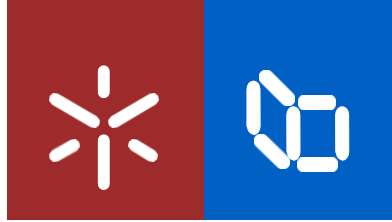


Universidade do Minho  
Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas

Joana Cristina Faria Ferreira

**Anatomy of a Screenplay:  
Writing a Television Pilot**





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## **Anatomy of a Screenplay: Writing a Television Pilot**

Relatório de Projeto  
Mestrado em Língua, Literatura e Cultura Inglesas

Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação da  
**Professora Doutora Margarida Pereira**

julho de 2022

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Este projeto final não teria sido possível sem o incrível apoio da Prof. Margarida Pereira. Quando pensei em desistir do mesmo, incentivou-me a continuar e sugeriu uma nova perspetiva, a qual resultou neste trabalho. Demonstro também gratidão aos meus pais pela paciência e motivação, principalmente por me fazerem acreditar que este era o caminho certo.

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# **ANATOMIA DE UM GUIÃO: ESCREVER UM PILOTO DE TELEVISÃO**

## **RESUMO**

Este relatório visa demonstrar, em primeiro plano, o processo de escrita de um guião, nomeadamente, o piloto de televisão. Como estudo de caso irá ser utilizado a minha própria escrita, um piloto de televisão de uma hora: *The Runaways*. Neste trabalho irá ser desenvolvido o processo desde a origem da ideia e do conceito de uma série de televisão e do piloto, até este ser finalizado, assim como os obstáculos e as dificuldades enfrentadas na escrita do mesmo. Temas como criação e estrutura de uma estória, viagem e desenvolvimento do protagonista, diferenças na narrativa de cinema e televisão, serão abordados neste relatório. Devido à falta de profissionais nesta área em Portugal, este trabalho tem também o objetivo de despertar o interesse sobre guionismo na comunidade académica.

**Palavras-chave:** anatomia de um Guião; guião; guionismo; piloto de televisão.

## **ANATOMY OF A SCREENPLAY: WRITING A TELEVISION PILOT**

### **ABSTRACT**

This report has the aim to showcase, in the first place, the process of writing a screenplay, specifically, a television pilot. As a case study, I use my own writing and screenplay, a one-hour television pilot entitled *The Runaways*. In this work will be developed the process of creation of story, from the origin of the idea and concept of a television series, since its genesis, its first episode, the pilot, until it is finalized, and the overall arc of the television series. We will also deal with the obstacles faced in the writing of the latter. Themes such as story structure, the hero's journey and development of the protagonist, differences in narrative in both film and television, will be explored in this report. Furthermore, due to the lack of focus on screenwriting in Portugal, it is also the aim of this report to not only shed light in the craft of screenwriting, but also awaken interest in the latter in the academic community.

**Keywords:** Anatomy of a Screenplay; Screenplay; Screenwriting Television Pilot; Writing a Television Pilot.



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Outlaw women are fascinating – not always for their behaviour but because historically women are seen as naturally disruptive and their status is an illegal one from birth if it is not under the rule of men.

Toni Morrison, in *Sula*

## INTRODUCTION

This text has the aim to shed light in the craft of screenwriting, namely, the process of writing a screenplay; to establish what sets it apart from other literary texts, by using as case study my own writing, the television pilot *The Runaways* and thus, acquaint the reader with the obstacles faced by screenwriters when writing a script. When it comes to the design of this report, it is structured similarly to that of a story, in three parts.

The first part of this text will focus on the fundamentals of storytelling, its elements and tools. In his book, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, American author Stephen King writes an analogy that I always loved when it comes to the craft of writing. In chapter forty of his part-biography part- collection of tips for the aspiring writer, Stephen King writes about a toolbox that his uncle had. King reminisces and tells the reader about a time as a child, his uncle gave him a toolbox so he could aid him and replace a screen outside his house.

Young King was given a screwdriver and told to put it back into the toolbox and 'latch her up'. He did as he was told, but he was puzzled, wondering why he lugged the toolbox all the way around the house if all his uncle needed was the one screwdriver — "Why go through all that trouble?" — To which Uncle Oren replied: 'Yeah, but Stevie, I didn't know what else I might find to do once I got out there, did I? It's best to have your tools with you. If you don't, you're apt to find something you expect and get discouraged.'<sup>1</sup>

The reason Stephen King reminisces about this personal moment with his uncle and chooses to share it with the reader, is to let one know that to write to one's best abilities, one has to first of all, construct a toolbox, learn every aspect of one's craft, build muscle to carry it and then use it.

Therefore, a writer when creating a story must be aware of and master every single aspect of the craft before putting his or her quill to paper. The first, structure and the essential elements of the

craft of story and storytelling. Following, the fundamentals of story, one explores what a Screenplay actually is, what sets it apart from the other types of literary text, and to conclude the first part of the report, what makes a writer stand out from others, their personality and identity as an artist – their Voice.

The second part focuses on how to write a screenplay, the differences about film and television, and how they impact both the formatting and writing of a screenplay, both its structure and formatting. This chapter ends with the analysis of the pilot of *Breaking Bad* which in my view is a perfect example of a

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), 125.

television pilot, it draws the audience in, makes one empathise and care about the protagonist, and wonder about what his journey is going to look like, and of course, to stick around and want to watch the next episode.

The third part of this report will focus on the actual process of writing a screenplay. The long journey of figuring out the story, characters and world, essentially how to create a television show. It is the part when I welcome you, the reader, to enter my state of mind when I was writing *The Runaways*, *Being John Malkovich*-like, my thought process, influences, research, and obstacles faced while writing the story.

As I am writing this introduction, the following comes to mind – it happens to be one of my favourite opening sentences in Literature from the novel *The Great Gatsby*: "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. 'Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me, 'Just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.'"<sup>2</sup>

I am going to be honest, when I first started writing this report, I was only thinking about myself, about my journey as a screenwriter. About the stories I wrote, and what drove me to do so. I was so focused on myself that I forgot that there are fellow writers out there that did not have the opportunities that I had. Having been born in Portugal, which at present does not have much support regarding the craft of screenwriting, I chose to move overseas to study. I chose it, because I could, which I am aware not everyone possesses the resources to do so. Later, when I returned home, I further developed my knowledge by reading screenplays and research online books on how to read screenplays.

As much as we writers can be introverts, creatures that spend a lot of time alone, it can be a daunting task. Thus, the main objective of this report is to illuminate others about writing a screenplay, and if the reader is already curious about writing a screenplay, then, I hope this makes the process less daunting. If it even inspires a kindred soul to write a screenplay, then this report would be doing its part.

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<sup>2</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, (Penguin), 1.

## **PART I**

### **STORYTELLING: ELEMENTS AND TOOLS**

"A family are looking forward to going on holiday. Mum has to sacrifice the holiday in order to pay the rent. Kids find a map buried in garden to treasure hidden in the woods, and decide to go after it. They get in loads of trouble and are chased before they finally find it and go on an even better holiday."<sup>3</sup>

The latter is part of an introduction of a book on screenwriting entitled *Into The Woods* by John Yorke in which he tells the reader this paragraph happens to have been created by a nine year old, a child of a friend of his. He then asks the reader how is it possible for a nine-year old boy to possess the knowledge of story structure.

York argues that maybe it is because we tend to draw stories from 'the same well'. "Storytelling has a shape. It dominates the way all stories are told and can be traced back not just to the Renaissance, but to the very beginnings of the recorded word."<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Poetics* and the Aristotelian Units: The Three-Act Structure**

Two thousand years ago, Aristotle, one of the brightest minds and thinkers in Ancient Greece, wrote a text entitled *Poetics* in which he states the importance of the structure of a story. According to the Greek thinker, a story is structured in a tripartite form, what one knows today as three-act structure: a beginning, a middle, and end. "A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end."<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle defined Beginning as "that which does not itself follow necessarily from anything else, but some second thing naturally exists or occurs after it"<sup>6</sup>; Middle as "that which itself comes after something else, and some other thing comes after it."<sup>7</sup>; and End "that which does itself naturally follow from something else, either necessarily or in general, but there is nothing else after it."<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the Aristotelian units of tragedy are divided in three parts is not by mere chance. The Rule of Three is all around us. It is a principle based on how humans process information through pattern recognition. A three-act structure not only helps a writer to organise a story, but also it can be found on the model of Hegelian dialectics – a discourse between two individuals with opposing views and arguments. These are: Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis. One then could argue a story's beginning could

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3 John Yorke, *Into The Woods* (Penguin Group), 17.

4 *Ibid*, 18.

5 Aristotle, *Poetics* (Penguin Classics), 13

6 *Ibid*, 13.

7 Aristotle, *Poetics* (Penguin Classics), 13-14.

8 *Ibid*, 13.

be seen as its thesis, the beginning of a proposition or argument, the middle as antithesis, the negation of the original thesis, and the end as synthesis, whereby the two conflicting ideas are reconciled and thus, form a new proposition.

Syd Field, author of *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, articulated Aristotle's tripartite form and translated it to the visual medium of Film and Television, dividing it into the following steps: Set-up, Confrontation and Resolution. If one takes a closer look, the latter are linked to Hegelian Dialectics. Act One is the set-up and thesis, the protagonist will be alerted to a world outside their own.

### **Act One – Thesis or Setup**

According to Robert McKee, within the Set-Up usually there is an 'Inciting Incident'. The latter happens to be the first major event in a story and its 'hook'. It occurs when something radically upsets the balance of forces in the protagonist's life, an event which turns the protagonist's life upside down. It can be caused by either the protagonist, due to some internal flaw, or a flaw within his or her world that must be fixed so that the balance is restored (i.e., *Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix*).

Essentially, a story truly begins when the Inciting Incident happens, drawing the protagonist toward conflict, creating a problem, which the main character will have to solve throughout the story.

John Yorke in his text *Into The Woods* adds that the Inciting Incident can also be regarded as the "What If?" moment which turns the protagonist's life upside down. Yorke argues that the Inciting Incident is a fortune, disguised as a misfortune, for it can be not exactly what the hero wanted, but needed in his life. Thus, the inciting incident being the catalyst of the protagonist's unconscious and hidden desire. "The Inciting Incident launches the protagonist on a quest for a conscious or unconscious Object of Desire to rescore life's balance."<sup>9</sup>

Following the Inciting Incident usually there is a 'Plot Point'. A Plot Point is a strong reversal, a turning point in the story, it marks the passage from Act One to Act Two; the moment when the protagonist fully accepts the mission which was set up in Act One. There is no going back. This is when the character decides to leave his or her comfort zone behind, and plunge into the darkness, and the unknown, thus accepting the journey.

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<sup>9</sup> John Yorke, *Into The Woods* (Penguin Group, 2014), 350.

## **Act Two – Antithesis and Confrontation**

Act Two marks the beginning of the protagonist's journey into the unknown, and his or her unconscious conflict. The journey is an integral ingredient of all archetypal stories. Change is the heart of the journey and what defines Act Two, for this is when the protagonist must face his or her deepest fears and accept transformation if he or she is to survive in this new frightening world.

Another Plot Point happens at the end of the act, just like in Plot Point I, but this time in Act Two. Its aim is to thrust the protagonist toward the Climax. This choice then is the final test of character, precisely, because it is the moment where the hero is forced to face up to their dramatic need or flaw. They have to choose between denying change and return to their former selves, or confront their innermost fears, overcome them and be rewarded for it. This is the main character's lowest point, all hope is lost, and he or she dies, metaphorically or not, this is the protagonists' opportunity to kill off their old selves, and come back to fight one more time, now reborn.

## **Act Three – Synthesis and Resolution**

Act Three begins and so does the final showdown with the antagonist. The battle in which the hero engages their dramatic need and overcomes his or her flaw. The inciting incident asks the question 'What will happen' and the climax answers it. "The climax is the stage at which the protagonist finds release from their seemingly inescapable predicament."<sup>10</sup>

Resolution, or 'denouement', is the final judgement after the battle. If the protagonists overcome their demons, they are rewarded. Denouement, a derivation of 'dénouer', means 'to untie' in French, and this is what the resolution is. "The knots of plot are undone and complications unravelled. But it is also a tying up of loose ends – in a classically structured work there must be a pay-off for every set-up, no strand left unattended or forgotten."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, one can see how both character and structure are linked and cannot function without one another. But which one comes first? "Plot or character? Which is more important? This debate is as old as the art."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Yorke, *Into The Woods*, (Penguin Group, 2014), 57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>12</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and The Principles of Screenwriting* (Regan Books, 1997), 174.

