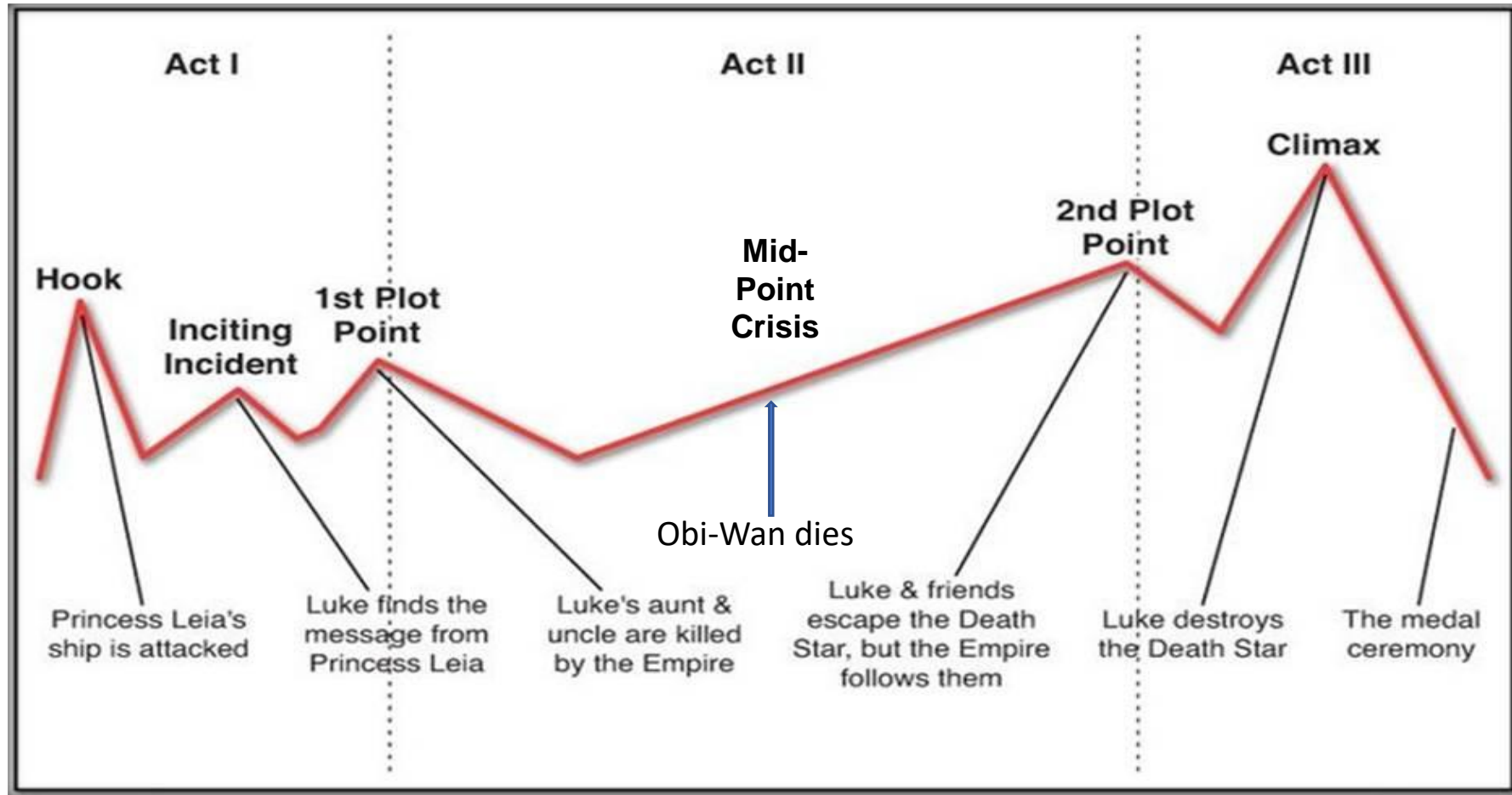
- In this “resolution stage,” the protagonist faces his/her greatest fears and shortcomings, draws upon lessons learned and hidden strengths, and confronts the main villain and/or threat to the critical value.
- The protagonist creates a clever plan, creatively improvising to meet the overwhelming forces and obstacles arrayed against him/her.
- The protagonist faces a moment when all seems lost.
- Then some earlier memory, or symbol, or sudden insight, gives the protagonist what he/she needs for the confrontation.
- The climactic battle may be internal, external, or both. *Will the protagonist prevail?* That, and the question posed during the “Mirror Moment,” are then answered, as are the subplot complications.
- A brief *coda* ties up loose ends and reveals key transformations.

ACT THREE EXAMPLES

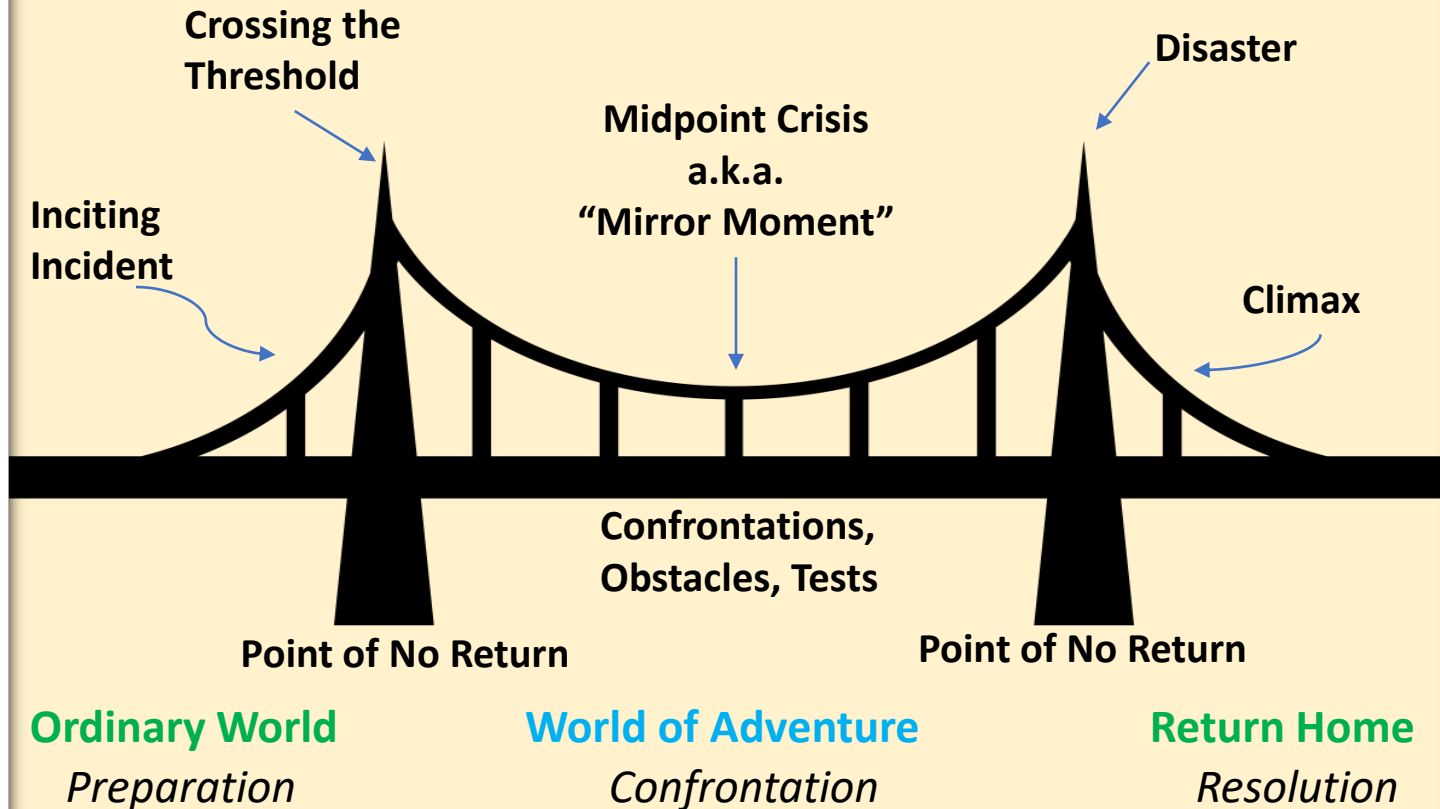
CLIMAX, RESOLUTIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS

- **Roy Neary reaches Devil's Tower, finds his answers, and becomes the first human interstellar ambassador.**
- **Once-cynical Rick Blaine relinquishes his love to help Ilsa and Laszlo escape the Nazis.**
- **Trapped in the Matrix, Neo is killed by Agent Smith—only to be resurrected by Trinity's love. Transformed, he easily defeats the Agents and assumes his mission as the Chosen One—mankind's liberator.**
- **Dorothy defeats the Wicked Witch and confronts the duplicitous Wizard—then learns vital life lessons before returning home.**
- **The death of Scarlett's and Rhett's daughter destroys their marriage, even as she realizes the final, sad truth about her love for Ashley.**
- **Aided by The Force and the last-minute arrival of Han Solo, Luke destroys the Death Star and saves the Rebel Alliance.**

