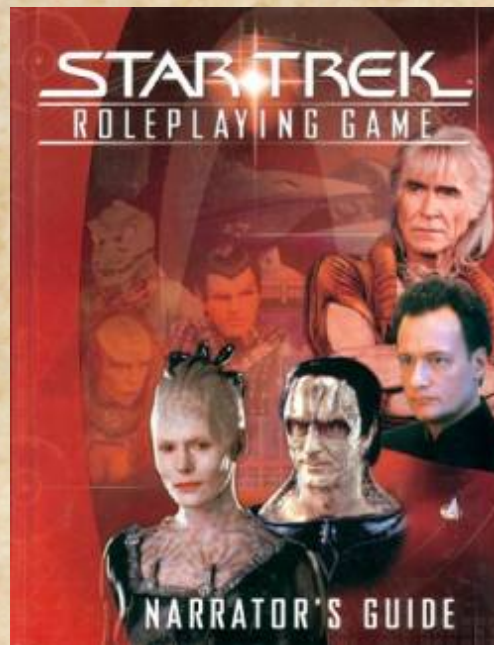# Story Structure

a presentation by

Dan Wells

Story Structure

Shamelessly pilfered from the

Star Trek RPG

The Seven-Point System

Credit Where It Is Due

Mathew Colville

Kenneth Hite

Ross A. Isaacs

Don Mappin

Christian Moore

Owen Seyler

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

The Seven-Point System

Building a Story:

1. Have a story in mind.

NOTE:

Not everyone writes this way.

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Before you can structure a story, you need a pretty good idea of what that story is about:

- Who are the characters?
- What is the setting?
- What is the major conflict?

The Seven-Point System

Building a Story:

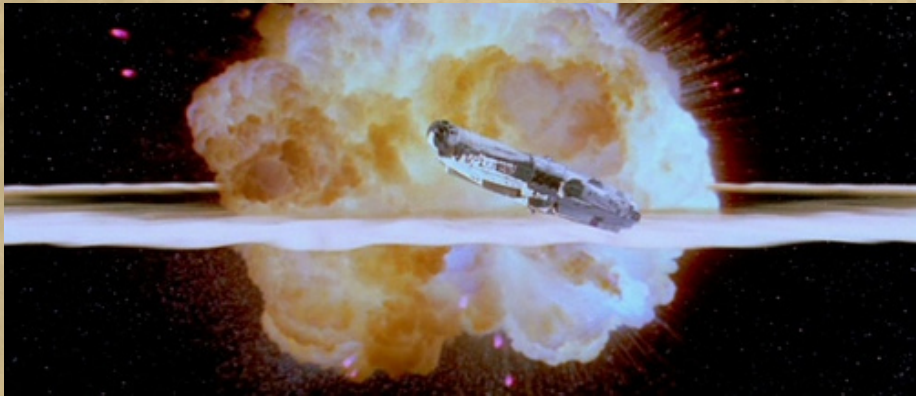1. Have a story in mind.

2. Start at the end.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- **Resolution**

- Everything in your story leads to this moment.

- What is your story about? Where is your story going?

- Make sure you know what kind of resolution you want.

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- Plot

- Character
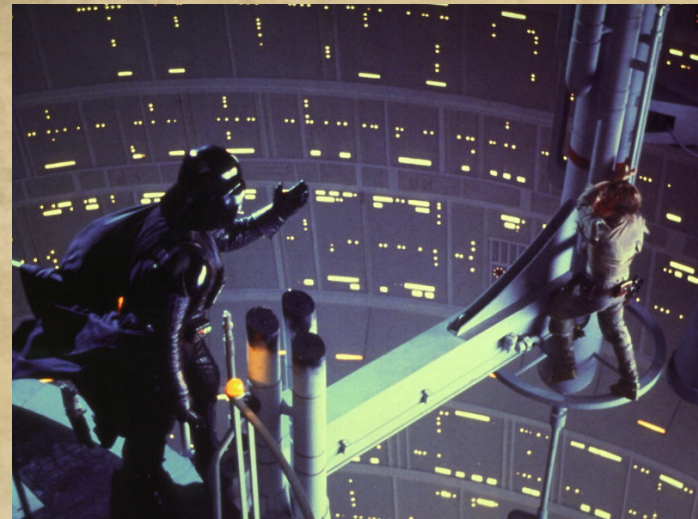
The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- **Resolution**

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- **Resolution**   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- **Hook**

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

- Now that you know where you're going, figure out where you start.