In *Story*, Robert McKee asks the latter, but Aristotle had no doubts about which one was more important when it comes to the creation of drama. It was clear as water to him. Plot came first; Character second. But why is that so? Should it not be the opposite? And why is structure so important to the point that one of the brightest minds in Ancient Greece, deemed it as the most important element of storytelling? One could start by making the argument that humans have the tendency to organise information, turn chaos into order. "Human beings order the world dialectically. Incapable of perceiving randomness, we insist on imposing order on any observed phenomena."<sup>13</sup>

It is part of the human nature to organise the world around us, and story, is not different, for it is a reflection, imitation (mimesis) of the real world, and thus a fictional mirror. "Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of action and of life."<sup>14</sup>

Robert McKee states the contrary in *Story*, arguing it is not possible to say which one is more important, Structure or Character, because 'Structure *is* Character'. "True Character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure—the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature."<sup>15</sup> Thus, one can understand where McKee is coming from, for human beings hide behind words, and it is only through action that they truly show who they are. After all, characters are in essence mimesis, imitations of human beings and it is what we really do which defines who we are.

Carl Jung believed in the duality of the human mind. A Ying and a Yang. A mask of unconscious urges and desire that human beings hide. It was Jung's belief that every person has a 'shadow' and it is only human for one to hide one's unconscious desires and fears.

Throughout a story, a character goes through a journey which symbolises change in the life and unconscious mind of the protagonist which will lead to the character's arc. Two fundamental terms of creation of character happen to be another duality. These are want and need.

### **Character: Want and Need**

Want and Need happen to be linked to Jung's concept of this duality and complexity of the human mind, thus possessing the following parameters: external vs internal and conscious vs unconscious.

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<sup>13</sup> John Yorke, *Into The Woods* (Penguin Group, 2014), 173.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* (Penguin Classics, 1997), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and The Principles of Screenwriting* (Regan Books, 1997), 174.



*Want* is defined by an external dramatic goal; what the character consciously pursues in the story, the main goal of the protagonist (or so the hero thinks) and what drives the plot forward.

*Need* is an internal dramatic goal; deep down what the protagonist needs, but he or she does not know it in the beginning of the story. For he or she has to slip underneath the mask, to face the fears, to get the 'key' to the unconscious mind and in order for it to happen, the protagonist must prove he or she is worthy of that key, by going on a journey in which he will face all those unconscious fears and desires.

When we think about the archetypal heroes and stories, one can notice a journey, from the unconscious to the conscious, from darkness to light, from being asleep and then finally being awake, seeing the world from a completely different lens, acknowledging his or her unconscious repressed fears and desires.

How many stories are out there about a flawed, conflicted hero or heroine who feels there is something amiss in his or her life and cannot pinpoint exactly what? In order for the hero or heroine truly figure out the answer to that question, he or she will have to leave everything from his or her old life and self behind, let go of their safety net and jump into the darkness, and unknown.

## Theme

"Your moral vision, your view of how people should act in the world. But instead of making the characters a mouthpiece for a message, we will express the theme that is inherent in the story idea. And we will express the theme through the story structure that it both surprises and moves the audience."<sup>16</sup>

Theme is one of the most important elements of storytelling. It is the driving force and intention behind a story. The message that the writer is trying to convey to the audience and the reason why he or she is writing the story. What the book, play, or script is *really* about, and it happens to be one of the most important and challenging aspects of creating a story.

John August, writer of *Big Fish* and *Frankenweenie*, argues that Theme is "The emotional, intellectual or spiritual issue at the core of the story. It is the "dark matter" that gives a movie weight

– you don't notice it directly, but when it is missing, the movie seems frivolous and disconnected."<sup>17</sup> August supports the latter statement by giving the example of James Cameron's *Aliens*. John August argues that the theme of *Aliens* is motherhood. In the beginning of the film, Ripley finds out she had been asleep in space and tragically has outlived her daughter. Later in the film, she

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<sup>16</sup> John Truby, *Anatomy of a Story* (North Point Press, 2008), 24.

<sup>17</sup> John August, *Themes* (<https://johnaugust.com/2003/themes>), September 10, 2003.

finds a young girl Newt in the spaceship and 'adopts' her as her own. When Newt happens to be kidnapped, Ripley goes to her rescue and confronts the Alien Mother.

But how does one convey the theme? Through dialogue? That is often regarded as 'on the nose', thus lacking subtext. It can be a combination of the story's setting, the world, and the characters, all working together to convey the theme of the story. For Theme is the glue that holds a story together.

In the podcast entitled 'Scriptnotes' in which Craig Mazin, creator of HBO's mini-series *Chernobyl* and upcoming HBO's *The Last of Us* series, hosts along fellow screenwriter John August, writer of *Big Fish*, *Frankenweenie*, stated that theme cannot be a vague concept or idea because the point of thematic structure is to take the protagonist somewhere, teaching them a lesson.

During this journey, the protagonist goes from ignorance of the truth to clarity, from "The thematic argument to the embodiment of the argument through action."<sup>18</sup> Craig Mazin further adds that in the beginning, within the character's ordinary and normal world, the protagonist will believe the opposite of the story's theme. Thus, Mazin establishes how crucial the second act is when it comes to theme.

By now, the protagonist's world has been turned upside down, disrupted, and he or she has entered a new world, which feels completely alien. The main character will want to go back to the comfort of home. According to Mazin, this is the perfect time to establish the anti-theme, when the hero considers the opposite side of his or her convictions, believes the opposite of them, toward a different way of thinking.

This is the point where the main character realises they have been living inside a lie all along, and yet at this point, the protagonist will be unable to change fully and accept the truth of the story's theme yet.

### **The Hero's Journey**

"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Craig Mazin, *Scriptnotes* (<https://screenwritingfromiowa.wordpress.com/2019/06/11/screenwriting-craig-mazin-theme-chernobly/>), May 19, 2022

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (New World Library, 3rd ed.), 52.

Christopher Vogler in his book *The Writer's Journey* (aimed toward filmmakers and screenwriters alike) re-envisioned Joseph Campbell's studies on mythology, deeply influenced by the psychology of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, in which he meditates on how every story is a journey and follows the concept of the archetypal Hero or Monomyth.

With Aristotle one went over the importance of plot as a crucial element of storytelling which reveals the protagonist's true self through *action* which then leads to his or her overall arc; With Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler one will focus, not only on the importance of character and the concept of "The Hero's Journey", but also the stages of this journey itself.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, one can find the influence of both Freud and Jung, how psychology concepts regarding the subconscious mind influenced Campbell's text. A story, as a journey from the subconscious to the conscious, the protagonist gradually realises, and comes with terms with its own repressed fears, battling self-doubt, and understanding one's identity.

These are all emotions we as human beings go through; therefore, it does not matter where a scribe comes from, which culture or religion, it is who we are, and both Campbell and Vogler believe mythology and the hero's journey are also embedded in us.

In his book *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler states that every story is a journey, and Campbell's Hero's Journey or Monomyth is not an invention, but an observation; it is Vogler's belief that Joseph Campbell only articulated in words that which was there all along in the very structure of storytelling. According to Campbell there are three stages in the Monomyth or The Hero's Journey which are dividing in three units like Aristotle's three act-structure. Act One is Separation; Act Two is Initiation; Act Three is The Return.

In the text *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell writes the following: "Mythology has a great deal to do with the stages of life, the initiation ceremonies as you move from childhood to adult responsibilities, from the unmarried state into the married state. All of those rituals are mythological rites."<sup>20</sup> And also, he adds, in another text: "In puberty or initiation rituals of early tribal societies, through which a child is compelled to give up its childhood and become an adult -- to die (...) to its infantile personality and psyche and come back as a responsible adult."<sup>21</sup>

Vogler adapted Campbell's stages for film and television and divided it in a three-act structure. On the whole, there are twelve stages and they are divided as follows: Act One - Separation, as combined by four stages: The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Meeting the Mentor, Crossing the First

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Power of Myth*, (Anchor, 1991), 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

Threshold; Act Two - Initiation, with five stages, Test, Allies and Enemies, Approaching the Inmost Cave, The Ordeal, Reward, The Road Back and Resurrection; Act Three only one, The Return.

### **Act I - Separation (Ordinary and Special World)**

Joseph Campbell believed that most stories take the hero out of an Ordinary World and into a Special World. Usually, the first world to be introduced is in fact the Ordinary World which is the Call to Adventure happens but there are exceptions to the rule, and the Hero's Journey is not a formula, but a paradigm.

A writer should always think of story first, and if there is a benefit to starting one's story with the Outside World first, one should not hesitate. But what are the differences between the Ordinary and the Special World? Very often stories start with the hero in the 'Special world', and we are given glimpses of the 'Ordinary world' in flashback.

The Ordinary World is the home of the hero, where he or she feels safe, the safe-haven of the protagonist; The Special World is the opposite of the Ordinary World, the unknown, a symbol of danger and peril, the personification of the hero's weaknesses, fears, and where the journey to the conscious, where the hero must go towards in order to find his or her true self, but for now, the hero's fears and anxieties are still in the back of his or her head.

Some stories with the classical Monomyth structure introduce the Special World first.

It allows the audience to know the rules of the Special World, how it functions and even introduce the antagonist — sometimes even one of the main characters (not the protagonist) — at the same time, to establish what the hero is going to face down the road, make the audience feel for the hero, raising the stakes right off the bat. These are the cases of films such as *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *The Matrix*.

*Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* with both a prologue of the war and the introduction of Sauron; *Star Wars* with the introduction of Darth Vader and Princess Leia, although kidnapped; *The Matrix* with the Agents, the antagonists, and Trinity (both the love interest of Neo and sidekick) and therefore, show this is a world where you can fly, and defy gravity – usual rules of reality do not apply here.

### **Call to Adventure**

As was stated previously, Joseph Campbell believed that most stories take the hero out of an Ordinary World and into a Special World. Christopher Vogler calls this the familiar 'fish out of water'. The writer shows the hero in the Ordinary World, giving the opportunity to the audience to connect with the protagonist before he or she is launched into an unexpected, and alien world.

Campbell writes that it is in this primary stage that the audience learns the hero is unhappy, this is also the hero's subconscious stage – when he or she feels in "his gut" something is somewhat missing but he or she does not know what that is exactly; as if the hero is in a dream waiting for his or her life to start.

In the *Matrix*, the opening frame of the Ordinary World is of the protagonist Neo, and he is so excited about his life that he is passed out on his computer's keyboard. Anderson lives a double life and name. Thomas Anderson, computer programmer for a respectable software company during the day; Neo, computer hacker by night. But this night is different, he is woken up by the message "Wake up, Neo", by an unknown identity. This scene hints at the hero's spiritual and psychological awakening (and we are back with Freud and Jung with dreams and the subconscious) will experience when he becomes his true self — Neo.

### **Refusal of the Call**

The Refusal of the Call is an essential stage because this is the time when the hero considers the risks involved, he must decide if he is going to fully commit or not. Without the threat of danger, the possibility of failing, the hero would not be taking any changes and the audience would not be committed to be part of the protagonist's journey. The hero refuses the call because of fear and insecurities that have surfaced from the Call to Adventure. He or she is not willing to make changes, preferring the safe haven of the Ordinary World. The protagonist is still in the unconscious stage of the journey, terrified of the unknown, what lurks inside the rabbit hole.

The hero might need a succession of calls before finally realising he must accept the journey to the Special for that is his or her only way to escape. The Refusal of the Call is the stage where the hero needs to choose between two conflicting calls.



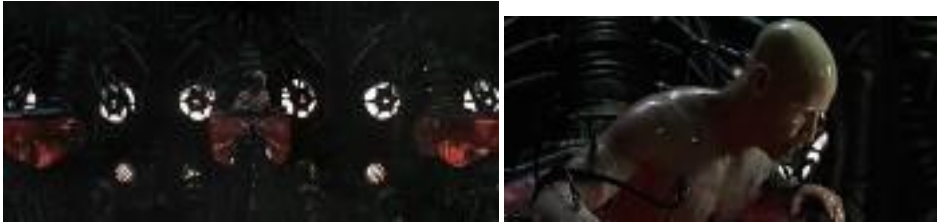
In *The Matrix*, Anderson refuses his call to adventure two times. The first when a group of goth-punks knocks to his door after he received the cryptic messages "Follow the white rabbit" and "What is the Matrix?" asking Anderson if he wants to join them at a club to which he says no, but then he sees the tattoo, a white rabbit, on the woman's neck, and he says yes. At the club, he meets Trinity who tells him he is in danger. Anderson seems at a loss, not knowing if he should believe in this stranger or not. In the next day, Anderson arrives late for work. His boss lectures him for it. When Neo gets back to his cubicle, a package is delivered to him. Inside, a burner phone ringing. He picks it up. On the other line, a man called Morpheus tells Anderson he is in danger and that someone is coming after him.



Neo looks up, and spots Agent Smith and police officers coming his way. Morpheus is right. He guides Anderson to the window and insists that he open it and escape outside, multiple stories high. Anderson refuses, because he does not believe in himself (a flaw), gets rid of the burner phone, and is caught, literally refusing his call (clever, the writers knew what they were doing). Thus, each call and refusal, Neo escalates the stakes, until he has no choice but to accept his call to adventure.