THREE-ACT STRUCTURE IN "STAR WARS"



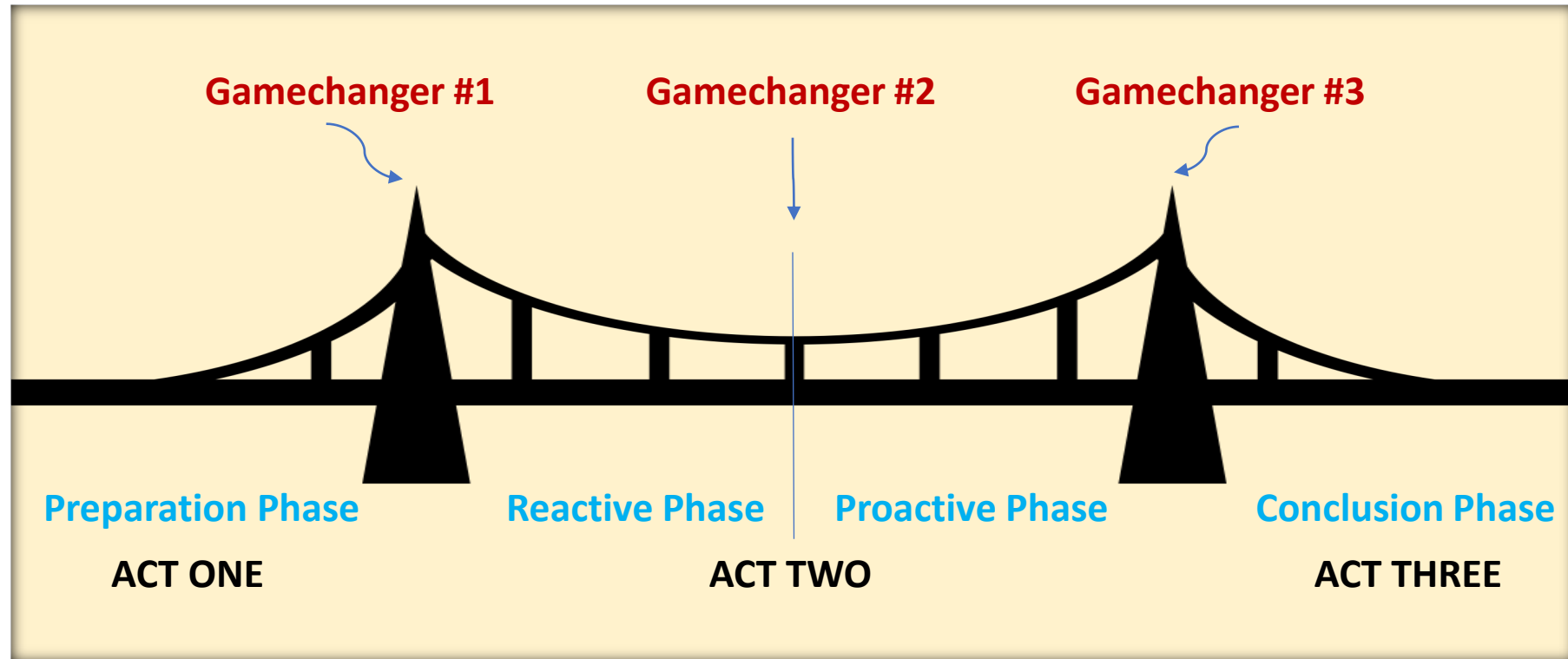
THE “SUSPENS-ION” BRIDGE



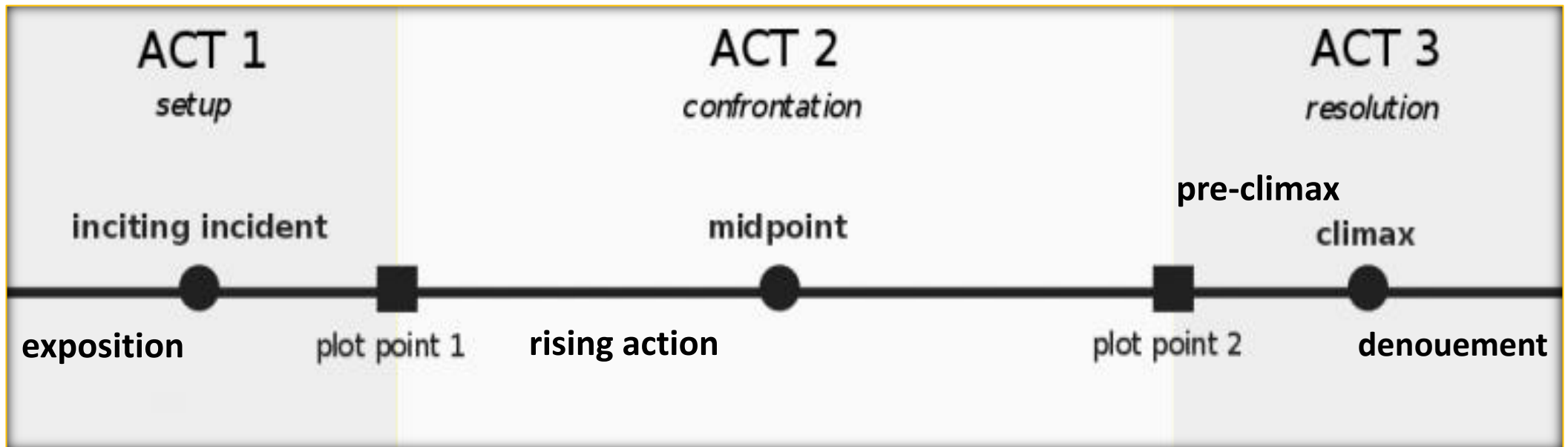
VARIATIONS OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

**These are specialized adaptations of the
classic Three-Act Structure**

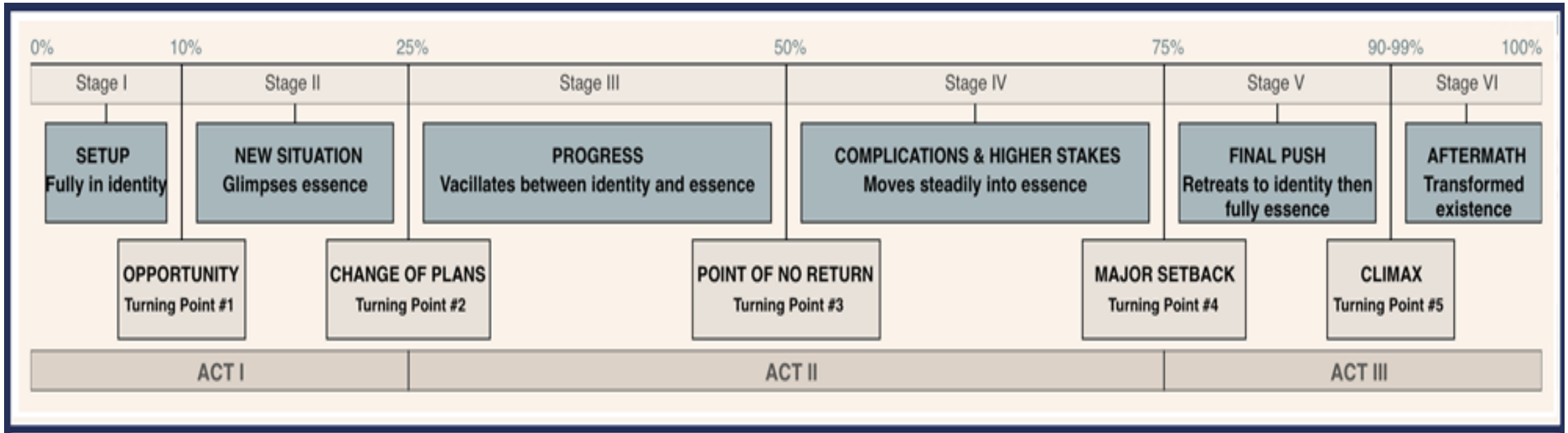
JOE NASSISE'S "STORY ENGINES"