- One simple trick is to start with the opposite state: if a character is going to end strong, he should start weak. This creates an arc of progress.

- This is another reason it's so vital to know your ending.

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- Simple Arc: Growth

- Complex Arc: Shift

The Seven-Point System

- **Hook**

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

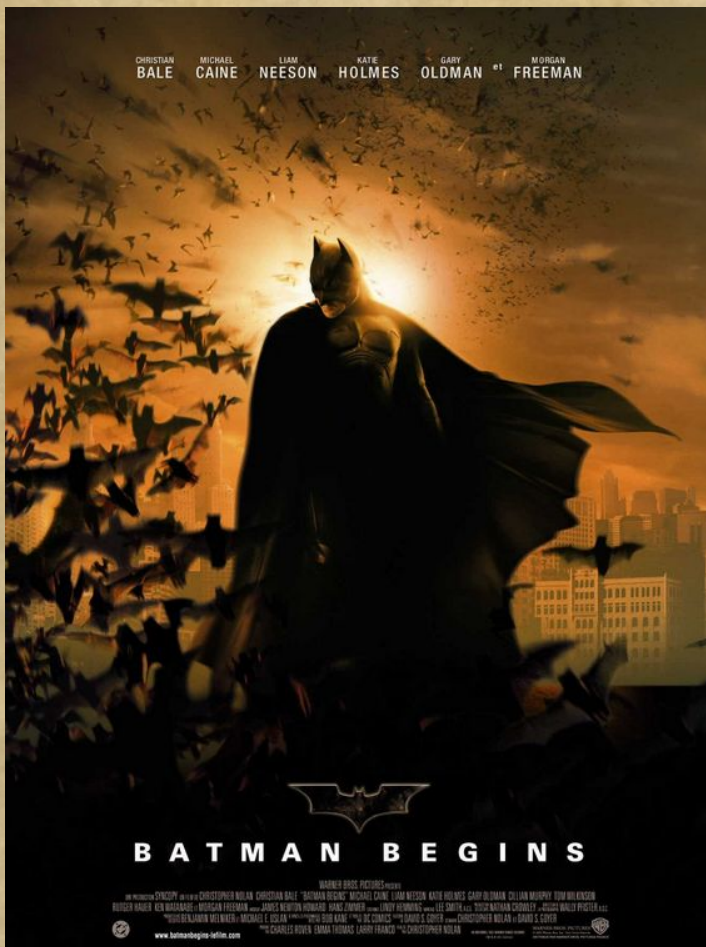# The Seven-Point System

- **Hook**   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- **Midpoint**

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

- The midpoint is the exact center between the two states. It is the point at which the characters begin moving from one state to the other.

- The characters move from <u>reaction</u> to <u>action</u>.

The Seven-Point System

The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- **Midpoint**

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- **Midpoint**   Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone, and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- **Plot Turn 1**

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

- Just as the midpoint moves you from beginning to end, Plot Turn 1 moves you from beginning to midpoint.

- Introduce the conflict.

- The character's world changes:
  – Meet new people
  – Discover new secrets
  – Follow the White Rabbit