The hero now has either met the mentor before or meets him or her at this moment.

The aim of a mentor is to give the hero insight, training, skills, the protagonist will need in order to go forward and face the unknown, jump into the rabbit's hole. The relationship between hero and Mentor is one of the most common themes in mythology, and one of the richest in its symbolic value. It stands for the bond between parent and child, teacher and student, doctor and patient, god and man.<sup>22</sup>



A Hero may not wish to rush into a Special World blindly and, therefore, seeks the experience and wisdom of someone who has been there before. This Mentor has survived to provide the essential lessons and training needed to better face the Journey's tests and ordeals. The Mentor may appear as a wise old Jedi (Obi-Wan Kenobi) in *Star Wars*, an old wizard (Gandalf) in *Lord of the Rings* or like a handsome charismatic Laurence Fishburne (Morpheus) in *The Matrix*.

In *The Matrix*, Neo only accepts his call to adventure when he finally meets Morpheus face to face. Morpheus voices the two conflicting calls once again, the famous red and blue pill. The choice between the Ordinary World, when he will remain asleep, trapped by his own anxieties, or go into the Special World, in which Anderson will finally learn what it is wrong with his world and find the truth.

### **Crossing The First Threshold**

The First Threshold marks the turning point between Acts One and Two. Now that the hero finally is fully committed, he or she overcomes fear and enters the Special World for the first time, and by proxy, agrees to face its consequences.

This stage can be a dramatic, hard moment for the hero, where the protagonist can finally see what lies beneath the rabbit's hole, the reality of the Special World, and what he or she might have to face, confront, and at this point there is no going back – the hero might want to go back, to the comfort zone, but at this point there is no going back, the only way is forward.

In *The Matrix*, the first threshold is a brilliant plot twist. Neo finds out the life he had been living until now has been nothing but a simulation, that he really has been asleep all this time. He has no

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<sup>22</sup> Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (Michael Wiese Productions, Rev. Edition, 1985), p. 11.

free will, he has been nothing but a slave, for his entire life has been programmed for him - which is ironic since the latter happens to be the ultimate nightmare for a computer programmer.

When Neo wakes up, he is in the *Nebuchadnezzar*, the first time he really meets Trinity and Morpheus outside the simulation, as well as the rest of the crew. He goes through a shell-shock moment, wanting to go back, but he cannot, as it is too late. His eyes have been opened and now he cannot close them.

One of the greatest lines in the film happens in this stage when Neo asks Morpheus "Why do my eyes hurt?", to which Morpheus replies: "You have never opened them before".

### **Act Two: First Half – Initiation**

Since the origins of humanity, initiation has been part of our history and culture. Joseph Campbell believed the initiation stage is one of the most important in the Hero's Journey. Campbell supported his belief with the example of the aborigines of Australia as one of the principal features of the ordeal of initiation — the rite of circumcision — after which the child is cut away from the mother and inducted into society and lore of men.



"But the structure and something of the spiritual sense of this adventure can be seen already anticipated in the puberty or initiation rituals of early tribal societies, through which a child is compelled to give up its childhood and become an adult -- to die, you might say, to its infantile personality and psyche and come back as a responsible adult."<sup>23</sup>

### **Test, Allies, Enemies**

Having crossed the threshold and coming to terms with this new world, the hero settles in, understand the rules of the Special World and how it works. This is also when side characters are introduced and the protagonist begins to bond, trying to figure out who their allies and enemies are.

This is a time where a trickster might enter the picture as well, masquerading as an ally (Cypher in *The Matrix*; and in the beginning of *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* film Boromir, who

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (Anchor Books, 1991), 266.



then changes back into Ally in the end, expressing he is sorry and apologizing to Aragorn for his behaviour toward Frodo), a team may come to fruition, or even a fellowship like in the *Lord of the Rings*.

The hero must prepare himself for the greater ordeals yet to come and for it to happen, the protagonist must know where his or her support lies, if success in this journey is to be found. The character also will wonder if he or she has what it takes, whether he or she will fail or succeed.

In *The Matrix*, this is the moment when Neo is tested physically. Through the training software, he spars with Morpheus after learning martial arts, he gains new skills he did not have before, and learns by doing the 'flight test' that even though he is training inside of a software program, if you get hurt, or die inside *The Matrix*, so do you in 'real life' – stakes rise even higher.

### **Approaching the Inmost Cave**

This is the stage when the protagonist makes all the preparations necessary to approach the Inmost Cave, leading to the journey's heart, planning of attacks, literal or metaphorical, before the protagonist can face his or her greatest fear or the Special World's antagonist.

Now, the hero has made it to the Special World and so he deserves a reward. This stage is also known as "Fun and Games", when the protagonist enjoys the perks of the Special World, thinking it is all a bed of roses, seeing its superficial side, for she or he is taking a peek from the outside. This is also the time when the hero and audience can take a break, a breather, before the hero gets back to focus on his journey again and his internal turmoil.

In *The Matrix*, *Approaching the Inmost Cave* is when Neo has settled down inside the Matrix, and is tested spiritually and psychologically instead of physically, as he visits the Oracle which plants doubt in his mind, telling him he is not The One, and after all, Morpheus is wrong about him.

### **The Ordeal**

This is the life-or-death moment in the hero's journey, when the protagonist faces her or his greatest fear and when his or her journey is in the brink of failure. The audience also watches in suspense and wonders whether the protagonist will make it. The Ordeal is the central, essential, and magical stage of the Hero's Journey.

The Hero may directly taste death or witness the death of an Ally or Mentor or, even worse, directly cause that death. The Ordeal may pit Hero against Shadow or Villain, The Hero may have the power to defeat the antagonist, to have to face bigger threats and forces in the second half.

Through death, spiritual or physical, the Hero is reborn. This death is linked to the resurrection of the Hero which will grant her or him insights and great power that was hidden until now, which will aid the protagonist during the journey to the end.

In *The Matrix*, the crew is ambushed by the agents and their tactical police. Morpheus sacrifices himself so the rest of the crew can escape, ending up being taken hostage and interrogated by the Agents. Back in the spaceship, Neo makes the decision to sacrifice himself to save Morpheus. Trinity comes along. Together, Neo and Trinity, enter the Matrix to rescue Morpheus. Later, they face off one of the agents on the roof of the building where Morpheus is being interrogated. The agents open fire, but Neo is able to escape the bullets in slow-motion like the Agents did before... could he be the one?

After fighting with the agents, Trinity and Neo with the help of a helicopter, rescue Morpheus from the high-rise where he was being interrogated. Neo tells Trinity and Morpheus to go ahead, and go to the spaceship. That he will meet them there, but before he can, Agent Smith appears. Trinity now inside the spaceship, begs Neo to run. In another time, he would have, but now something has changed, Neo believes (due to the slow-motion bullet dodging). Finally, the time for the face-off between the protagonist and antagonist arrives.

## **Resurrection**

In the resurrection stage, the hero faces the most dangerous meeting — death. This is when the protagonist is finally able to apply all the knowledge and skills she or he has learned and acquired through the story. Once again, death is linked to resurrection, symbolizing a cleansing or purification of the soul, after experiencing his or her greatest fear, may it be, spiritually or physically. Thus, by finally facing the antagonist, the Hero is therefore transformed.



In *The Matrix*, Neo and Smith fight via hand combat, then with guns; Neo fires, Agent Smith defies the physics of the Matrix, like him earlier, dodging his bullets. Smith fires multiple bullets at Neo, but he is not as quick as the agent and is shot, multiple times, and dies. Silence. Inside the ship, the crew cannot believe it, and so the audience, as we all watch in anticipation wondering if the hero is actually dead.

Trinity approaches Anderson's body in the ship and kisses him, and after a few dramatic beats, Anderson opens his eyes. Back in The Matrix, he rises to fight again, to the disbelief of Agent Smith. Smith launches at him to finish the job, but this is not Mr. Anderson anymore, for he is dead, this is Neo, and now he *knows* he is The One.

Neo dodges all of Smith's attacks, countering them, and then he too defies the laws of the Matrix, entering Smith's body, destroying him from the inside. The two other agents terrified, flee, Neo has won the fight, and the Second Act comes to an end.

In *The Matrix*, as Neo flees, Agent Smith ambushes him in an apartment, shooting him dead. Neo literally dies and comes back to life. As Neo dies, Trinity whispers into his ear outside of the Matrix. She tells him that he can't be dead because he is the One. And she knows he is because the Oracle told her that she would fall in love with the One. She kisses him. Neo is revived. He defeats Agent Smith, and he alone holds the power to perceive and control the Matrix.

### **Act Three - Resolution**

#### **Reward**

We reach Act Three, it is time for the Resolution. The hero has survived death, overcame his greatest fear, weathered the crisis of the heart, conquered doubt, and now he has earned the reward. This reward can come in many ways: inner knowledge, an object like a sword or elixir to fix and bring equilibrium to the ordinary world. Whatever the reward, the hero has earned the right to celebrate. Celebration not only allows the Hero to replenish his or her energy, but also gives the audience a moment so one can catch a breath before the journey resumes to its climax and resolution.

In *The Matrix*, Neo's reward is having confidence in his abilities and himself, knowing he is The One, and by proxy, having the power to face the Agents, and save humanity.

#### **The Road Back**

The hero must finally commit to completing the journey. Accept the Road Back to the Ordinary World. A hero's success in the Special World may make it difficult to return. Like Crossing the Threshold, The Road Back, needs an event that will push the Hero through the Threshold, back into the Ordinary World. When it comes to *The Matrix*, the third act is both the Road Back and Return of the Elixir.

### **Return with the Elixir**

Return with the Elixir is the final reward earned on the Hero's Journey, and generally, the stage where the hero's journey ends, since balance has been restored. The Hero has been resurrected, gotten his or her reward, to go back home, to the Ordinary World, and share the Elixir of the Journey.

The latter can be a treasure or just surviving the Special World. In the case of *Lord of the Rings*, it is Frodo destroying the Ring, and go back home to the Shire, after having healed, and restored peace to a wounded land, to the Ordinary World.

In *The Matrix*, the protagonist chooses not to go back, for he has found who he is, Neo, and his true purpose, put an end to the Matrix and free humanity. A call is made to the Matrix. Neo sends a message that he's going to awaken the humans imprisoned within the Matrix. He blends in, walks through a crowd. Enters a phone box. Makes a phone call. It is revealed he has ultimate power within the Matrix as he suddenly flies into the sky, showcasing his power.

## WHAT IS A SCREENPLAY?

In his book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Syd Field tells the reader about the real story of renowned American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald, like many fellow writers, was struggling financially.

Looking for another method of income, and for a change career wise, he moved to Hollywood. In his first years, he immersed himself in the craft of screenwriting. But even so, Fitzgerald approached screenwriting the same way as he did when writing a novel. It was challenging for him to find an equilibrium between words and images, combining what he learned while writing novels with the new medium of film.

Fitzgerald passed away in 1941 with only one Hollywood screen credit to his name: an adaptation of the novel of *Three Comrades* with the same name, although Joseph L. Mankiewicz (screenwriter of classics *All About Eve* and *Cleopatra*) ended up being hired to rewrite Fitzgerald's draft. Director Billy Wilder offered the following analogy about Fitzgerald's screenwriting story: "A great sculptor who is hired to do a plumbing job. He did not know how to connect the pipes so the water could flow."<sup>24</sup>

Syd Field stated that there is not only one answer why Fitzgerald could not make it in Hollywood as a screenwriter, but he suggests that one of the reasons could have been "Reading his books and writings and letters from this period, it seems clear that he was never exactly sure what a screenplay was."<sup>25</sup>

Thus, one is back to the primary question: What is a screenplay? Field was certain what it was not. Neither a novel or a play. Although its format is inspired by and contains elements of both.

In a novel the action may take place inside the head of the protagonist. The reader may be directed to the action, guided by a narrator, which may be outside the narrative or not; sometimes, the perception is that of the protagonist of the story, through an internal focalization.

In a play, the actions happen on stage and thus, the audience becomes the fourth wall, like a curious neighbour, eavesdropping in the lives of the characters, watching them reveal what they think and feel; talk about their hopes, dreams, needs, desires, and fears. In Theatre, "the action of the play occurs within the language of dramatic action; it is spoken in words that describe feelings, actions, and emotions."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, (Delta, 2005), 50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, (Delta, 2005), 19.

A Screenplay is something else, a different craft. Film and Television are visual mediums, inspired by literature and visual arts, but also music and sound. So, one has to take the latter elements in consideration before writing a screenplay.

