The “Cinema” in Machinima

CS 5964

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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)

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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

The Hero’s Journey Model

Act I - Separation
- Refusal of the Call
- Call to Adventure

Ordinary World
- Ordinary World
- Return with Elixir

Act II - A Descent
- Crossing the Threshold
- Tests, Allies, and Enemies
- Approach the Inmost Cave
- The Ordeal

Special World
- Reward
- Resurrection

Act II - B Initiation
- Approach the Inmost Cave
- The Ordeal
- Reward
- Resurrection

Act III - Return
- Refusal of the Call
- Crossing the Threshold
- Tests, Allies, and Enemies
- Meeting the Mentor

- The Hero finally accepts the challenge and Crosses the Threshold into the Special World.
- A Meeting with the Mentor provides encouragement, wisdom or magical gifts to push the Hero past fear and doubt.
- The Hero learns about the Special World through Tests, encountering Allies and Enemies.
- The Hero makes the final preparations and Approaches the Inmost Cave.
- The Hero endures the Ordeal, the central crisis in which the Hero confronts his greatest fear and tastes death.
- The Hero enjoys the Reward of having confronted fear and death.
- The Hero takes the Road Back and recommits to completing the Journey.

- The Hero faces the climactic ordeal that purifies, redeems, and transforms the Hero on the Threshold home.
- The Hero Returns with the Elixir to benefit the Ordinary World.

- The Audience meets the Hero in the Ordinary World.
- The Hero receives the Call to Adventure, a challenge, a quest, or a problem that must be faced.
- The Hero expresses fear and is Reluctant or Refuses the Call.
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

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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?

![Graph showing the relationship between time required to write and develop a script and the quality of the script.

The graph illustrates that as time increases, the quality of the script generally improves, reaching a peak at point X, after which further development may not significantly enhance the script's quality.](image-url)
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 in CAPS.
   - B. The *parenthetical* or actor’s direction or *wryly.* This is optional.
   - C. The *speech.*
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