The Seven-Point System

- Call to Adventure

- Confront New Ideas
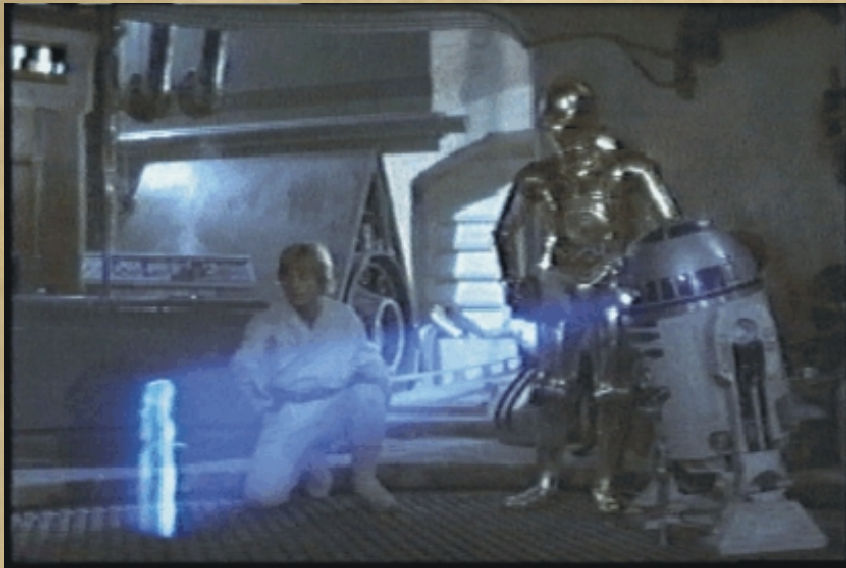
The Seven-Point System

- Hook

  Harry has a sad, boring life.

- **Plot Turn 1**

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

  Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone, and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

  Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- **Plot Turn 1**   Harry becomes a wizard
                      and learns magic.

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint   Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone,
                      and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- **Plot Turn 2**

- Resolution

- Move the story from midpoint to end.

- At the midpoint you determine to do something, and in the resolution you do it, so Plot Turn 2 is where you obtain the final thing you need to make it happen.

- "The power is in you!"

The Seven-Point System

- "Use the Force, Luke!"

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- "You can go home anytime you want!"

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- "Neo, you're the One!"

The Seven-Point System

- "Neo, you're the One!"

The Seven-Point System

Grasping victory from the jaws of defeat:

- Something horrible just happened, but now the heroes have what they need…

…even if they don't realize it at the time.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

  Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1

  Harry becomes a wizard and learns magic.

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

  Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone, and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2

- **Plot Turn 2**

- Resolution

  Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1 Harry becomes a wizard
                and learns magic.

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone,
            and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2

- **Plot Turn 2** Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because
                   his motives are pure.

- Resolution Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1   Harry becomes a wizard and learns magic.

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- Pinch 2

- **Plot Turn 2**   Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because **his motives are pure**.

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- **Pinch 1**

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

- Apply pressure:
  - Something goes wrong
  - Bad guys attack
  - Peace is destroyed

- Force the characters to action.

- Often used to introduce the villain.

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- No adults around, forcing the children to solve the problem on their own.

- Introduce danger into a fun environment.

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- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1   Harry becomes a wizard
                and learns magic.

- **Pinch 1**

- Midpoint   Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone,
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- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2   Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because
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- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

  Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1

  Harry becomes a wizard and learns magic.

- **Pinch 1**

  A troll attacks.

- Midpoint

  Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone, and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

  Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because his motives are pure.

- Resolution

  Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- **Pinch 2**

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

- Apply more pressure, until the situation seems hopeless:
  - A plan fails
  - A mentor dies, leaving the heroes alone
  - The bad guys seem to win

- These are the jaws of defeat from which your hero will be snatching victory. Make sure the teeth are sharp.

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- Loss of Mentor

- Loss of Everything

The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1   Harry becomes a wizard
  and learns magic.

- Pinch 1   A troll attacks.

- Midpoint   Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone,
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- **Pinch 2**

- Plot Turn 2   Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because
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The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1   Harry becomes a wizard
                            and learns magic.

- Pinch 1   A troll attacks.

- Midpoint   Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone,
                            and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- **Pinch 2**   Ron and Hermione fall to the traps in the dungeon,
                            and Harry is left alone.

- Plot Turn 2   Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because
                            his motives are pure.

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

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- Plot Turn 2   Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because
                his motives are pure.

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

This story is not complete!

It is a skeleton, and needs flesh to fill it out:

- Round characters
- Rich environments
- The "Ice Monster" Prologue
- Try/Fail cycles
- Subplots (depending on size)

The Seven-Point System

The Hero's Journey

The Seven-Point System

- Hook   Harry has a sad, boring life.

- Plot Turn 1   Harry becomes a wizard and learns magic.

- Pinch 1   A troll attacks.