### **"Show, Don't Tell"**

There is a golden rule in writing, which can be subsumed in the motto: "Show, don't tell" if this is true for novels, then, it is even more crucial when writing for Film and Television for these are visual mediums. When one tells information to the audience through dialogue it just feels 'too on the nose' and awkward. So how does one do it? "I think that that may be one of the indications of a good movie, music: the immediate recurrence of the visual elements in the picture that the music supports."<sup>27</sup>

Although one thinks of Film and Television as a visual experience, one can not underestimate the power of sound and music. The latter have been part of cinema since its birth, as much as the moving image has and way before one could hear an actor's voice. It is what makes a film, cinema, and not a painting. "We see a clock ticking, a window opening, a person in the distance leaning over a balcony, smoking, we see two people laughing as their car pulls away from the curb."<sup>28</sup>

It is what makes possible to set a mood of a scene shift, and evoke an emotional reaction in the audience. So, the use of sound in the storytelling within a visual medium cannot be understated. There are two types of sound in Film: diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic is the sound that occurs in the film's narrative which the characters themselves can hear; Non-diegetic are the sounds that only the audience can hear, these are the sound techniques used to set the mood of a scene to evoking an emotional reaction in the audience.

The latter can be used by a screenwriter when writing a screenplay, it is an important tool to set the mood of a scene, evoke an emotional reaction in the audience, or even as a transition to the next scene which one will see when formatting a screenplay.

### **How a Screenplay 'Looks'**

Before explaining how a screenplay is formatted one must state first that like all things, screenwriting has evolved and changed through time, meaning that a screenplay from the 20<sup>th</sup> century looks completely different from a script from the twenty first century.

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<sup>27</sup> Sidney Lumet, *Making Movies* (Vintage Books, A Division of Random House Inc., 1996), 288.

<sup>28</sup> Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, (Delta; Revised Edition, 2005), 19.

Let us imagine the following scenario. If *Citizen Kane*, Orson Wells' American classic and considered one of the greatest screenplays of all time (co-written by Wells himself and Herman J. Mankiewicz), never got made and were to be sent for the first time to a studio or agency to be read, it could get passed on.

The reason why being its presentation. The reader, as soon as he or she opened the first page would perhaps let out a loud groan and who would judge him or her. Imagine hundreds of pages of long blocks of text like the paragraph below. The reader would probably not make it through the first ten pages of the screenplay as great as the writing, story and the character work might be and that would be a shame. Nowadays, screenwriters tend to refrain from writing such long paragraphs. The maximum of lines being four to five so the reading flows.

#### PROLOGUE

FADE IN:

EXT. XANADU - FAINT DAWN - 1940 (MINIATURE)

Window, very small in the distance, illuminated.

All around this is an almost totally black screen. Now, as the camera moves slowly towards the window which is almost a postage stamp in the frame, other forms appear; barbed wire, cyclone fencing, and now, looming up against an early morning sky, enormous iron grille work. Camera travels up what is now shown to be a gateway of gigantic proportions and holds on the top of it - a huge initial "K" showing darker and darker against the dawn sky. Through this and beyond we see the fairy-tale mountaintop of Xanadu, the great castle a silhouette as its summit, the little window a distant accent in the darkness.

DISSOLVE:

A SERIES OF SET -UPS, EACH CLOSER TO THE GREAT WINDOW, ALL TELLING SOMETHING OF:

The literally incredible domain of CHARLES FOSTER KANE.

Its right flank resting for nearly forty miles on the Gulf Coast, it truly extends in all directions farther than the eye can see. Designed by nature to be almost completely bare and flat - it was, as will develop, practically all marshland when Kane acquired and changed its face - it is now pleasantly uneven, with its fair share of rolling hills and one very good-sized mountain, all man-made. Almost all the land is improved, either through cultivation for farming purposes or through careful landscaping, in the shape of parks and lakes. The castle dominates itself, an enormous pile, compounded of several genuine castles, of European origin, of varying architecture - dominates the scene, from the very peak of the mountain.

*Citizen Kane* (1941) Screenplay by Orson Welles (p.1)

In essence, the presentation of a script, the way a screenplay looks, is crucial, for it means if the writer gets read or not. When one has read many screenplays as a studio script reader, manager or agent has which can amount to thousands, one happens to have a trained eye and spot, very quickly, the scripts that lack proper formatting and not enough 'white space'.

### **White Space**

The word "white space" is quite common in the screenwriting world. Writing a screenplay, opposite to writing a novel, is about being clear, evoking an image or emotion with the least amount of words possible. When reading a script, directors and producers want a clear image. This is why long, convoluted blocks of text are often frowned upon. It is too much information. When writing a screenplay, clarity is key. This can be a hard task when one is writing a screenplay for the first time. One is more used to the format of a novel than of a screenplay.

In a novel one is free when it comes to space, there are no restrictions, and one can write as much prose and be poetic as one chooses. When writing a screenplay one can also do the latter, but has to be careful and not get carried away by the prose.

Another important aspect of screenwriting is rhythm and pace. Earlier, the importance of music and sound it was mentioned the importance of music and sound. Words are powerful, and like music, they can set up rhythm and pacing, by using, beats, pauses and space to set it up. There is one screenwriter that does the latter masterfully.

His name is John Logan and he wrote the following screenplays: *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Gladiator* (2000), *Skyfall* (2002), *Hugo* (2011), *The Aviator* (2004), *Rango* (2011), and the television show *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016). Quite the bibliography. Logan happens to be a master of pace and images which when it is done as Logan does it reads as poetry.

The following is an excerpt of the first page of John Logan's adaptation of *Hugo* which was directed by Martin Scorsese. Every line evokes an image. Firstly, a great clockwork, then we are introduced to the world of the story, the train station which is crowded, bustling with rhythm, as the pacing of this page, the clock working, "a precise, beautiful machine, lovely line, filled with poetry, then we dive down, and are introduced to a huge clock in a ceiling, what lurks behind our protagonist, Hugo Cabret, inside the most unlikely of places, so strange, which makes one wonder about this boy.

The screenwriter could have given us the following information in one go, but he shows it to us in cinematic form, one image at a time, like music, a note following another, makes us want to find out what the next image is going to be, ending with the introduction of a strange boy with the name of



Hugo. With only seventeen lines, John Logan not only sets up the setting, time, world protagonist and mood of the story all at once, and most importantly, one can see it, the scene flows as if one was already watching the film in a movie theater.

1 INT. TRAIN STATION -- GRAND HALL - DAY 1

From far above it looks like a great clockwork.

We are looking down on the Grand Hall of the Paris Train Station.

It is crowded.

People bustle back and forth.

Like the gears and wheels of a clock.

A precise, beautiful machine.

We float down...

Under the great iron girders...

Moving through the station...

Past kiosks and shops...

Weaving among commuters...

Heading toward the trains and platforms in the distance...

Finally moving up to...

A huge clock suspended from the ceiling of the station...

Behind the ironwork dial we see a face peering out.

HUGO CABRET looks at us. He is a serious-looking boy of around 12. Long hair.

It is 1931.

*Hugo* (2011) Screenplay by John Logan

### **'Action Verbs not Adverbs'**

In his book *On Writing: Memoir of the Craft*, the American author writes the following about adverbs “Adverbs, you will remember from your own version of Business English, are words that modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs like the passive voice, seem to have been created with the timid writer in mind.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen King, *On Writing: Memoir of the Craft* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), 189.

"I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs."<sup>30</sup> King sees adverbs as repetitive, redundant. If adverbs are seen as the latter when it comes to novel writing, even more so in screenwriting. Action verbs can be used instead of adverbs. They do not only save space on the page and thus money on the day of shooting the script, but action verbs lead to a direct emotion for actors to perform.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

## FORMATTING A SCREENPLAY

### Fade in and Out

These two terms come from Film Editing and are used to describe a transition, to and from a blank image, marking the beginning and ending of a film and which translates to screenwriting. Nowadays one can start a screenplay with Fade In or not, it is up to the screenwriter, but it is important to know this was a rule in one time.

### Scene Headings or Sluglines

Sluglines, also known as scene headings, tell the reader the location where the action is happening and its time, thus establish space and time. "The actual term is *scene heading*, which is the term you see in the major software programs. *Slug* or *slug line* is a popular nickname derived from the world of journalism."<sup>31</sup>

Scene Headings or Slug Lines are important because they tell line producers and assistant directors how things get shot. The difference between one scene being night and the next being day is incredibly important for the lighting, wardrobe and makeup departments. Knowing the time of the day and where the scene takes place, affects nearly every department in a major way.

**INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - DAUGHTER'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Bedtime. Quiet. Just one warm light on the floor as Kristen reads from PRINCESS BRIDE, her daughters flopped all around her, some on her legs, others cuddled against her. Ripped wrapping paper all around from opened presents.

*Evil 'Pilot'* (2019) Created by Robert King and Michelle King

### Locations : Interior and Exterior

When a scene is set inside a location, one has to type INT., when outside it is EXT, always capitalised. After location, comes the time. This can be Day, Night, Morning, Evening (one can also write dawn or dusk). Also, when a scene directly continues from the previous scene, mark it "continuous" in the time slot. One can also use continuous when a character is moving from a room to another.

If a character is inside a house, and moves from the bedroom to the living room. For example: "INT. HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS". If a scene happens minutes later from the one previous, one can use "MOMENTS LATER" in the slugline.

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<sup>31</sup> Dave Trotter, *Script Magazine*, (<https://scriptmag.com/features/ask-dr-format-slugging-out-slug-lines>), June 2, 2009.

**INT. SULLIVAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

**EXT. SULLIVAN HOUSE - DAY**

*Road to Perdition*; Written by David Self (p.1)

There are also times when INT./EXT. can be used. This happens when a scene takes place in both in an interior and an exterior. This usually happens when a character is inside a vehicle which is moving in real time. The character can be driving, or staring through a window while someone else is driving. For example, when the character is driving a car, and we see her drive and what she is seeing outside.

**Secondary Slugs or Sub-Headers**

Sub-Headers are formatted like slug-lines and can be described as mini slug-lines. They add another place or time within a scene. They are left-justified and capitalised. If one is using screenwriting software, one will have to format it as a "scene header". Writers, on the other hand, tend to prefer to save the line so they do not push a page. So, instead of saying INT. HOME - LATER, since the scene is set in the same location, one can just write LATER.

**Action Lines**

Action Lines are essentially descriptions of the action. In Theatre, these describe the space where the scene is set, and these happen to be very straightforward. Film is a different medium, one where one jumps around to and fro several settings, and so there has to be a vocabulary of what that looks on the page every time we change location. An action line or sentence can be regarded as a visual image. A reader wants to feel as if one is watching a film, and therefore one has to build a rhythm and a pacy through words.

Painting an image with words. Your action lines go right beneath the slug line. Proper screenplay format dictates that they always should be written in the present tense and are visually descriptive. Specifically, action lines describe what the reader sees and hears other than dialogue.

This is one of the hardest aspects when beginning writing a script, because one is often used to reading novels, and writing in prose. But in screenwriting, clarity is king. This does not mean one cannot be poetic and clear, but one must be careful and find a middle ground.

Finding the balance between letting a director direct a scene, giving the prop department get enough information to get exactly what the writer describes.

## **Capitals**

There are two main rules for capitalisation in screenwriting. To capitalise a character's name the first time they appear in the screenplay during their introduction scene, and transitions.

**Waves lap against a sand beach. A 12 year old BOY, MICHAEL, stands facing the still water, his back to us.**

*Road to Perdition* (2002) Screenplay by David Self (p.1)

One also must capitalise important props and sound design, for pre-production and post- production purposes, like such:

**Michael is cycling along, one hand to steer the bike, the other to puff on his lit PIPE.**

*Road to Perdition* (2002) Screenplay by David Self (p.3)

When writing dialogue, the text must be front and center. Nowadays, this is easy, it is not like writing in a typewriter, since screenwriting software such as Final Draft or Fade in, takes care of screenplay formatting automatically for the writer. Here is how dialogue looks formatting wise.

KRISTEN BENOIST  
(taking out a form)  
These are 567 true or false  
statements. Answer as honestly as  
you can, and that will help me  
determine how honest we are with  
each other, okay?

ORSON LEROUX  
Sure, you're the doc.

KRISTEN BENOIST  
True or false. "*I like mechanics  
magazines.*"

ORSON LEROUX  
Are you serious?  
(she is)  
False.

KRISTEN BENOIST  
*"I think I would like the work of a  
librarian."*

*Evil 'Pilot'* (2009) Created by Robert and Michelle King (p. 4)

## Parentheticals

Parentheticals give input to the reader, the actors, information about how the line can be performed (although, one should be careful because the writer should not tell the actor how to do their job). How it differs from a normal line, or if it is a voice over (V.O) or if it is uttered off screen (O.S).

FADE IN:

**EXT. LAKE - PERDITION, MICH. - 1931 - DAY**

Waves lap against a sand beach. A 12 year old BOY, MICHAEL,  
stands facing the still water, his back to us.

MICHAEL (V.O.)  
There are many stories about Michael  
Sullivan. Some say he was a decent  
man. Some say there was no good in  
him at all. But I once spent six  
weeks on the road with him in the  
winter of 1931.