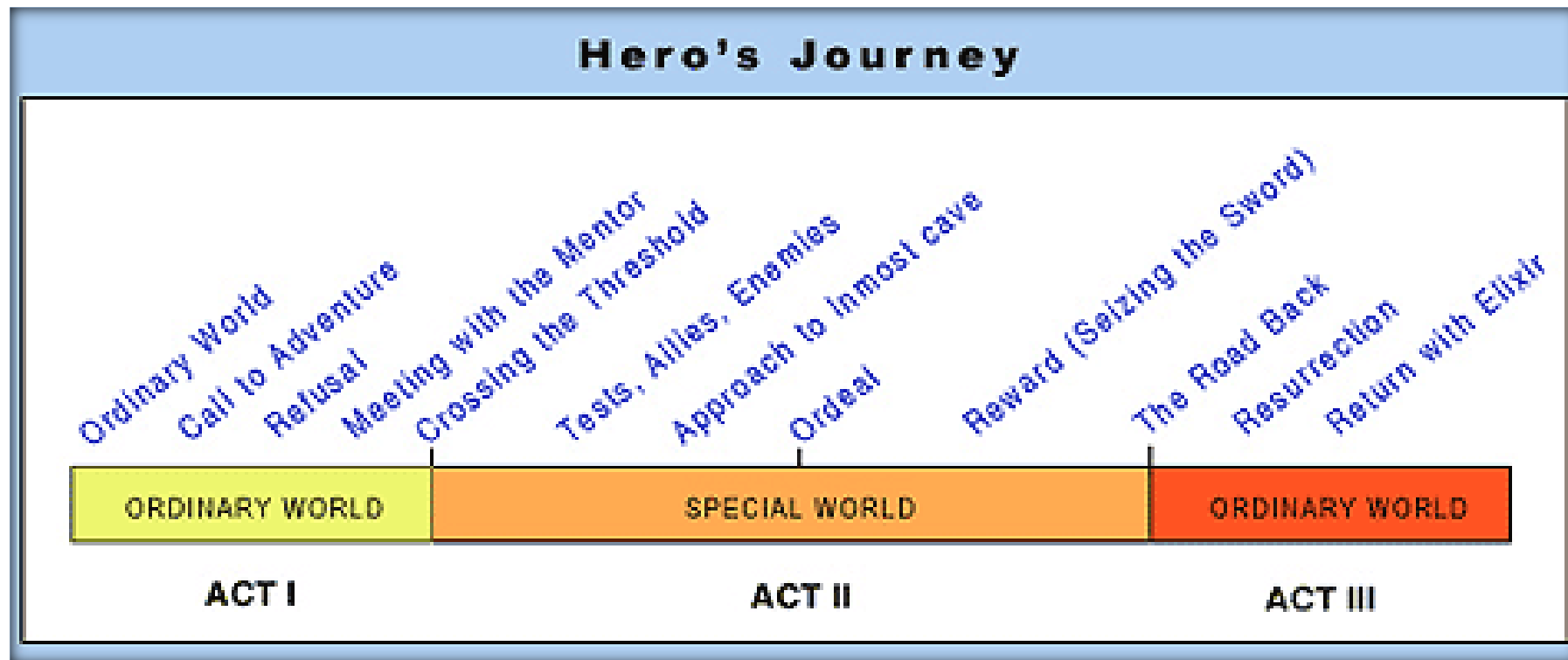
NINE-STEP VARIATION ON THREE-ACT STRUCTURE



MICHAEL HAUGE'S SIX-STAGE PLOT STRUCTURE

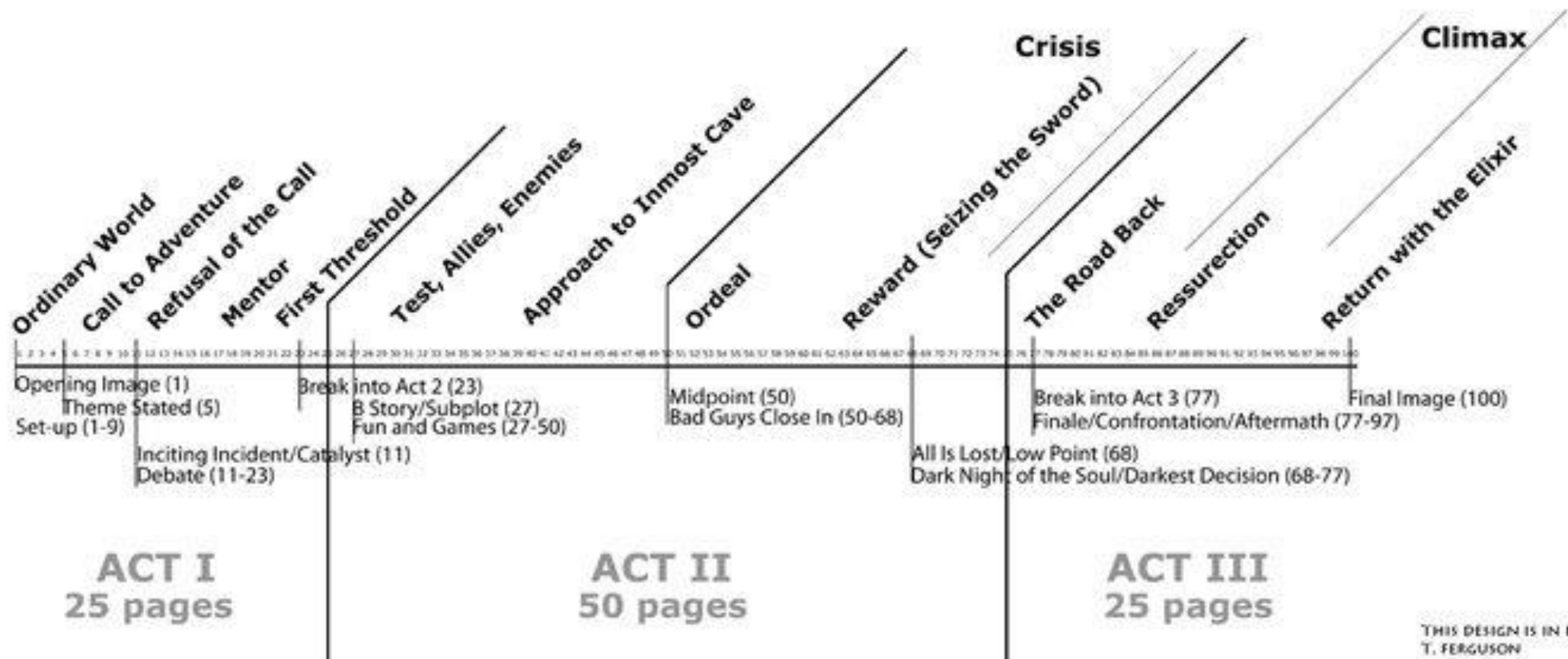


JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S and CHRISTOPHER VOGLER'S "HERO'S JOURNEY"