- Midpoint   Harry learns the truth about the sorcerer's stone, and swears to protect it from Voldemort.

- Pinch 2   Ron and Hermione fall to the traps in the dungeon, and Harry is left alone.

- Plot Turn 2   Harry discovers the stone is in his pocket because his motives are pure.

- Resolution   Harry defeats Voldemort.

The Seven-Point System

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- Resolution

HERO has a sad, boring life.

HERO becomes a ROLE.

A BAD GUY attacks.

HERO learns the truth about SOMETHING, and swears to DEFEAT the VILLAIN.

COMPANIONS fall to the VILLAIN, and HERO is left alone.

Facing VILLAIN, HERO discovers THE POWER IS IN HIM.

HERO defeats VILLAIN.

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There Are Other Plots!

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Romance

Romance

- Hook

  Elizabeth and her sisters are single.

- Plot Turn 1

  Darcy and Elizabeth meet and hate each other.

- Pinch 1

  Darcy breaks up Jane and Bingley, proposes to Elizabeth in a very insulting way.

- Midpoint

  Darcy explains himself in a letter: he's a noble man trying to protect his friend from perceived impropriety.

- Pinch 2

  Lydia runs off with Wickham, Elizabeth thinks Darcy will hate her family even more.

- Plot Turn 2

  Darcy helps Elizabeth's sisters.

- **Resolution**

  Elizabeth and Darcy get married.

The Seven-Point System

Tragedy

Tragedy

- Hook

- Plot Turn 1

- Pinch 1

- Midpoint

- Pinch 2

- Plot Turn 2

- **Resolution**   Everybody dies!
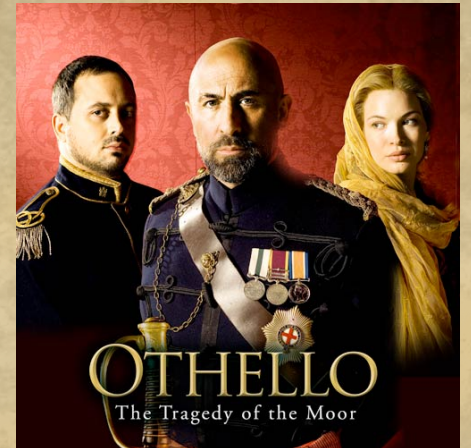
Tragedy

- Hook — Othello and Desdemona are happily married.

- Plot Turn 1 — Iago swears to destroy Othello.

- Pinch 1 — Iago plants evidence of an affair.

- Midpoint — Othello suspects Desdemona of adultery.

- Pinch 2 — Othello kills Desdemona.

- Plot Turn 2 — Othello learns that Desdemona is innocent.

- **Resolution** — Othello kills himself.
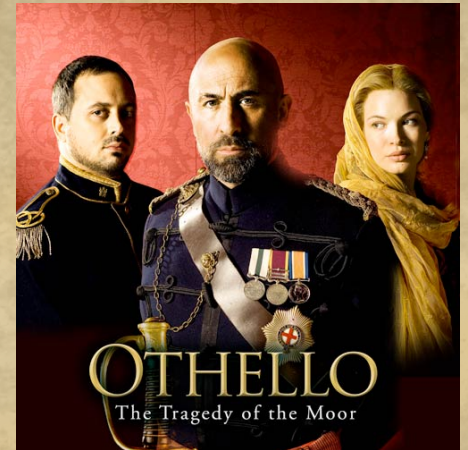
The Seven-Point System

Horror

Horror

- Hook

  Narrator insists he's sane.

- Plot Turn 1

  Narrator resolves to murder the old man.

- Pinch 1

  Narrator tries 8 times, but can't bring himself to do it.

- Midpoint

  Narrator kills the old man.

- Pinch 2

  Police officers come to the house.

- Plot Turn 2

  Narrator can hear the old man's heart still beating.