FADE TO WHITE:

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
This is our story.

*Road to Perdition* (2002) Screenplay by David Self (p.1)

## Super, Title or Chyron

Super as in superimposed, Title or Chyron refers to the text which appears on the screen. It is usually used to indicate the time and place of the scene to the audience. It is placed as an action line with the word Super or Chyron in all caps, followed by the text.

Then it is gone, vanishing into the mist.

SUPER: NORWAY - 709 AD

*Outlander* (2008) Screenplay by Dirk Blackman and Howard McCain (p.1)

## Transitions

In screenwriting, transitions indicate how an editor should switch between two scenes — they are on the far right of the page (right justified) and placed between two scenes. Proper screenplay formatting usually indicates these as being capitalised. Transitions happen to be one of the most underrated aspects of screenwriting. Through transitions one can establish pace in a screenplay, while also cutting from a scene to the next. These can be visual or with sound. One can tell when a screenwriter has not been writing for a long time through transition he or she chooses, because they tell one not only when it comes to the experience of writing a screenplay, but also the cinematic and visual knowledge of the writer.

## Cut To

Cut To is the simplest of transitions. A mere cut to the next scene.

KRISTEN BENOIST

Occam's razor. Simpler is truer,  
isn't it?... So, let's get the  
timeline straight. Who did you kill  
first: Mr. or Mrs. Gilbert?

Orson frowns at the question's indelicacy, but we CUT TO...

**INT. EMPTY HOUSE - (PAST) - DAY**

...LeRoux slashing the throat of MR. GILBERT (28) who reaches for his neck, blood spilling through his fingers, spreading in a red pool on the polished floors. A nightmare image out of Bosch. But quickly we're back with...

*Evil "Pilot"* (2019 - Present) Created by Robert and Michelle King (p. 13)

## Smash Cut

Smash Cut is an abrupt, sudden cut, similar to "Cut To", but times ten. This kind of cut can happen during a mid-sentence or sound.

RED

Agent Cooper, you've overestimated your authority. I don't trust you. I don't even like you. I said I'll help you find Zamani, and I will, but from this point forward there's one very important rule:  
(fearless)  
I only speak with Elizabeth Keen.

IN THE SECURITY NEST...

The agents blink in confusion. Glances are exchanged.

RESSLER

Who the hell is Elizabeth Keen?

So we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DARK BEDROOM - DAWN

A golden retriever licks the face of a SLEEPING WOMAN. She pushes the dog away and squints at the blinking alarm clock. Lays back down. Suddenly JOLTS OUT OF BED as --

WOMAN

Crap. CRAP!!!

-- her dazed HUSBAND sits up on his elbows.

HUSBAND

Lizzy, what's going on?

*The Blacklist* (2013 – Present) Created by Jon Bokenkamp (p.9)

## Dissolve

A dissolve overlaps two shots for the duration of the effect, usually at the end of one scene and the beginning of the next, but may be used in montage sequences also. Generally, but not always, the use of a dissolve is held to indicate that a period of time has passed between the two scenes. Also, it may indicate a change of location or the start of a flashback.

For instance, in the opening sequence of *Citizen Kane*, the dissolves between the master shots are slow because of the pervading sense of morbidity Welles and his collaborators wished to create. When one scene "dissolves" into another scene, almost transforming into that scene. It is primarily used to indicate that time has passed. For instance, the classic dissolve of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*





*Saving Private Ryan* (1998) Directed by Steven Spielberg

### **Match Cut**

A match cut cuts from one shot to a similar one, by either matching the action or the composition. For instance, the ship turning into a bone as a weapon in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.



Opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) Directed by Stanley Kubrick

### **Intercut**

Intercutting can be used when one needs to bounce back and forth between different locations at the same time. It is often used in montage scenes, i.e. in heist films during robberies.

161 INT. CRAWL SPACE - DAY 161  
Luther unpacks a handheld RECEIVER --

LUTHER  
Bravo standing by to receive  
transmission.

INTERCUT WITH:

162 INT. CATACOMB ROOM - DAY 162

Ethan quickly enters the crypt, removes his WOODEN CROSS,  
pulls off the top piece, revealing a METAL ANTENNA: it EMITS  
A FAINT BEEP, an LED PULSING, as he holds it up to the wall --

ETHAN  
Transmitting.

DIRECTIONAL INDICATORS on Luther's receiver tell him where to  
move it -- a shot of LUTHER AND ETHAN, THE STONE WALL  
SPLITTING THEM DOWN THE MIDDLE. Luther's receiver BEEPS:

LUTHER  
Gotcha -- mark it --

-- they both mark the wall with a piece of CHALK. Then Ethan  
pulls off his jacket and starts to peel from its interior a  
THIN COMPOSITE ADHESIVE PATCH, four feet square, as Luther  
begins attaching an EXPLOSIVE PATCH to the stone wall.

*Mission Impossible III* (2006) Screenplay by Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, J.J Abrams (p. 70)

There is an exception to rule though, regarding scenes where two characters have a phone call.

This can happen in the same scene by using a parenthetical by stating the character is talking on the phone or via voice-over (V.O).

### **Pre-Lap**

A pre-lap is considered a sound transition in order to connect a line of dialogue or sound effects from an earlier scene to a following one. The sound from the next scene starts playing the end of the previous scene, before the cut. Screenwriters can incorporate dialogue or sound effects from an earlier scene to a following one. Dialogue or sound effect pre-laps can be incorporated either for dramatic or comedic effect.

INT. LEAH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

LEAH's room is cluttered with the sentimental junk that certain girls love to hoard. The PHONE rings.

LEAH  
(answering phone)  
Yo-yo-yiggity-yo.

JUNO  
I am a suicide risk.

LEAH  
Is this Juno?

JUNO  
No it's Morgan Freeman. Got any bones that need collecting?

*Juno (2007) Screenplay by Diablo Cody (p.6)*

The Kindly Man enters the prison as Kristen remembers: oh, the text. She dials her phone, starting toward her car:

KRISTEN BENOIST (CONT'D)  
Hi, Lila. What's wrong? You texted.

INT. BENOIST APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

INTERCUT with the Capra-esque part of Kristen's life: LILA (10), one of her four daughters, the artist in the family, standing on a chair in her Catholic prep uniform, getting down flour:

LILA (THE ARTIST)  
Lynn thinks I should do cupcakes,  
but didn't I do cupcakes last year?

Kristen smiles. Her daughters are a breath of fresh air. Behind Lila is LYNN (13), Kristen's oldest daughter, the family scientist, always wearing a lucky baseball cap, trying to be an adult. She yells toward the phone:

LYNN (THE SCIENTIST)  
Cupcakes are easier, mom!

KRISTEN BENOIST  
What does grandma say?

*Evil "Pilot" Written by Robert and Michelle King (p. 4)*

## VOICE

"The writer's voice is a term some critics use to refer to distinctive features of a written work in terms of spoken utterance. The voice of a literary work is then the specific group of characteristics displayed by the narrator or poetic 'speaker' (or, in some uses, the actual author behind them), assessed in terms of *tone, style, or personality*."<sup>32</sup>

Voice is one of the most underrated aspects of screenwriting. It is what makes a screenwriter stand out from the other thousands of screenwriters out there trying to 'make it'. The voice of a screenwriter is what makes the reader (besides the story) want to turn the page and keep wanting to read the script. In essence, it is the writer's personality, identity and 'style' poured onto the page.

As for instance one can tell when one's watching a film by Martin Scorsese or Quentin Tarantino, a person who has read a great number of scripts, can immediately tell when one is reading a screenplay by Aaron Sorkin or Shane Black. With a background from the theatre, a playwright, before he turned to screenwriting with the adaptation of his play *A Few Good Men* (1992), Sorkin happens one of the best screenwriters when it comes to writing dialogue. His 'snappy' dialogue filled with rhythm and energy as if out of a music sheet, his "walk and talk" scenes famous from the iconic television show *The West Wing* (1999-2006), as well as *The Newsroom* (2012-2014) make his voice as a screenwriter stand out.

The same can be said about Shane Black's writing, standing out with a symphony of powerful movement and cinematic images which immediately set up a scene from page one, drawing the reader into this new world. The very first page of *Lethal Weapon* (1987) makes one feel as if one is already watching the movie, and that is exactly what managers, agents, and producers are looking for. Something they have not read nor seen before. A voice that is unique and stands out. Thus, both the voices of Shane Black and Aaron Sorkin are undeniable.

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<sup>32</sup> Chris Baldwick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 273.

FROM THE BLACK WE HEAR--

MARK (V.O.)

Did you know there are more people with genius IQ's living in China than there are people of any kind living in the United States?

ERICA (V.O.)

That can't possibly be true.

MARK (V.O.)

It is.

ERICA (V.O.)

What would account for that?

MARK (V.O.)

Well, first, an awful lot of people live in China. But here's my question:

FADE IN:

INT. CAMPUS BAR - NIGHT

MARK ZUCKERBERG is a sweet looking 19 year old whose lack of any physically intimidating attributes masks a very complicated and dangerous anger. He has trouble making eye contact and sometimes it's hard to tell if he's talking to you or to himself.

ERICA, also 19, is Mark's date. She has a girl-next-door face that makes her easy to fall for. At this point in the conversation she already knows that she'd rather not be there and her politeness is about to be tested.

The scene is stark and simple.

MARK

How do you distinguish yourself in a population of people who all got 1600 on their SAT's?

ERICA

I didn't know they take SAT's in China.

MARK

They don't. I wasn't talking about China anymore, I was talking about me.

ERICA

You got 1600?

MARK

Yes. I could sing in an a Capella group, but I can't sing.

*The Social Network* (2010) Screenplay by Aaron Sorkin (p.1)

LETHAL WEAPON

FADE IN:

1

CITY OF ANGELS

1

lies spread out beneath us in all its splendor, like a bargain basement Promised Land. \*

CAMERA SOARS, DIPS, WINDS its way SLOWLY DOWN, DOWN, bringing us IN OVER the city as we:

SUPER MAIN TITLES.

TITLES END, as we --

SPIRAL DOWN TOWARD a lush, high-rise apartment complex. The moon reflected in glass.

CAMERA CONTINUES TO MOVE IN THROUGH billowing curtains, INTO the inner sanctum of a penthouse apartment, and here, boys and girls, is where we lose our breath, because -- \*

spread-eagled on a sumptuous designer sofa lies the single most beautiful GIRL in the city. Blonde hair. A satin nightgown that positively glows. Sam Cooke MUSIC, crooning from five hundred dollar SPEAKERS.

PASTEL colors. Window walls. New wave furniture tortured into weird shapes. It looks like robots live here.

On the table next to the sleeping Venus lies an open bottle of pills... next to that, a mirror dusted with cocaine. She rouses herself to smear some powder on her gums. As she does, we see from her eyes that she is thoroughly, completely whacked out of her mind...

She stands, stumbles across the room, pausing to glance at a photograph on the wall: Two men. Soldiers. Young, rough-hewn, arms around each other.

The Girl throws open the glass doors... steps out onto a balcony, and there, beneath her, lies all of nighttime L.A. Panoramic splendor. Her hair flies, her expression rapt, as she stands against this sea of technology. She is beautiful.

On the balcony railing beside her stand three potted plants.

(CONTINUED)

*Lethal Weapon* (1987) Screenplay by Shane Black (p.1)

It is true one can achieve the latter with the use of action lines, but also push it to another level with formatting. For instance, let us take a closer look at the first page of the script of

*Nightcrawler*(2014) by screenwriter Dan Gilroy. The sluglines or scene heading one talked about earlier are gone, and will be so throughout the entire screenplay.

*Nightcrawler* is set in one night in Los Angeles and the non-existence of sluglines not only creates this forward momentum without any stops, but it also allows the scenes to fade into each other, mixing time and locations, as if one was wrapped in a feverish dream.

This change of formatting is not only efficient when it comes to establishing the tone and world of *Nightcrawler* but also its protagonist, Lou Bloom. Bloom is detached from the vibrant and exciting Los Angeles, this never-ending contrast echoes throughout the screenplay and furthermore accentuates the sociopathic behaviour of Bloom, for his actions, and behaviour clearly lack empathy as he often has manipulative and violent action toward others toward the screenplay.

Thus, being knowledgeable when it comes to script formatting is crucial, but after being familiarised with it, one can adapt the formatting of a screenplay to highlight one's voice as a screenwriter.