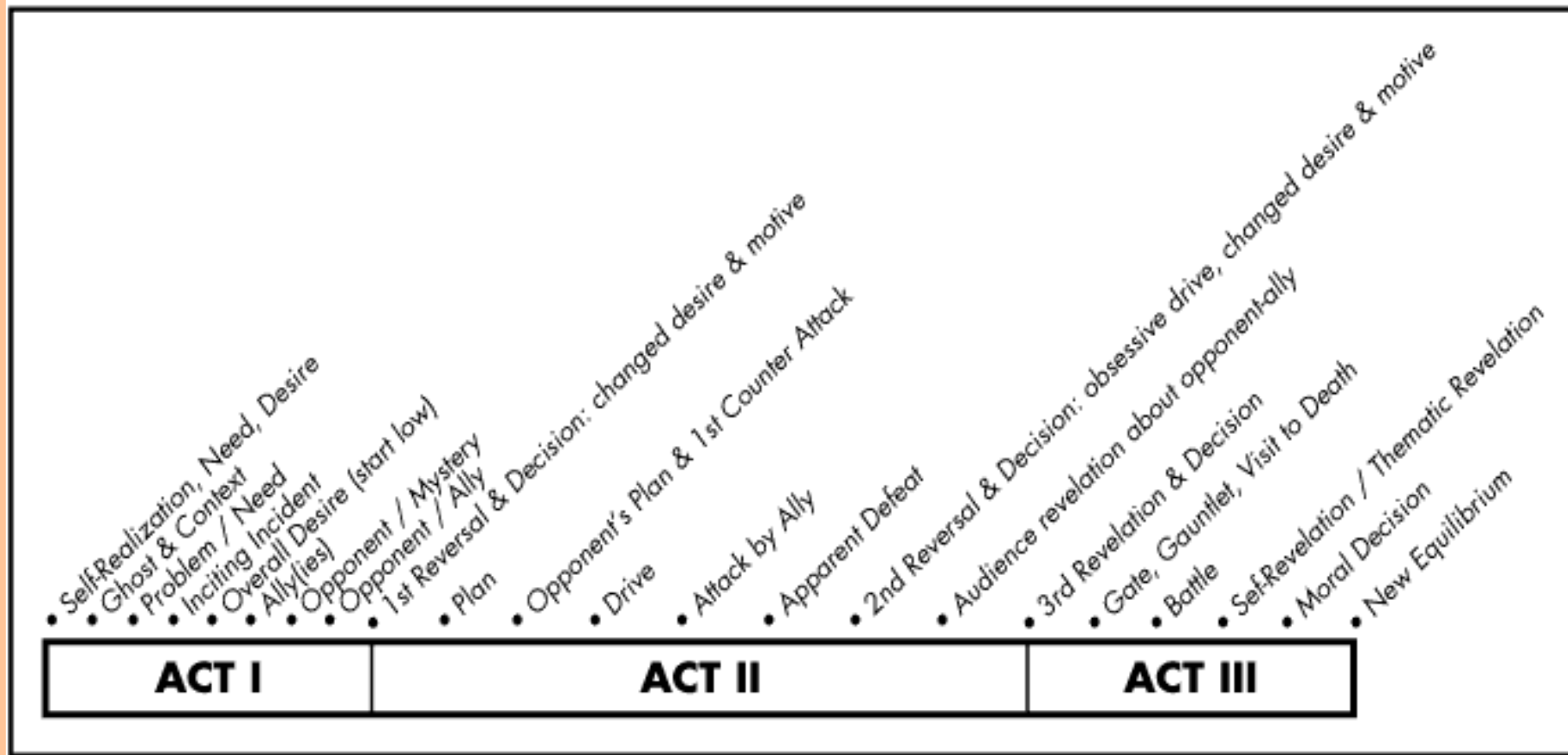


AN ADAPTATION FOR SCREENPLAYS

The Hero's Journey Model Blake Snyder's 15 Beats

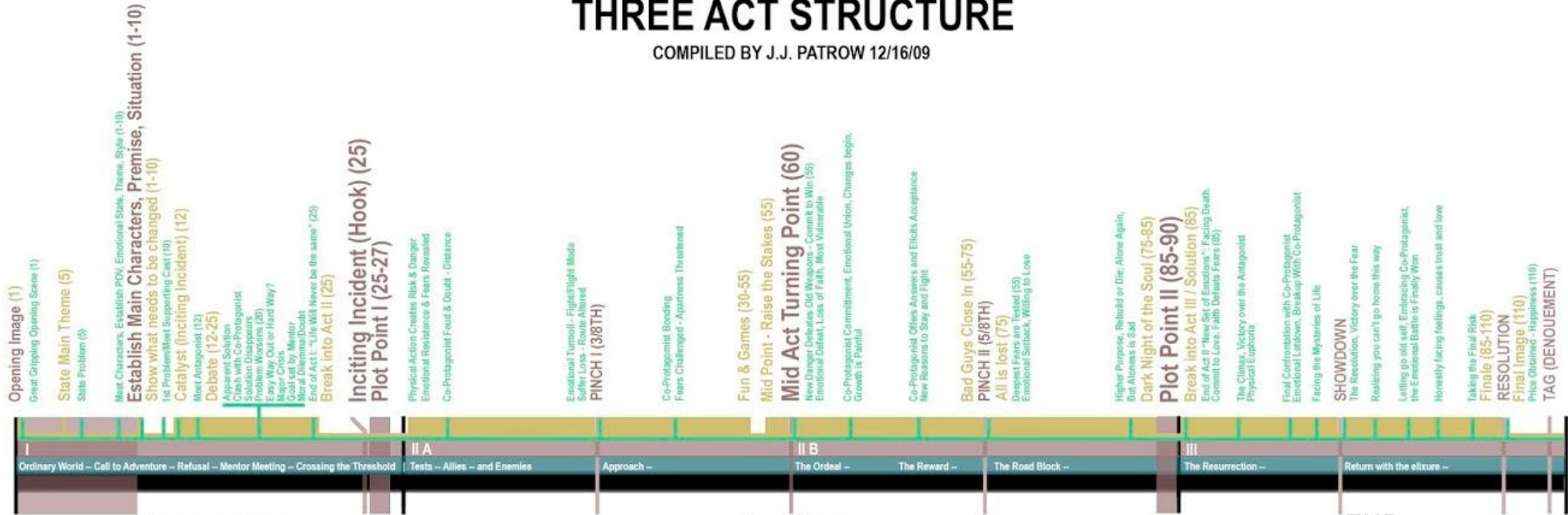


John Truby's "Twenty-two Building Blocks"



HOLLYWOOD SCREENPLAY THREE ACT STRUCTURE

COMPILED BY J.J. PATROW 12/16/09



BEGINNING

MIDDLE (Aristotle)

END

CALL TO ADVENTURE

ROAD OF TRIALS (Joseph Campbell)
Script terms by Christopher Vogler

RETURN

SETUP (1-30)

CONFRONTATION (30-90)
(Syd Field)

RESOLUTION (90-120)

ACT ONE (1-25)

ACT TWO (25-85)
(Blake Synder)

ACT THREE (85-110)

THE BEGINNING (1-25)
"LIFE AS IT WAS"

THE MIDDLE (25-85)
"LIFE TORN APART"
(Peter Dunne)
Emotion Structure

THE END (85-110)
"LIFE AS IT IS NOW"

SCREENWRITING TRICKS FOR AUTHORS | ALEXANDRA SOKOLOFF



ACT I	ACT II:1	ACT II:2	ACT III
SEQUENCE 1	SEQUENCE 3	SEQUENCE 5	SEQUENCE 7
SEQUENCE 1 CLIMAX	SEQUENCE 3 CLIMAX	SEQUENCE 5 CLIMAX	SEQUENCE 7 CLIMAX
SEQUENCE 2	SEQUENCE 4	SEQUENCE 6	SEQUENCE 8
			FINAL BATTLE
ACT I CLIMAX	MIDPOINT CLIMAX	ACT II CLIMAX	RESOLUTION/ NEW WAY OF LIFE

ACT ONE CHECKLIST

- Opening Image
- Meet the Hero or Heroine
- Hero/ine’s Ordinary World
- Hero/ine’s Inner and Outer Desire
- Hero/ine’s Problem
- Hero/ine’s Ghost
- Hero/ine’s Special Skills
- Hero/ine’s Arc
- Inciting Incident/ Call to Adventure
- The Offer S/he Can’t Refuse (possibly)
- Sequence One Climax
- Meet the Antagonist (and/or Introduce a Mystery)
- State the Theme / What’s the Story About?
- Introduce Allies
- Introduce Mentor (possibly)
- Introduce Love Interest (possibly)
- Plants/ Reveals (or Set ups and Payoffs)
- Hope/ Fear (and Stakes)
- Ticking Clock (possibly)
- MacGuffin (not all stories have a MacGuffin)
- Central Question/ Central Story Action
- Hero/ine’s Plan (may be at Beginning of Act II)
- Act One Climax

Author and screenwriter Alexandra Sokoloff has a Three-Act, Eight-Sequence plotting structure that incorporates checklists of some 70 elements you can include in a plot!

WHY MANY WRITERS RESIST PLOT STRUCTURE

The biggest obstacle to getting writers to think in terms of *structuring* a story is that many feel—wrongly—that structure is an enemy of creativity and spontaneity.

Actually, our challenge is to make story structuring mesh with our individual writing methods, or “creative paradigms.”

CREATIVE PARADIGMS

The “Pantsers”

- **Seat of the Pants**
- **Short Synopsis**

The Plotters

- **Outlining**
- **Long Synopsis**

The Hybrids

FAMOUS “PLOTTERS”

**JK Rowling James Patterson Stephen Hunter Erle Stanley Gardner
John Grisham Robert Crais Robert Ludlum Ken Follett RL Stein
David Mamet Arthur Miller Joseph Heller Norman Mailer Sylvia Plath**

FAMOUS “PANTSERS”

**Lee Child Vince Flynn Stephen King George R.R. Martin
Ray Bradbury David Morrell Margaret Atwood**

SEAT OF THE PANTS (“Pantser”)

Method: Just sit down and write, without planning or editing

Advantages:

- The creative pleasure of spontaneously experimenting
- The delights of constant discovery and many surprises

Disadvantages:

- You go down many rabbit holes and dead ends
- You often waste a lot of time and many drafts
- It requires heavy editing and rewriting later
- The process can become confusing and discouraging

“I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning; and second, because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren’t compatible.”

– Stephen King, *On Writing*

SHORT SYNOPSIS (“Pantser”)

Method: Brainstorm just a few paragraphs or pages that describe the general plot events and main characters, then start to draft.

Advantages:

- Initial brainstorming provides some guidance while writing
- Allows for creativity of all kinds during drafting

Disadvantages:

- Still leaves possibilities of logical dead ends, roadblocks
- Still requires multiple drafts and revisions

OUTLINING (“Plotter”)

Method: Plan out the major elements of the story before doing any writing, including such things as...

- Detailed character backgrounds and settings
- A list of likely or possible scenes
- Arranging the scenes in a three-act (or similar) story order

Advantages:

- You know where you're going, and that your story "works"
- Minimizes logical dead ends, wasted time, number of drafts
- It speeds up your writing time and efficiency
- It still leaves room for creativity in the details & drafting

Disadvantages:

- Possible false confidence: problems can still arise
- It may not allow sufficient space for creative brainstorming

“I believe in outlining. One of my rules is: don’t write the first scene until you know the last scene.