- **Resolution**

  Narrator is insane.
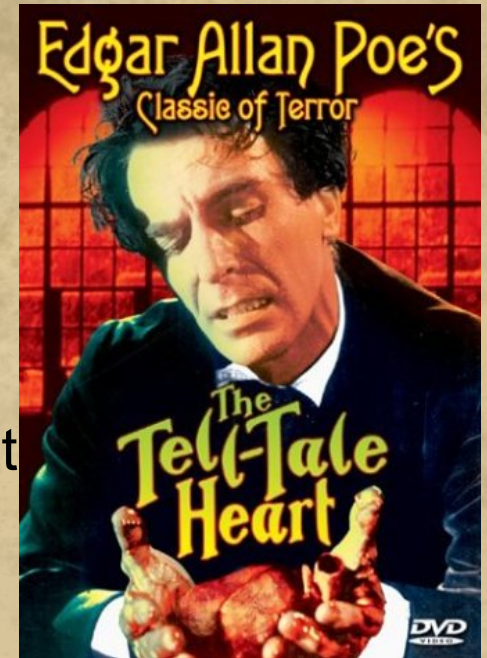
The Seven-Point System

These stories are not complete!

There are skeletons, and need flesh to fill them out:

- Round characters
- Rich environments
- The "Ice Monster" Prologue
- Try/Fail cycles
- Subplots (depending on size)

The "Ice Monster" Prologue

- The Hook scene in most story arcs, especially adventure stories, is not very interesting:
  - Most arcs start in a position of weakness.
  - Most plots start before the conflict is introduced.
  - You need to grab your readers' attention now, but you also need to lay the foundation for a strong story twenty chapters from now.

The "Ice Monster" Prologue

- The "Ice Monster" prologue lets you start with something exciting, and hint at all the cool stuff to come, before you launch into your real plot.
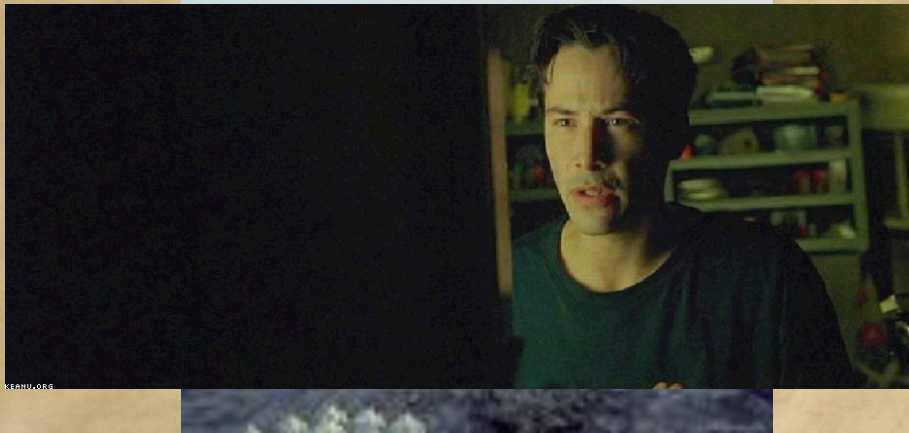
Try/Fail Cycles

- Before the heroes succeed at anything important, they should try and fail at least twice.

- Victory should be earned.

- A problem that can be solved on the first try is not big enough for your readers to care about.

Try/Fail Cycles

Demonstrate consequences:

Try/Fail Cycles

Demonstrate consequences:

Try/Fail Cycles

Sometimes Try/Fail cycles look like victories:

Try/Fail Cycles

And sometimes they are actual failures:
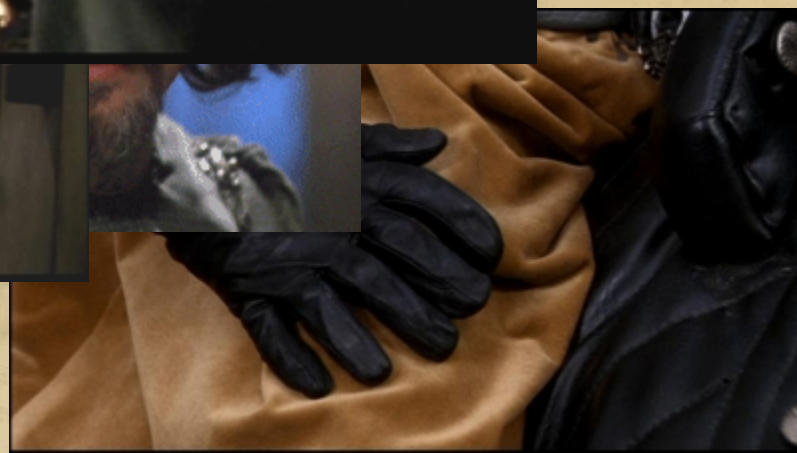
Plots and Subplots