INFINITY OF STARS  
over barren ground ... if not for a BILLBOARD reading

***Lose Weight With The Lapband  
1-800-GET-THIN***

it could be the moon ... CAMERA pushing over a rim to show  
LOS ANGELES  
shimmering in night heat ... THUM of civilization ... a  
FREEWAY feeds into the city as a SEMI blasts by and CUT TO  
A COYOTE  
loping across a RESIDENTIAL STREET in the hills ... it stops  
under a street lamp ... darting away and CUT TO  
THE L.A. RIVER  
flows darkly before us ... CAMERA rising above a FLOOD  
CHANNEL to a fenced industrial area where  
LOUIS "LOU" BLOOM  
is a silhouette against the city glow ... using bolt cutters  
to rip down a square of chain-link fence ... muscling it into  
the back of a beat-up CAR as he hears something, turns to SEE  
HEADLIGHTS  
approaching in the distance ... LOU slamming the trunk as the  
lights  
SWEEP  
and we see him ... LOU'S mid-20s ... pure primal id ... if  
there's music it's in his head ... disconnected ... feral ...  
driven by dollar signs and a dream of some imagined Eden as  
A PICK-UP TRUCK  
stops and a MAN gets out ... framed in headlights ... wearing  
a utility belt with mace and handcuffs ...

MAN'S VOICE  
What are you doing out here?

LOU  
I'm lost.

*Nightcrawler* (2014) Screenplay by Dan Gilroy (p.1)

## PART II

### FILM AND TELEVISION: WHAT SETS THEM APART

*VOIR*, a Netflix's documentary series about the visual medium of film, focuses its fifth episode entitled *Film VS Television* on how television fiction has changed throughout time. The episode opens by stating that there used to be a clear contrast between Television and Film. That one went to 'the movies', but Television was at home. One would watch it alone or surrounded by one's family. Whereas at the movie theatre, one had to jump into the unknown; at home one has control, is able to change the channel on a whim. But as time went by, the lines between Television and Film began to blur, and merge with one another. But before one can dive and discuss what truly sets Film and Television apart one has to go back to the past — to the origin of Television.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Film reigned, but after World War Two, something changed. A new technology emerged, Television, and for the very first time, Film had competition. The power of Television came from its ability to give anyone who owned a tv set visual entertainment without having to leave one's home. Hollywood Studios started to sweat as if out of *The Doors* classic verse 'Is This The End?'.<sup>33</sup>

The fall of cinema itself seemed on the horizon. Except, Television was still in its genesis, and in essence, very much still radio with pictures. Television still had a long road to go, until they reached the quality of storytelling and technology film possessed. While Cinema already had its own language, fluent and confident in its own vocabulary and grammar, Television was still developing its alphabet. For now, film studios could breathe. They were still king... for now.

As far as fictional television narrative goes, at first, series were free as they were funded by advertisers and in exchange, shows had to build a relationship with the audience. This was possible by doing an episode every week. Fuelling that relationship so it would not fall apart.

Episodes were then structured around commercial breaks. Cliffhangers<sup>33</sup> used to keep the audience interested, making them want to stay on the couch and not change the channel during said commercial break.

But the real reason why Television succeeded was not because of cliffhangers, but connection. Due to the development of the relationship and connection to the main characters. This is what made the audience turn on their television every week. Because television sets were at home, the living room,

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<sup>33</sup> A story or a situation that is exciting because its ending or result is uncertain until it happens.



the heart of a house, where family comes together. In a way, these characters became part of their family as well.

Thus, once an audience was invested, the hook was in. But there was still a long road to go until Television truly became a threat to Film. For fifty years, this was the line that divided the crafts of Film and Television.

A film was a cinematic experience in a movie theatre, a 'high-art', where A-List talent would go. A television show, a weekly ritual at home, was still seen as the world of soap operas, episodic and formulaic drama. Where writers and actors would go when they could not make it in Hollywood, in order to make a living, and from where established, A-Listers and big names of the industry stayed away, until one day... when everything changed.

Until then, the characters that would enter the small screen were fellow ordinary people. People one would call neighbours. Characters that one would love to be best friends with in real life. But then, HBO introduces an Italian-American family to us. Its protagonist, Tony Soprano, to put it mildly, one would think twice before becoming best friends with, and which a family would be reticent to invite into one's home, willingly.

Tony Soprano, a flawed, corrupt, violent man. A criminal, a murderer and yet, human. Soprano, shows insecurities about being a boss within the New Jersey mob, in a business where showing weakness and vulnerability can lead to a death sentence, but in storytelling it is what an audience connects to. "From the time Tony Soprano waded into his pool to welcome his flock of wayward ducks, it had been clear that viewers were willing to be seduced."<sup>34</sup>

This would lead to the audience, even though knowing this is a man capable of vile actions, and yet one cared and connected to the human side of Tony. *The Sopranos* would then inspire a new generation of Television storytelling. No longer featuring black and white characters; hiding their dark complexions, but highlighting them instead. Bringing complex, complicated men as protagonists to the foreground of the small screen of Television.

Criminals and killers, once the villains, were now the protagonists. Highlighting both their flawed and human features. A portrait of men battling with the concept of identity, masculinity, and mental health, while struggling to express the depth of their emotions and hiding their inner flaws and demons.

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<sup>34</sup> Brett Martin, *Difficult Men, Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From The Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad* (The Penguin Press, New York, 2012), 20.

## The rise of HBO and the Anti-Hero

American Filmmaker David Fincher once said: "I'm always interested in movies that scar. The thing I love about *Jaws* is the fact that I've never gone swimming in the ocean again."<sup>35</sup> This is what makes filmmaking an art, for it confronts the things that terrify us or move us. Storytelling does not only shed light on the goodness of humanity and the world which surrounds it, but also in the darkness. What makes us shiver with dread at night, our fears. There is some seducing factor for wanting to get a glimpse at that darkness, at people that can do horrible things and yet who look like us.

That is why several shows starring anti-heroes were made after *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) and we keep consuming them as if eternally fascinated, such are the cases of Showtime's *Dexter* (2006- 2013) and which just resurfaced for its very last season entitled *Dexter: New Blood* (2022).

*Dexter* was a series which took the antihero principle quite at heart. A serial killer as the protagonist of the series. As well as Netflix's *House of Cards* (2013-2018), adopting a Macbethian plot, a tale about the rise and fall of a couple in the world of politics, Frank and Claire Underwood, with no limits or boundaries from the opening bell. Its pilot's opening and teaser with Frank Underwood killing a dog with no emotion, or empathy whatsoever, and yet, one kept watching.

When AMC's *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) debuted on the small screens, the New Golden Age of Television was already in full swing, one had already met the likes of Tony Soprano and Dexter Morgan. What made *Breaking Bad* stand out was that these other anti-heroes were already "bad" when we first made their acquaintance.

*Breaking Bad* sends us on a journey of transformation and change, as we meet Walter White, someone who appears to be protagonist of old. One that the audience would see themselves invite over to one's home and become friends with. A seemingly good man, wonderful father and teacher which would then transform into the most intimidating persona in the history of television.

Not only the look and storytelling were dramatically changed, but also the formal structure of the series. *The Sopranos* did not possess the traditional network number of twenty-three episodes, but instead thirteen, which influenced other networks to do the same. Thus, focusing on quality instead of quantity.

The series possessed not only brilliant storytelling, character development, but also a cinematic look and feel. There were no commercial breaks, writers were able to create story beats according to what was best storytelling wise and not due to financial issues. There was no outside input or criticism

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<sup>35</sup> David Fincher, *David Fincher: Interviews*, (University Press of Mississippi / Jackson), 64.

from advertisers about what the audience would react to, the violence or language. This was due to the nature of HBO's model. For it was subscriptions based and not advertisements.

The lack of financial constrictions allowed *The Sopranos* to flourish and match the quality of storytelling and the cinematic look and feel of Film. Now Hollywood Studios truly started to sweat. Film was now officially competing with Television.

"These kings are called showrunners and instead of sceptres, they wield index card, and dry-erase boards. Unlike film, where writers are hired and fired at a whim and rarely spend time on sets or get their pictures on the cover of *Variety*, the TV Writer has more control, more respect."<sup>36</sup>

Like HBO did in the past, provoked by the rapid success of Netflix (*House of Cards*, *Stranger Things*, *Squid Game*), other streaming channels appeared, such as Hulu (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Great*), Amazon (*Fleabag*, *Carnival Row*, *The Boys*), Apple (*Ted Lasso*, *The Morning Show*, *See*), Disney Plus (*The Mandalorian*, *Wandavision*, *Loki*) and HBO Max (*Hacks*, *Tokyo Vice*)

A-List directors and actors were no longer running the opposite way, but towards Television and its streaming revolution. Screenwriters too, saw it as a big opportunity to have full creative control, bigger pay checks, and contracts like they used to back in classic Hollywood. Television rapidly became the world for screenwriters. A world where the showrunner<sup>37</sup> has full control of the story – the opposite of what happens in feature films where the director reigns and writers have very little voice when it comes to the finished product.

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<sup>36</sup> Jamie Nash, *Save The Cat! Writes For Television*, (USA: *Save The Cat! Press*, Los Angeles CA), 16.

<sup>37</sup> The person who has overall creative authority and management responsibility for a television show: from the character arcs to the look of the show and even the soundtrack, It's all down to the word of the showrunner.

## WRITING FOR TELEVISION

“Movies are a fling, Television a relationship and like a relationship they need to be built to last.”<sup>38</sup>  
Now we are back to the primary question — the difference between Film and Television - but now when it comes to writing. Earlier, one mentioned commercial breaks, and even though nowadays one sees them less due to the rise of streaming content, the structure of an episode of television essentially stayed the same: so, one must mention it due to its impact on the structure of a television screenplay.

As one stated, when television shows began, they had several commercial breaks during an episode, but they were not set up randomly. Episodes were written so there were story beats every ten to fifteen minutes, so that when the commercial break came up it would be at the end of a cliff-hanger or twist, making the audience want to stay on the couch or chair during the break to find out what happens next to their favourite character. These beats happen to be called Act Breaks, and in television they usually go from four to five acts.<sup>39</sup>

### Time in Television

In a feature film one creates an arc in which the protagonist or hero of the story goes on a journey which leads him or her way from one state of unconsciousness to consciousness. The character struggles toward a goal and once it is established, and reached, his or her arc is complete and thus, the story comes to an end.

A television series is built to last several seasons. One mentioned that every season of a television show would have from twenty-four to twenty-six episodes. Currently, only broadcast channels such as ABC, CBS, NBC or FOX, possess the latter format. Streaming series, and premium cable networks such as HBO, Showtime and Stars seem to prefer up to ten episodes. Quality before quantity.

It is a common thought that in Television one has more time, and can focus on character and develop it throughout multiple seasons, without having to rush to complete the character arc over the course of two hours, and instead focusing on the complexity and evolution of the characters throughout a longer period of time.

While this is true in the course of the writing of a television series, one first has to get there, get a television screenplay greenlit<sup>40</sup>, the first script of the television show optioned<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Jamie Nash, *Save The Cat! Writes For Television*, (USA: *Save The Cat! Press*, Los Angeles, CA), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Although there are exceptions such as the television show *Lost*. Its pilot contains seven acts, perhaps due to its ensemble cast.

<sup>40</sup> Greenlit as in green-light, something to give permission for a project, to start or continue.

<sup>41</sup> Buy or sell the right to own or use something at some time in the future.

Let us go back for a bit to the nature of Television. One has control of a television set, a remote, and now with streaming even more so. With one click of a computer mouse, one can simply close the tab of a television show and choose another one to watch. This makes it even more imperative to make the story engaging from the get go.

The first episode of a television series is crucial, for it means if a viewer will continue to watch the show or not, and so is the opening frame of the episode which is called the "Pilot".

## **Pilot VS Spec**

A television Pilot<sup>42</sup> is an original first episode of a television series. Nowadays, showrunners ask writers' rooms candidates for original pilots. It can be used as sample to apply for television jobs and as an introduction to the series to potential buyers. It sets up the premise of the series, introduces the characters and the world. It also conveys how an episode of the series would look like. A great pilot script is the only firm requirement to break into the business of writing for television.

From the very beginning of a pilot, the first episode of a television show, the job of a screenwriter is to grab the audience. In the same way, the first sentence of a novel is paramount; it is the reason for the reader to continue or not reading the book, the same could be said about the beginning of a pilot. A teaser of a pilot, the "hook"<sup>43</sup> in television, is crucial for the success of the pilot and series. "Your pilot must deliver enough information to the audience to grasp the show's broader potential and hook them to make the longer commitment for the rest of the season(s)."<sup>44</sup>

## **Spec**

A "spec" script is an original episode of an existing show, written as a writing sample to show that one is able to write in a specific genre and within an established set of dramatic parameters.

A spec pilot, not only has to set up the entire series, but also how an episode would look like, while also set up all the characters, world and showcase the writer's voice.

As television shows are written by a writing staff, rather than by one person alone, as it is usual in a feature film, it is important to show that you can be a team player and write effectively in someone else's voice. Specs are not requested as often as they used to by aspiring writers.

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<sup>42</sup> A TV pilot is a standalone episode that a creator/writer writes in order to convey how a television show would look like to pitch it to network executives in Hollywood.

<sup>43</sup> A literary technique that "hooks" the reader so they continue to read the story.