“I don’t start until I have the complete story, so I’ve never had a situation, after writing forty-something books, of just hitting a dead end and not knowing where you’re going. Writers are famous for doing that.”

– John Grisham

LONG SYNOPSIS (“Plotter”)

Method: An extended, detailed “treatment,” or narrative summary, of the entire story, which may run 20 to 50 or more pages in length.

Advantages:

- You know everything about your plot in advance
- It minimizes dead ends, plot holes
- It vastly speeds up writing your first draft

Disadvantages:

- Long synopses must undergo many drafts
- It focuses on plot, but not character

FROM SYNOPSIS OF KEN FOLLETT'S *THE MAN FROM ST. PETERSBURG*

PART 3

9. Ferfichkin knows Oblomov's movements. Consequently he is able to give Barre information which makes Barre indispensable to Feliks; and in return Feliks is obliged to make Barre privy to his plans, so Ferfichkin knows what Feliks is doing.

Now, instructed by Ferfichkin, Barre takes Feliks to see a crazy old Polish chemist in Clerkenwell who makes bombs. Feliks says he will need a large bomb with a timing device. The chemist names a price. I'll get the money, says Feliks.

Feliks calls on Lydia while Walden is out. (He gains admittance by giving a false name.) He tells Lydia how much money he needs and asks her to meet him in a week's time. Lydia, desperate to get him out of the house and terrified Walden will learn of her premarital affair, agrees.

10. Walden and Oblomov exchange information on mobilization and military planning. They begin to draft an agreement whereby both will attack Germany if Germany attacks either France or Russia. Oblomov may be hopeless with women but he is a tough negotiator, and the first meeting gets stuck on the definition of "attack."

Afterwards Walden walks around for a while. He has noticed Lydia's new mood and vaguely resents it. He finds himself walking past a small house in Chelsea. It is the home of Bonita Carlos, real name Myrtle Jenkins. Bonnie was the greatest courtesan in London in the 1890s. The young Walden was crazy for her and in fact gave her this little house. What is she like now? he wonders. My God, she must be fifty. He walks on.

11. *Charlotte meets people in the avant-garde, and horrifies her parents by announcing she's going on a suffragette demonstration.*

12. Lydia's problem now is that she has no money. The household shopping is done by servants, and they do not use cash—the shopkeepers send bills to Walden who pays by check. Lydia's dressmakers, hatters, etc. all send bills. If Lydia takes morning coffee at the Cafe Royal during a shopping expedition, she signs for it. Her personal fortune consists of property and shares which she cannot sell without the knowledge of the family solicitor, a personal friend of Walden. She has no bank account of her own.

HYBRIDS

Method: Combine elements from the various creative paradigms.

You may combine classic plot structuring with a short or long synopsis—or a brief outline with seat-of-the-pants drafting.

Advantage:

- Flexibility to fit your own style of thinking and working

Disadvantages:

- You may import the inherent disadvantages of the other methods

SUMMARY OF METHODS

- **There is no “one right way” to write a story.**
- **Fiction writers tend to fall roughly into two camps: “*plotters*,” who prefer to plan the story before they write, and “*pantsers*” who find advance plotting too constricting and prefer to “wing it.”**
- **Both camps include highly successful authors.**

Dramatic structure is equally useful for both types of writers

- *If you like to plan and outline, you can set up a strong story by plotting out scenes in detail from the start.*
- *If you like flying by the seat of your pants, you can continue to be as free as you like...during your first draft.*

However, if you're a Pantser, understand that later, you'll *still* have to structure what you've written, *if* you want to be published and widely read.

Manuscripts that ignore plot structure almost always remain unsold.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR PANTSERS:

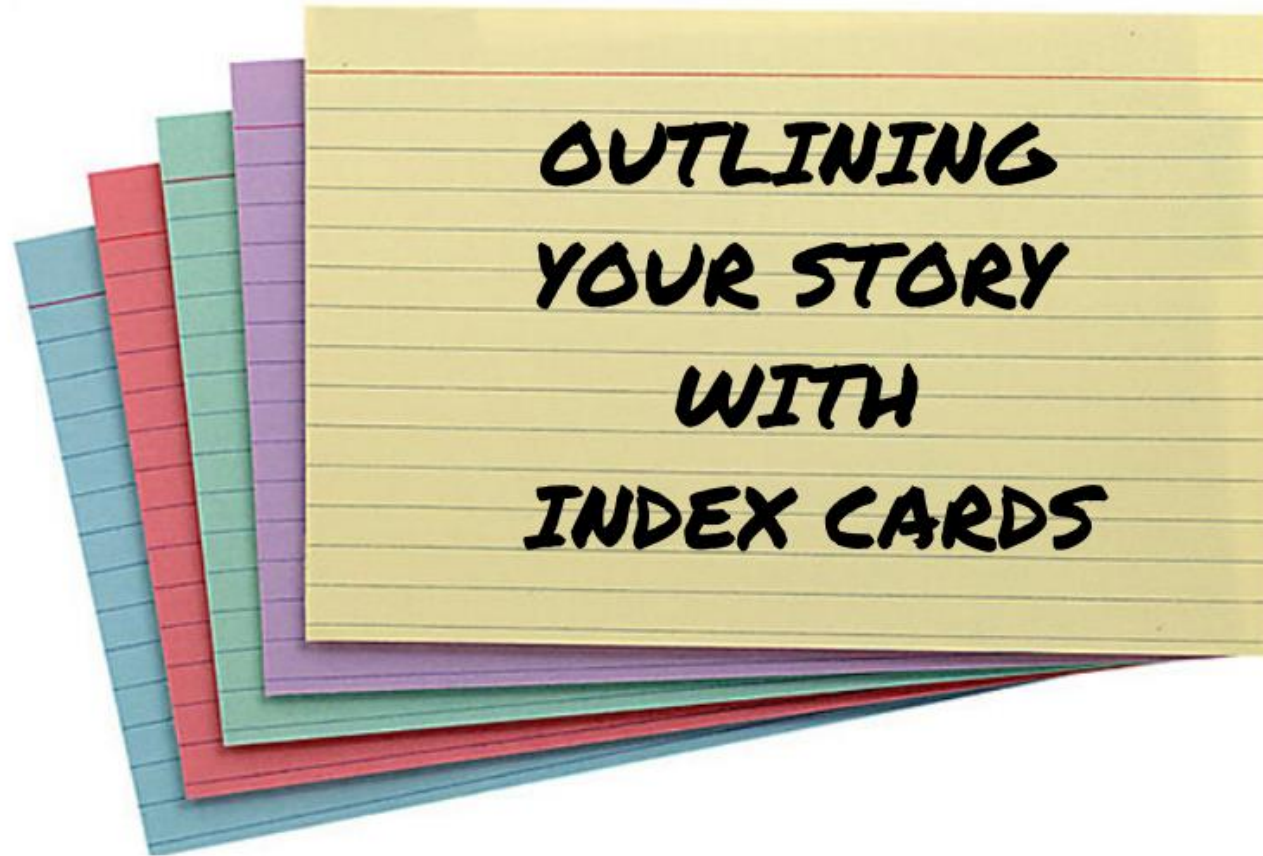
- You don't *need* to use the more elaborate plot structure formats with multiple suggested scenes (e.g., “15 Beats,” “Hero’s Journey”).
- You can keep it simple and stick to the five key plot beats: *Inciting Incident*; *First Doorway* (into Act Two); *Midpoint Crisis*; *Second Doorway* (into Act Three); and *Final Climactic Battle*.

“If you nail these, you have a story. You will also have plenty of freedom to write in between these scenes.”