- Most stories have more than one plot

- Each thread of plot, action, and growth can be mapped out with the Seven-Point system

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Neo defeats the Agents	Neo becomes the One	Trinity falls in love with Neo	Cypher betrays Morpheus and kills the crew

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Neo is a shlumpy underachiever			
Neo learns about the Matrix			
Agents kidnap Neo			
Neo escapes the Matrix			
Morpheus is captured			
Neo becomes the One			
Neo defeats the Agents			

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Neo is a shlumpy underachiever	Neo is a shlumpy underachiever		
Neo learns about the Matrix	Morpheus tells Neo he's the One		
Agents kidnap Neo	Neo is the wimpy new guy; can't do anything		
Neo escapes the Matrix	Neo meets the Oracle		
Morpheus is captured	Oracle tells Neo he's not the One		
Neo becomes the One	Neo realizes the power is in him		
Neo defeats the Agents	Neo becomes the One		

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Neo is a shlumpy underachiever	Neo is a shlumpy underachiever	Neo is alone	
Neo learns about the Matrix	Morpheus tells Neo he's the One	Neo meets Trinity	
Agents kidnap Neo	Neo is the wimpy new guy; can't do anything	Trinity isn't interested in Neo	
Neo escapes the Matrix	Neo meets the Oracle	Neo falls in love with Trinity	
Morpheus is captured	Oracle tells Neo he's not the One	Trinity won't open up, Neo thinks she loves someone else	
Neo becomes the One	Neo realizes the power is in him	Neo risks his life to save Trinity and Morpheus	
Neo defeats the Agents	Neo becomes the One	Trinity falls in love with Neo	

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Neo is a shlumpy underachiever	Neo is a shlumpy underachiever	Neo is alone	Cypher is their friend
Neo learns about the Matrix	Morpheus tells Neo he's the One	Neo meets Trinity	Cypher makes a deal with the agents
Agents kidnap Neo	Neo is the wimpy new guy; can't do anything	Trinity isn't interested in Neo	Crew discovers an unauthorized trip into the Matrix
Neo escapes the Matrix	Neo meets the Oracle	Neo falls in love with Trinity	Cypher tells the Agents where they are
Morpheus is captured	Oracle tells Neo he's not the One	Trinity won't open up, Neo thinks she loves someone else	Neo spots the trap, they try to escape
Neo becomes the One	Neo realizes the power is in him	Neo risks his life to save Trinity and Morpheus	Cypher attacks in the real world
Neo defeats the Agents	Neo becomes the One	Trinity falls in love with Neo	Cypher betrays Morpheus and kills the crew

Plots and Subplots

- Spread out the events to create good pacing

- Line up the events to create powerful moments and scenes

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Ice Monster!			

The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
Ice Monster!			
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Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
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The Matrix

Action	Character	Romance	Betrayal
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The Matrix

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			Crew discovers an unauthorized trip into the Matrix

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Try/Fail Cycles!			

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	Neo realizes the power is in him		

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		Trinity falls in love with Neo	

			where they are
	Oracle tells Neo he's not the One		
		Trinity won't open up, Neo thinks she loves someone else	
			Neo spots the trap, they try to escape
			Cypher attacks in the real world
Morpheus is captured			Cypher betrays Morpheus and kills the crew
		Neo risks his life to save Trinity and Morpheus	
Try/Fail Cycles!			
	Neo realizes the power is in him		
Neo becomes the One	Neo becomes the One	Trinity falls in love with Neo	

			where they are
	Oracle tells Neo he's not the One		
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Try/Fail Cycles!			
	Neo realizes the power is in him		
Neo becomes the One	Neo becomes the One	Trinity falls in love with Neo	
Neo defeats the Agents			