<sup>44</sup> Jamie Nash, *Save The Cat! Writes For Television*, (Save The Cat! Press, 2021), 24.

Renowned NBC's Writing Fellowship "Writers on the Verge", distinguished for asking screenwriters two spec writing samples in order to submit to the competition, in 2021, changed their rules and guidelines, opting to request two original samples instead, showing how the industry currently prefers original screenplays to specs.

### **Pilot Format: Procedural or Serial**

In a procedural series each episode introduces a dramatic dilemma and problem that the characters will have to resolve by the end of the episode, a case of the week, while ongoing arcs and themes, take a backseat. Common procedurals are police, lawyer, and medical dramas such as *Law & Order*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *NCIS*, and *CSI*.

A serial or serialised show differs when it comes to wider storylines and character arcs that develop over the course of the series. These television shows are often the choice in streaming platforms and premium cable. Such are the cases of *Lost*, *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, *Stranger Things*, *Mad Men*, *The Sopranos*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, etc.

### **Serial and Procedural Hybrids**

There are television shows which alternate between a case-of-the-week episode and a "mythology" episode that advances a long-term narrative arc. One of the original television mythology shows is *The X-Files* (1993-2018), since it alternated between case of the week or monster of the week, with a wider arc of a possible alien invasion, Fox Mulder's and Dana Scully's past, while confronting other antagonists such as "The Smoking Man". A hybrid show can also combine a case and mythology in a single episode such is the case of NBC's *The Blacklist* and *Hannibal*, as well as Paramount Plus' *Evil* and Showtime's *Dexter*.

### **Limited Series or Mini-Series**

Limited Series happen to possess similarities to Serial series. An overarching plot, focused on character development and theme, similar to a feature film, but shorter. It normally runs for only one season and notable for starring Hollywood A-List Actors. Although, when it achieves great success, other seasons might follow. Such are the cases of HBO's *Big Little Lies* (2017-2019), *Watchmen* (2019), *Mare of Easttown* (2021), *Sharp Objects* (2018), and Netflix's *The Queen's Gambit* (2020), *Godless* (2017) and *Unbelievable* (2019).

## **Television Script Formatting**

The formatting of a TV screenplay is quite similar to a feature. Scene headings, action, description, dialogue, transitions, etc. are mostly the same, but there are a few key differences one must be aware of.

The most important difference is the writer normally labels each act in a television script. It is not mandatory, and pilots written for pay-cable networks like HBO and streaming platforms which often possessed a serialised format do not use act markers or page breaks.

These pilot scripts are written pretty much just like a feature. One should add that including act breaks could help while applying to a writer's room as a staff writer, it tells the show-runner that the writer knows how to structure a television episode.

A Television script differs from a Feature screenplay in the sense that each act is preceded by a page break. Another aspect is time. One page equals more and less to one minute in both formats. Thus, a script for a one-hour drama should max out around sixty pages. The current sweet spot for one-hour pilot scripts seems to be in the range of fifty-four to fifty-eight pages. But then again, story always comes first.

## ANALYSIS OF THE PILOT OF *BREAKING BAD*

### The Teaser

A teaser is the television version of “a hook” in a novel. Like the first sentence of a novel is paramount, the reason why a reader keeps reading or not, a teaser in an episode is crucial. Unlike in a feature in which you have time and up to twenty pages to set up everything, and the audience already paid for the ticket, in television a writer has got to introduce the protagonist and the conflict right off the bat. If she or he fails to do so, the viewer can easily change the channel, or the website tab and switch to another series in a matter of seconds. There is no shortage of choice when it comes to entertainment nowadays.

The pilot of *Breaking Bad* has only three pages, it opens with still images of succulents and rocks; its setting, a New Mexico desert. A pair of trousers glide to the ground in slow-motion. What follows next is a fast-paced score and action; an RV in full-speed; inside, a man with a gas mask on, wearing only white jockey underpants, breathing fast, scared out of his mind, on survival mode. Next to him, a young man is strapped to the passenger sit, too wearing a gas mask, his face is beaten to a pulp. *Is he dead? And who is the driver? What is he running from?*



Screenshot from *Breaking Bad* 'Pilot'

With just a couple of images, the writer is already making us ask several questions, demanding our attention. Immediately, the RV crashes into a deep gully, the engine ‘dies’, and the driver gets out of the vehicle, sweating profusely and holding a revolver. He records himself, says goodbye to his family, by doing so he tells us who he is. Then, in the background, the sounds of sirens. The police are on their way. The ending, near.

With no way out, the stranger records a video message to his family. Grabs a gun. Points the gun at us and thus, he makes the audience captive. He has our attention now, and we have no choice but to keep watching. We are now invested and in for the ride.



UNDERPANTS MAN

My name is Walter Hartwell White.  
I live at 308 Belmont Avenue,  
Ontario, California 91764. I am of  
sound mind. To all law enforcement  
entities, this is not an admission  
of guilt. I'm speaking now to my  
family.

(swallows hard)

Skyler... you are... the love of my  
life. I hope you know that.  
Walter Junior. You're my big man.  
I should have told you things, both  
of you. I should have said things.  
But I love you both so much. And  
our unborn child. And I just want  
you to know that these... things  
you're going to learn about me in  
the coming days. These things.  
I just want you to know that...  
no matter what it may look like...  
I had all three of you in my heart.

*Breaking Bad* 'Pilot' (p.3)

Following the teaser, the reader and audience knows the name of the protagonist: Walter White. But who is he? Act One of *Breaking Bad* shows us who Walter White is and what a normal day in his life looks like. After the writer teases the struggle and conflict that the pilot will tackle, the episode really begins as we go back to three weeks earlier, about to learn who White is and how he ended up in a New Mexico desert. (Formatting wise, when Act One starts one should write a new heading with Act one — from page four to seventeen.

Act One begins with Walt waking up, having breakfast with his family. Skyler, his wife and his son, Walter Jr., who suffers from a disability, cerebral palsy, which causes difficulties in speech and impaired motor control. Then, we discover White is a former member of a Nobel winning chemistry team, brilliant mind, trapped in a monotonous life.

We follow Walter as he heads to work. White teaches Chemistry at High School. While he gives a lecture, one realises that his students do not respect him. They chatter while he teaches, completely disinterested in what he has to say, even when he delivers a passionate and fascinating monologue on the nature of Chemistry — the subject of change.



Change happens to be one of the themes of the television show. Therefore, ten pages in, Gilligan not only shows us the nature of the protagonist but states the dramatic theme of his television show. Will this be a positive or negative change and transformation? So far, in the pilot, it seems to be positive due to the nature of Walter White as a character. But how does he end up with a gun in his hand and saying goodbye to his family? Gilligan gives us a hint 'Growth, Decay'. The cycle of life itself. Perhaps White will grow in confidence, but will it lead to his fall?

WALT  
Chemicals. No. Change. Chemistry  
is the study of change.  
(a beat)  
Think about it. Electrons change  
their orbits, molecules change  
their bonds. Elements combine and  
change into compounds. That's all  
of life, right? The constant...  
(shrug)  
The cycle. Solution, dissolution,  
over and over.

Walt seems to be talking mostly to himself. A pep talk.

WALT  
Growth, decay. Transformation.  
It's fascinating, really.

*Breaking Bad 'Pilot' (p.3)*

We are back to Walter White's character: White is bullied by both his family and students, then at his other job, at Car Wash, cleaning cars on his knees while his boss screams at him, Chad the bully reappears and takes a photo of him, once again Walt, humiliated. He does not seem to have the ability to stand up to those who mock and bully him, lacking self-respect.

Walt arrives home, emotionally a wreck, to find a surprise birthday party. He learns his wife Skyler is pregnant. Skyler's sister Marie and her husband Hank, a DEA agent, congratulate him. Even though it is Walt's birthday, Hank decides to be the centre of attention, showing off his gun, offering to Walt who looks awkward holding it, Hank pokes fun at him, and then offers him a toast to "the smartest guy he knows."

Hank then turns on the television, so everyone can watch an interview he gave after his team made a big meth lab sting. Walt is impressed as the D.E.A finds thousands of dollars in dirty cash, and thus we arrive to the Inciting Incident in page thirteen. The revelation. Perhaps an opportunity? Then, in the next day, Walt is back at work when h3 collapses at the Car Wash. The twist in page seventeen, right before we enter Act Two.

## Act Two



Act Two begins with Walter White at the doctor. Takes a full body scan. The verdict: Walter White has lung cancer. Inoperable. Will only probably make it a couple of years... with chemo. Walter is stunned. Who will support his family when that happens? What can he do? He decides not to tell Skyler.

Back at the car wash, his boss bullies him once again, but this time Walter loses it, curses at him. Later, at home, Walter throws a match at the pool, numb, exhausted. Then, has an idea, calls Hanks about the ride along he mentioned to him.

Walt rides along with Hank as they take down the meth lab. White is fascinated by the lab equipment. He notices Jesse Pinkman, a former Chemistry student of his, fleeing the scene. Later, Walt heads to Pinkman's home and essentially blackmails him, partner up to cook meth, or he turns him in to the DEA. Once a threat, cancer, turns now into an opportunity, giving his family a way to survive and carry on living once he is gone. And this is when we arrive to the Midpoint of the episode in page thirty, and thus begins Act Three.

## Act Three

Walter White shops for cooking tools and utensils at school. Walt sets the standards with Jesse, how this partnership is going to work. We realise they have different perspectives and values when it comes to chemistry. meth. who instead claims cooking is an art, not chemistry.

Where are they going to cook? The RV of course! 'Sixty and breaking bad?' asks Jesse, to which Walt replies: 'I am awake.' Later, Walt Jr. is fitting pants with Walt and Skyler. Bullies make fun of Walt Jr. His father, Walter White loses it, takes on the bullies, attacks their 'king-pin', they freak out, call him a psycho, and flee the scene.

With the main plot now well underway, there is time for character exposition and subplots. The relationship between Walt and Jesse, volatile, Walt now protects his family like never before. The tone changes, it is more uplifting now, which is interesting since Act Three usually is the "All is Lost" section.

Therefore, Act Three is the silence before the storm, as Act Four will rise in momentum, leading to a powerful climax.

### **Act Four**

Jesse films Walt while he cooks, has a laugh, makes fun of him, but then the meth turns up to be... a masterpiece. Jesse tries to sell the amazing meth to Crazy-8, Emilio's cousin. They think Jesse snitched. Emilio "enters the scene". He made bail, surprise! They ask where Jesse got the meth from, no way he cooked it, it is too good.

Walt is at the RV when Crazy-8 and company arrive. Emilio recognises Walt from his encounter with DEA. In his mind, Walter White equals DEA and DEA well, equals prison. No way he is going back. Guns are pulled. Jesse is tied up and Walt is forced to cook. In order to survive, White uses red phosphorus to cause a chemical reaction that all the antagonists out. He frees Jesse.

A fire starts as they drive off and we are back to the teaser. Walt stands holding a gun. Sirens everywhere. Desperate, he considers suicide as the echo of the sirens gets closer and... the fire brigade drives past him. Jesse comes out asks what happened. Walt replies 'Red phosphorus.'

### **Act Five**

Even though Gilligan did not add another act, the last pages of Act Four, feel like Act Five. Walter White returning home, laundering his meth money; returning home from the new world to the old world, with his reward and changed, no longer the same Walter. This is why Skyler asks him:"

Walt? Is that you?" while they make love, in contrast with the beginning of the pilot, and thus, the first step of Walter White's change begins.

### PART III

#### FINDING THE RUNAWAYS

There is a saying in Hollywood that every story has been done before; that nowadays it is impossible to create an original story, thus, all the stories the audience watches on screen are variations of what has been written before.

So why do some films and television shows *feel* different? A breath of fresh air? That could be explained with the terms of antithesis, thesis and synthesis, going back to Hegel's dialectics. A story with familiar aspects that the audience has seen before (thesis), but with a new component, (antithesis), a different point of view which then leads to the synthesis – a story that has been done before and yet feels fresh.

When I was thinking of what story I could possibly write that has not been written before and what my voice as a writer is, I went back to the movies and television shows that I am passionate about and inspire me. For some reason I am drawn to genre stories: noir/ gangster, horror, sci-fi.

They can be set in the present, past or future, offering a myriad of landscapes and to comment on the modern times behind a mask of fiction. In genre movies and television shows female characters also become part of the center of the narrative, instead of being placed in the background.

I have always been fond of the *Noir* and Gangster genre. Movies like *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), *Road to Perdition* (2002), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Untouchables* (1987). While watching them, I realised I did not see myself in the female characters, they did not feel like three-dimensional characters to me. Either as lovers that needed to be saved, damsels in distress, or vilified as *femme-fatales*.