–James Scott Bell

**Whether you're
a plotter or a pantsler,
how can you flesh out
the three-act plot structure
into a story?**

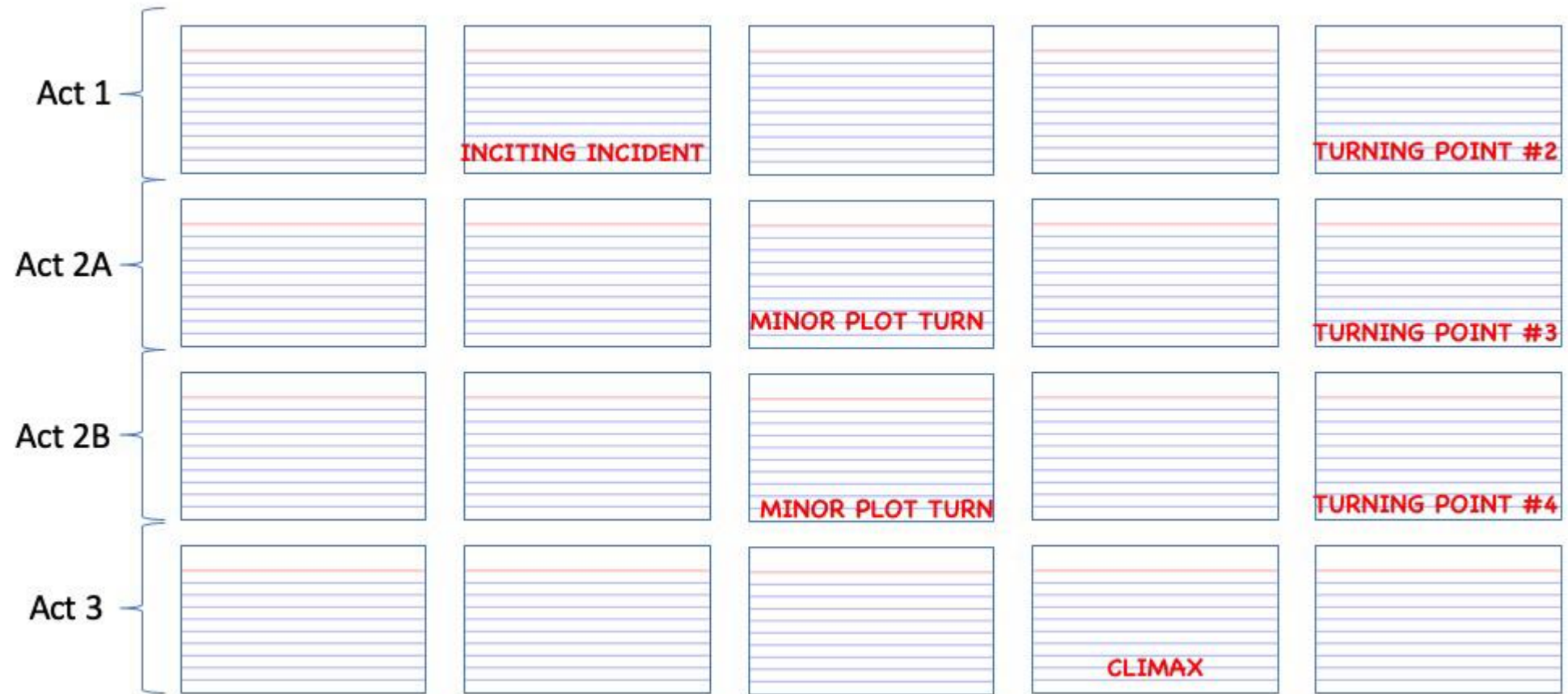
THE NOTECARD METHOD

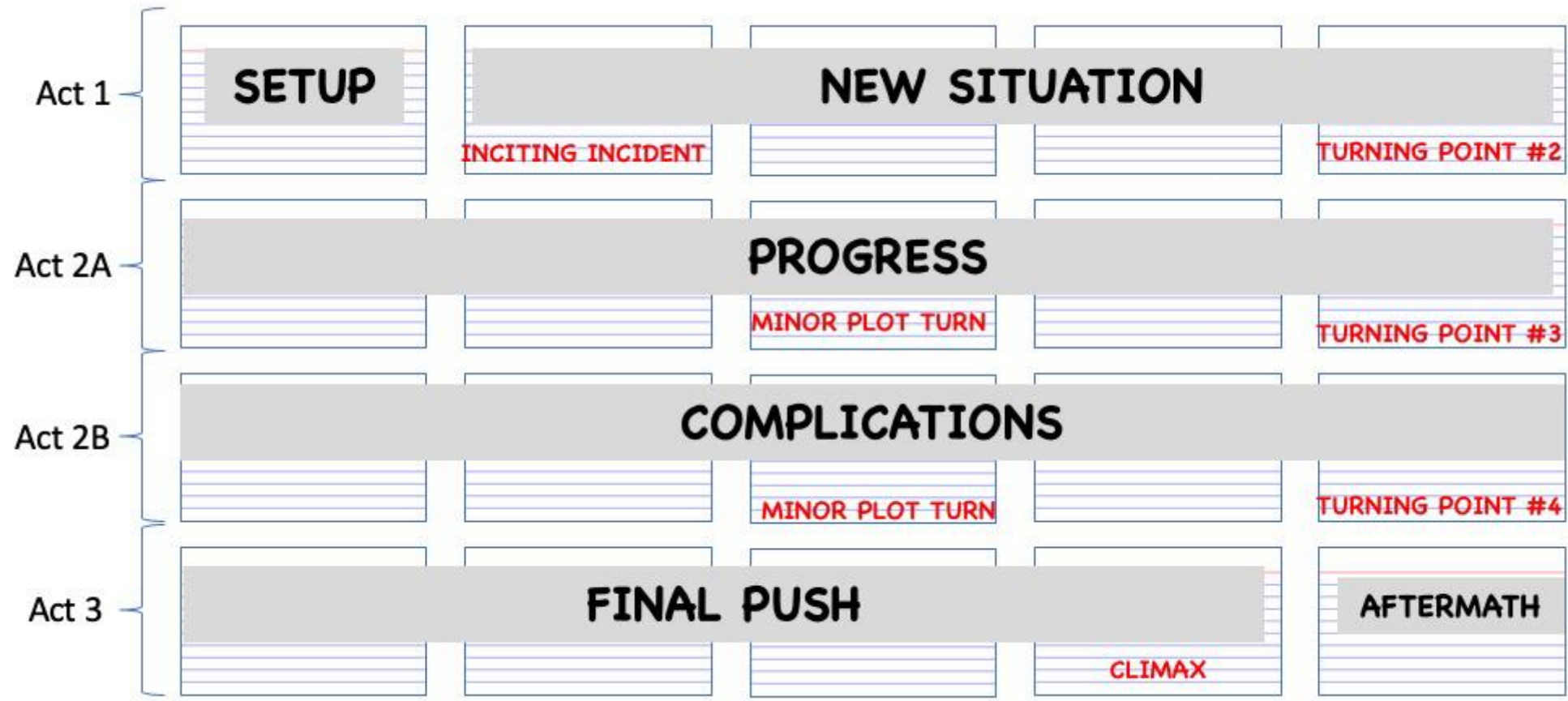


**OUTLINING
YOUR STORY
WITH
INDEX CARDS**

- **Buy a stack of notecards, mostly white, and also a smaller number of colored ones.**
- **Keep them handy, for brainstorming.**
- **Write “ACT ONE,” “ACT TWO,” and “ACT THREE” on three cards of the same color.**
- **Every time you get an idea for a scene, jot it on a white card.**
- **For key scenes—the Opening Scene, the Inciting Incident, the major Plot Points, the Midpoint/Mirror Moment, the Climax, the Closing Scene—use a colored card instead.**
- **Use different colored cards for notes about characters, settings, bits of dialogue or description, etc.**

- **Do this until you have a considerable stack.**
- **Using a table, corkboard, or floor, first lay out the three cards labeled ACTS ONE, TWO, and THREE.**
- **Beside them, lay out the colored “major scene” cards, in their proper 3-Act Structure order.**
- **Then start to lay down the rest of the scene cards in between the colored cards, in the order that seems most appropriate.**
- **Don’t worry at first about getting the order exactly “right.” This will change as the story evolves.**
- **If you notice gaps in the story chronology, insert blank cards “to be filled.”**
- **Keep brainstorming till you fill out the plot outline.**
- **Finally, divide the scenes into appropriate chapters.**





USING COLORED CARDS TO DISTINGUISH ACTS AND SCENES

My Awesome Movie Actions Like Print Save Sharing Comments

Filter by tags... (comma separated)

1. ACT ONE OVERVIEW MAN IN RUT GETS A NEW JOB. PROMISE OF ADVENTURE. HITS THE ROAD. overview 1 general	2. ACT ONE - INTRODUCTION our man can't catch a break. act 1 protagonist	3. ACT ONE - INCITING INCIDENT until a mysterious stranger offers him act 1 refer	4. ACT ONE - TURNING POINT A JOB. Time to hit the road. act 1 workshop
5. ACT TWO OVERVIEW THE ADVENTURE IS FUN... OR SO IT SEEMS. THINGS GET BETTER. THINGS GET BAD... FAST. ENTER THE VILLAIN overview general 2	6. ACT TWO - OBSTACLE The car breaks down in a strange town! act 2 punch up villain	7. ACT TWO - MIDPOINT Our man falls in love with a small town girl act 2 good love interest	8. ACT TWO - CRISIS ?????? act 2
9. ACT THREE OVERVIEW OUR MAN DEFEATS THE VILLAIN BUT IN THE PROCESS, DEFEATS HIMSELF RETREATS INTO OBSCURITY overview 3 general	10. ACT THREE - CLIMAX big fistfight on a sinking boat act 3 villain	11. ACT THREE - DENOUEMENT all glory is fleeting. act 3 pare down	12. ACT THREE - RESOLUTION our man ends up exactly where he began, no richer for the experience. act 3 too sad
13. OUR MAN	14. THE BAD GUY	15. THE GIRL	



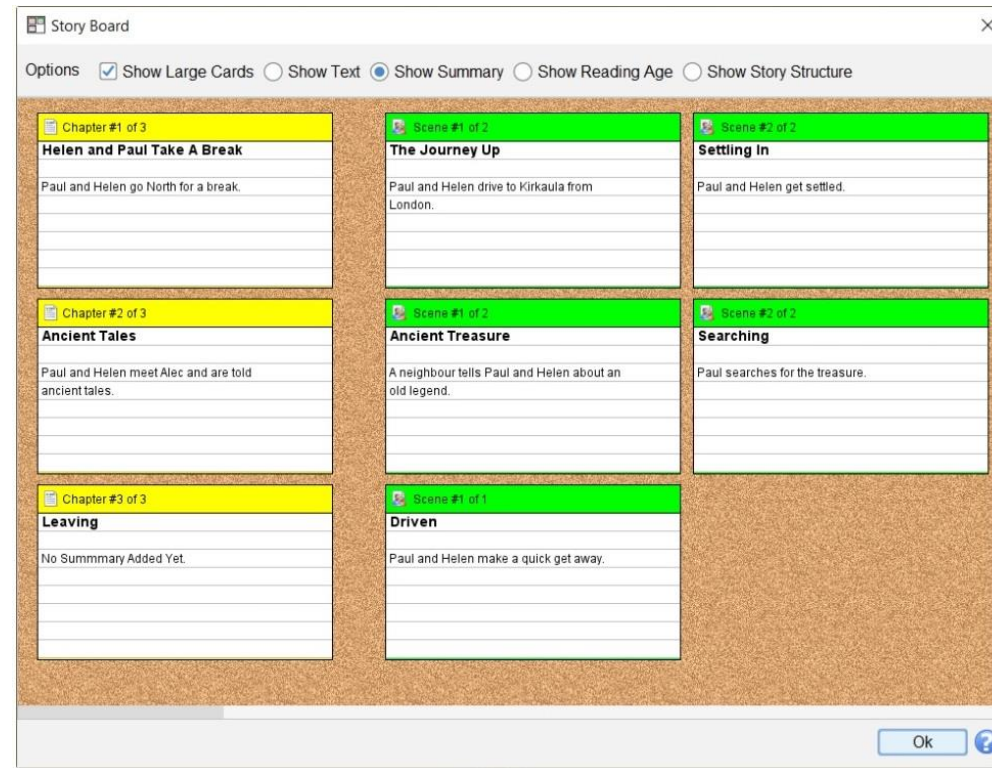
If you have the wall space, you can use a corkboard – or try Post-It Notes on a whiteboard.

- **The notecard outlining method does *not* squelch your creativity: you constantly brainstorm and add new scenes, characters, and ideas.**
- **It is flexible: you make changes on the fly by moving cards.**
- **You can see at a glance your entire story and its logical flow.**
- **You can see at a glance where there are plot holes to be filled.**
- **You can see at a glance where too many “static” scenes, action scenes, etc., are clumped together.**
- **You can transfer notes easily from your notecards to a word processor or other software, to expand into drafts of scenes.**

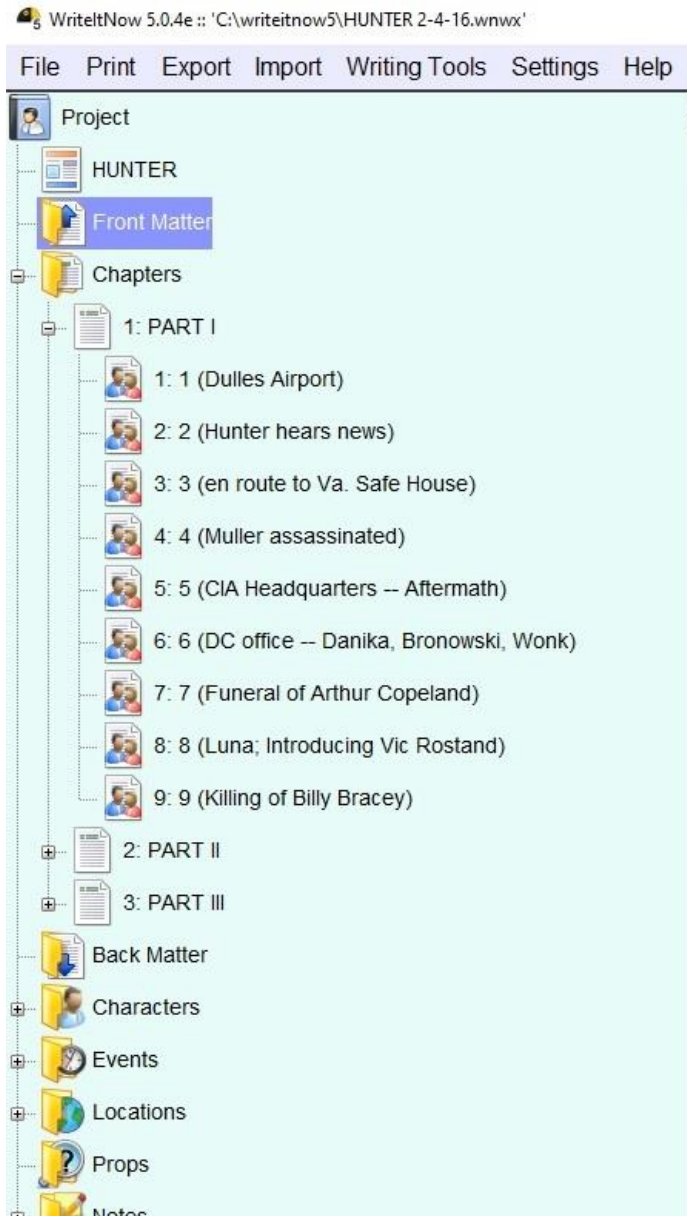
THE “WHITE-HOT DOCUMENT” METHOD

- **From Dwight Swain in *Techniques of the Selling Writer***
- **Just open a document and start jotting down anything that comes to mind**
- **Write without thinking about it or self-censorship**
- **Set it aside for a day, then come back to it. Highlight and expand the best parts**
- **Rinse and repeat**
- **After a while, you might want to start writing scenes**
- **At that point, try moving to the Notecard Method**

NOVEL-WRITING SOFTWARE



Programs like WriteltNow (shown) and Scrivener offer visual “storyboards” that simulate notecards.

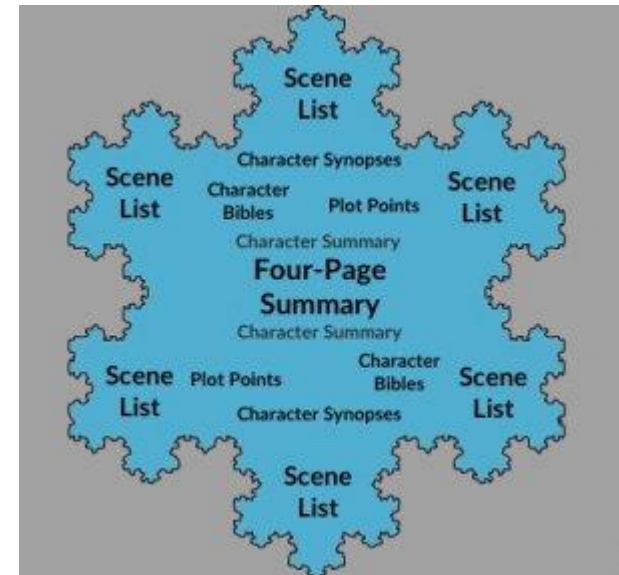
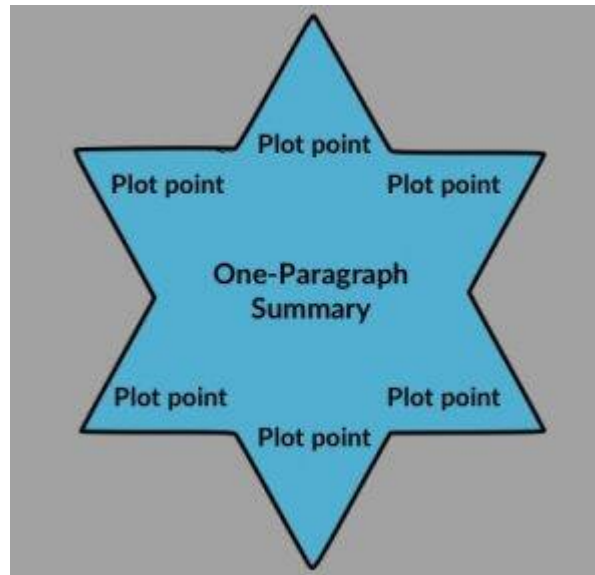
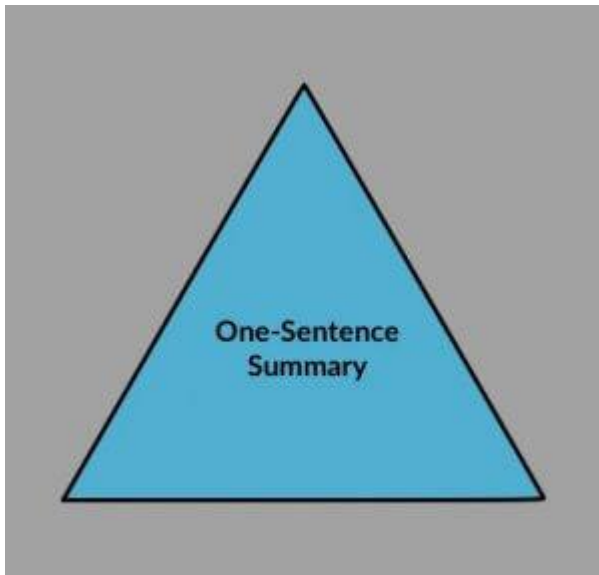


Novel-writing programs like WritelNow also allow you to develop scenes in a “tree” format, as Acts, Chapters, and Scenes.

Such programs are a great place to transfer and flesh out ideas from your notecards.

TRY THE “SNOWFLAKE METHOD”

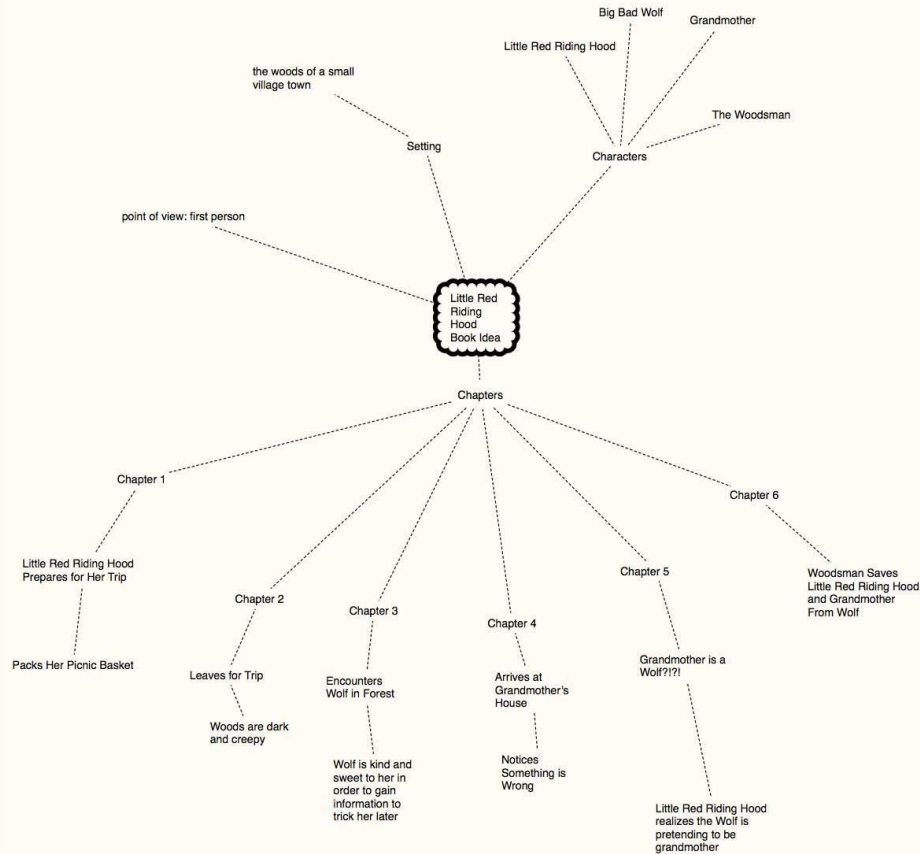
- Developed by writing instructor Randy Ingermanson
- Can be used with other tools (e.g., notecards, software)
- Expands small story idea in six steps into a 4-page synopsis



PLOTTING BY USING SPREADSHEETS

The Tenth Plague					
Chapter	Setting	Characters	Summary	Outcome	Time
Prologue	Mine, Ishpeming	Rutherford Wils	Willa flees mine disaster.	Wils survives, remembers what his friend found.	Nov. 1926
Some Day in May					
Part 1: The Writing on the Wall					
1	Courtroom	Gillian and Marc	Thayers attend hearing to get rights of adopted baby	She fears someone may try to take her baby away.	May, some day
2	Compound in San Antonio	Cyrus	Cyrus visits his son's grave.	He makes plans for revenge.	May, someday
3	Hotel Room	Gillian and Marc	Gillian loads photos of the baby to Facebook.	She sees Gabriel in Facebook, remembers bad memories..	
4	Alex's Grave	Cyrus	Cyrus reviews plans.		
Two Months Later, July, Thursday					
Plague 1: Blood					
5	Bathroom at SRCC	Brianne Hyde	Brianne Hyde washes hands when water turns to blood.	Brianne escapes, puzzled by what happened.	July, morning
6	Highway, Tahoe	Gillian and Marc	Gillian wakes from a nightmare. The Thayers drive to the resort.	Marc agrees to give his BlackBerry to G.	8:30 a.m.
7	Plantation-style house	Lacey Caruthers	Lacey can't reach her husband. She interacts with Sammy.	Lacey sees mud on Sammy's shoes and wonders where he wandered off to.	9 a.m.
8	Tahoe, resort	Gillian	The Thayers arrive to find protestors.	The receptionist encourages them to ask Jared about the cause of the fuss.	10 a.m.
Plague 2: Frogs					
9	Jared's suite	Jared Russo	Jared has been poisoned.	Jared dies.	11 a.m.
10	Thayers' suite	Gillian and Marc	They find their suite and hear screams.	Marc goes to see what's wrong.	Noonish
11	Resort hallways	Marc	Marc explores the source of screams.	Marc finds the body of Jared Russo.	12:15 p.m.
12	Resort hallways, security office	Cyrus	Cyrus finds security office and accesses it.	Austin takes the surveillance video.	12:30 p.m.
13	Suite	Gillian and Marc	The Thayers talk to Sheriff Griswold.	Vernon knocks on door and wants to talk to them.	1 p.m.

HOW TO MINDMAP A NOVEL PLOT EXAMPLE: LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD



THINKWRITTEN.COM

“MIND MAPS”

If you are visually oriented and adventurous, you might try “Mind Maps.”

The only challenge would be to highlight Acts, Chapters, and pivotal Scenes so they can be easily seen.

KEY TAKEAWAY POINTS

- Use any story development tool or method compatible with your creative paradigm, from extreme Pantser to extreme Plotter.
- *After* using your preferred methods and tools to create your story's scenes and elements, *then* arrange them into a rough “three-act” order.
- You don't *need* to use the more elaborate plot structure formats with multiple suggested scenes (e.g., “15 Beats,” “Hero's Journey”).
- Instead, you can keep it simple and stick to the five key plot beats: *Inciting Incident*; *First Doorway* (into Act Two); *Midpoint Crisis*; *Second Doorway* (into Act Three); and *Final Climactic Battle*. “If you nail these, you have a story. You will also have plenty of freedom to write in between these scenes.” –James Scott Bell
- You can be flexible about placement of other scenes and elements, as long as you focus on *pacing ongoing, ever-increasing suspense*.

YOUR “PRIME DIRECTIVE” AS A STORYTELLER:

To create a Story World so compelling that your target reader is drawn into it—then, to keep your reader held in its spell and committed to the story journey until “The End.”

THANK YOU!



RECOMMENDED READING

Bestselling author and writing teacher James Scott Bell's books are invaluable guides to developing and plotting your stories. The most relevant are *Super Structure*, *Plot & Structure*, and *Write Your Novel from the Middle*.

Writing Fiction for Dummies by Randy Ingermanson and Peter Economy is packed with great writing advice on the Three-Act Structure and picking methods compatible with your creative paradigm. Also recommended is Ingermanson's *How to Write a Novel Using the Snowflake Method*. Learn more about his "Snowflake Method" at: www.advancedfictionwriting.com

Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* adapts Joseph Campbell's insights about "hero's journey" mythology for writers.

Albert Zuckerman's *Writing the Blockbuster Novel* contains lengthy samples showing how author Ken Follett plans and develops novels using long, ever-expanding synopses.

Other relevant works include: *Structuring Your Novel* by K.M. Weiland; *Story Structure Basics* by Alexandra Sokoloff; *Story Engines*, a video course by Nick Stephenson and Joe Nassise; and *Save the Cat!* by Blake Snyder, with his "15-beat" plotting system for screenwriters.



About Robert Bidinotto

Reach me by email at: Robert@Bidinotto.com



My Fiction Website, "The Vigilante Author":
www.Bidinotto.com

My Amazon Author Page: <https://amzn.to/2TpAEOZ>

My Facebook Author Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/RobertBidinottoAuthor/>