*Double Indemnity* (1945)



*The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1947)

"Outlaw women are fascinating — not always for their behavior, but because historically women are seen as naturally disruptive and their status is an illegal one from birth if it not under the rule of

men.”<sup>45</sup> The latter quote by Toni Morrison always stroke a chord with me, for in our world women often are vilified, our nature seen as criminal since our birth.

So, I had an idea, a eureka moment. “Your premise is the inspiration. It’s the ‘lightbulb’ moment when you say, ‘Now that would make a terrific story, and that excitement gives you the perseverance to go through months, even years, of hard writing.’”<sup>46</sup>

A story within the Noir world, about a group of teenager girls who even though are victims, are seen as criminals, and have no other choice to become what they are accused of, in order to survive amidst the world of mafia in mid-1920s New York City.

There is a phrase that is quoted all the time in the world of writing ‘Write what you know’.

I have always felt it was not about writing about your job or some activity the writer did before, but something one experienced first-hand, emotionally. All my life, I have felt like an outsider, so that was my way into *The Runaways*, and its core and soul.

### **To Outline or Not to Outline?**

In 2016, genre authors Stephen King and George R.R. Martin walked into an auditorium in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to talk about the craft of writing, and by proxy their novels.

George R.R Martin stated that in his view there are two kinds of writers: architects and gardeners. According to Martin, architects plan everything ahead of time while Gardeners dig a hole, drop in a seed and water it (...) they don’t know how many branches it is going to have, they find out as it grows. Martin and King both claimed to be gardeners, and I feel the same way. When I decide to begin writing the first page of a screenplay, I usually have the “image” of the first scene in my head.

It is all I have going into it. That, and a somewhat brief concept of the premise. But if one was to google “how to write a screenplay” most websites, as well as books are likely to mention the concept of “Outlining” and how essential it is for a writer to work on one before starting to write a screenplay or in order to become a ‘successful screenwriter in Hollywood and make a million bucks.’

Truthfully, I have tried this process several times through the years, but in the end, I always got stuck and “writer blocked”. What I found that works for me is to write and edit scenes back and forth. Every day, I start on page one, read it, and if something does not flow, I edit, over and over again. I have a

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<sup>45</sup> Toni Morrison, *Sula* (Vintage Books, A Division of Random Books: New York), 11.

<sup>46</sup> John Yorke, *The Anatomy of Story* (Faber & Faber), 28.

new idea about a scene or dialogue that would work better, I edit. I find a typo, I edit. Some might say 'You have to keep writing, only go back once you have finished the script.'

Whether one writes an outline, treatment, or character biography, no matter the process, writing is just hard. That is the nature of it. One has to dig, and dig... and dig again, until the story works as a whole. Writing is after all re-writing, and it is in fact indeed like climbing a mountain, plus blindfolded, because most of the time one feels like one is walking in circles and will never reach the summit, but when one does, there is no better feeling in the world.

In essence, I believe a writer does not need to know every single detail about what is going to happen, one can just flow, follow the characters, and in time, one will find the story; only when one finishes a script can one know what one is looking at, and what needs to be worked on.

King and Martin happen to have the same process and yet, the first is considered one of the fastest writers to finish a novel, in a few months, and the latter the slowest, sometimes taking decades to do so. Therefore, in the end, there are no right or wrong ways to write, nor an absolute formula that fits all.

No writer is the same, but all writers, no matter the process, stare at the same thing -- a blank canvas and feel the same emotion -- the fear of failing or not being able to finish the script. Thus, whatever the process, outlining or not outlining, what matters is to follow the process that will help the writer to finish that first draft.

In his book *The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Syd Field opens the Chapter *Beginning and Endings* with the following question: 'What's the best way to open a screenplay?' That is the question. Field said the following "There are, of course, a myriad of different ways to begin your screenplay."<sup>47</sup> A novel starts with a sentence, that sentence has to pull the reader in. The first image of a screenplay is as crucial as the first sentence of a novel. Field asks another question What do you see?"

Film is a visual medium. For cinema and television are a visual media. I like to call it painting images with words. '*Show Don't Tell*'.

It took me one year to write *The Runaways*, because, at first, I thought it was a feature film.

I thought it would have a structure similar to Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America*, but it was not until I reached page 50 that I noticed I was still in the first act of the story, and therefore, I realised the script was not a feature, but a television show instead, and therein lied the rub, because I had never written a television pilot before.

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<sup>47</sup> Syd Field, *The Foundations of Screenwriting* (Delta), 107.

After several months of writing, I knew I had to go back to the beginning, and learn about writing television pilots, and re-format the entire screenplay, so it fit the format of television writing. I knew I had to learn how to use a new set of tools in order to write the story. And back to the toolbox I went.

The first aspect I had to focus on was time. With features, one has ninety to a hundred twenty pages to work with, with one-hour television one has fifty to sixty 50-60, so one has to be more efficient, because there is less time and pages to set up the characters and story, and television show. One has to define a whole series in one episode. The pilot.

Like one stated earlier with the hero's journey, the world of a story needs to come from who the protagonist is, his or her predicament. With *The Runaways* I wanted to make it clear that these were innocent young girls, orphans, trapped in this Orphanage; while the main antagonist, a killer and criminal, was free to amble the streets of New York City. In my mind, Sam and Hannah were living in this dark, Tim Burton-esque orphanage — traits of gothic architecture, narrow halls, to amplify the feeling of this place as a prison to them. Falco, the one who should be in prison and yet, he is enjoying the lights of New York City, while the girls are surrounded by darkness. Therefore, stating from the get go, this will not be another noir story, focused on the male characters but in fact it will be about these young girls.



## WRITING THE RUNAWAYS

### Teaser

Video games can be very influencing when it comes to storytelling. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* inspired *The Runaways* immensely. I saw the introduction of the girls like the first chapter of *A Thief's End*, almost like the reader was a player, trying to understand how the controls work. What button to click when to jump, run, fight, these instances allow not only to show how to move a character, but show the world around them, while getting to know the protagonist and bond with them.



Screenshots from *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* (2016)

By spending time with the girls in the beginning, climbing up to the roof of the orphanage the reader could then spend some time with the girls before seeing them being thrown into the inciting incident right away; to explore the setting of the Orphanage, follow Sam and Hannah through its narrow halls at night, shining light in the darkness, the innocence of breaking the rules, helping each other along like a family.

Sam being afraid of heights, but Hannah believing she can do it, so she keeps going. As they go up, their mouths agape, their eyes shimmering in awe of what they can see but cannot touch, the skyline of New York city... Lush skyscrapers... The Roaring Twenties. A boom of Artistic Expression just waiting for them.

*She draws the picture closer to her, as if to become part of the lights themselves.*

*Times Square takes over the frame. Its lights begin to shimmer as we...*

**DISSOLVE TO:**

*The Runaways, p. 9*

Therefore, with only a couple of scenes, the reader will get know the kind of world the girls live in, which happens to be the complete opposite of Falco's World. While Falco can wander about the city which never sleeps with complete freedom, the girls have no freedom whatsoever. But Falco's World, like

all dreams in one's head, the city does seem like the perfect world to the girls, until of course, they are confronted with the real world.

### **Chekhov's Gun**

Before moving to Act One, it feels important to state the technique that is called "Chekhov's Gun". The latter was named after Anton Chekhov, who stated the following: "If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it is not going to be fired, it should not be hanging there."<sup>48</sup>

The idea behind Chekhov's Gun is the following, if a screenwriter shows and highlights an object, it means it is important. It is not appearing for no reason. 'Chekhov's Gun' is a kind of foreshadowing. If an object is given a special attention in a scene, it means it is important. So, if an object shows capitalised it is a special prop. It is not appearing for no reason. A 'Chekhov's Gun' is a kind of foreshadowing.

By using it, the writer gives special attention to the object, meaning it will appear again in the story or have an important function later on. In *The Runaways*, this object happens to be Sam's baseball bat, which we see for the first time capitalised since it is an essential element of the story. She looks under the bed to get the rope to get to the roof and we see the baseball bat, which will reappear later in the story and have a great impact in the story.

### **Act One - World-Building and Character**

Act One is when we get to know the characters and the world deeper. The conflicts of the story and how the world really functions and what needs fixing. *The Runaways* has essentially, three storylines: A (The girls), B (Gallagher) and C (Falco). Although we focus more in A and B, we will be cutting to and fro, between the ordinary world and the special world.

The audience dives deeper, getting to know the world, and by proxy, the characters. One saw earlier, that a pilot is a mere appetiser. A glance to what the show is and could be. Showing the settings of where the characters are going to be throughout the show. These locations can be mirrors of the characters themselves. Therefore, one has to carefully pick them.

The teaser now ends and we get to page ten when Act One starts. Sam and Hannah as they head to bed and fall asleep. Hannah opens her nightstand drawer, picks up a photograph of Times Square, still dreaming about the city.

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<sup>48</sup> S. Shchukin, *Memoirs*, 1911.

In order to make their world feel as honest, believable and close to the reality of New York in the mid-1920s as possible, and the only way to do that is to go deep in research. Research the architecture, which buildings existed then. It was paramount that every detail, word, about the city was true. These are the things I really appreciate in a book, film or television show and I really wanted to nail it. That would mean that every building and block I mention in the screenplay had to be right.

"Remember that the truth is in the details. No matter how you see the world or what style it imposes on your work as an artist, the truth is in the details."<sup>49</sup>

### **Times Square**

Showing Hannah staring at the picture of Times Square, plants another layer into the reader's mind of Hannah wanting to be immersed in the lights of the city. Maybe because living trapped in an Orphanage is not a child's dream, but maybe because of something else. This establishes Hannah's desire, while also giving an opportunity to create a transition — the dissolve.

**INT./EXT. CAB - TIMES SQUARE - CONTINUOUS**

**A YOUNG BOY sits on his MOTHER'S lap.**

**His hands against the window. His eyes on the theaters' extravagant, flamboyant SIGNS and MOVIE POSTERS.**

**The mother steps out of the cab, cradling her child in her arms as she takes in all the rush and excitement.**

**Another vehicle whizzes past.**

*The Runaways, p. 12*

The decision to go for this kind of transition was not by mere chance. The dissolve transition is a classic one. In the time of black and white film, the dissolve was primarily used to convey the passage of time. Hannah starting at the black and white picture, from the Orphanage at Staten Island, to color in Times Square. It works as a passage of time transition, but also from one world to another. From the darkness of the orphanage to the lights of the metropolis, while adding a noir texture to it, a Throwback to classic Hollywood.

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen King, *Duma Key* (Scribner, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2008), 77.

At the time, it felt like the perfect transition. One dissolves from Hannah's world to Times Square. From darkness to the extravagant lights of Times Square. While she's trapped inside the Orphanage, a young boy watches the lights of the Square from inside a cab.



Edwin Levick/Hulton Archive/GettyImages

(<https://alltatsinteresting.com/new-york-1920s>)



Unknown Source

<https://www.jthomas0779/new-york-city->

#### **INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - LOWER MANHATTAN - NIGHT**

Detective Gallagher drives through the rush and buzz of Broadway.

He whizzes past Madison Square Garden, oblivious to it all.

The bright lights of Times Square fade in the background and are replaced by the skyscrapers of Lower Manhattan.

#### **THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING.**

He doesn't stare at it once, nor at the lush buildings which surround it. He keeps his gaze forward, focused on what lies beyond...

#### **BROOKLYN BRIDGE.**

He hesitates, changing his mind. Makes a U-turn.

*The Runaways*, p. 12

Then, a car passes by us and we find a familiar figure — revealing Detective Gallagher — a stark contrast to the boy we saw moments ago. In my mind, I wanted the boy to be a personification of Gallagher as a young boy: innocent, unaware of the illusion of the lights; a distraction from the reality of the city which we will soon get to know through Gallagher's eyes.

The purpose of the following scenes is not only to show the iconic buildings of mid-1920s New York, but also make a portrait of Gallagher's world, and his world is not under the luxurious lights and high-rises but in the periphery of the city, where the darker side is hidden. But before Gallagher takes us there, it was imperative that I showed some of the light, and as King stated, be as detailed as possible

about the world. That meant doing research about the iconic buildings of 1920s New York City and its streets.

Gallagher driving from Times Square to Hell's Kitchen, meaning one had to make sure this journey would be as close to reality as possible. The last thing I wanted is for someone from or who lives in New York, read this television pilot, point at it and state this is an unrealistic depiction of their city. So, one has to put in the work, for world building is incredibly important for the reader and audience to believe in the story.

Back to Gallagher and his world. From Times Square, Gallagher shows us Broadway and Midtown Manhattan, then to Madison Square Garden also known as "The Garden" famous not only for its sports events such as boxing.

It also felt important to mention and highlight a high-rise, but the Empire State Building or the Twin Towers did not exist then. The Woolworth Building seemed a great choice, completed in 1913, it was one of the first iconic skyscrapers in New York City, deemed at the time as today's Empire State Building.



Broadway/ Midtown Manhattan  
(Fay Lincoln Photograph



The Woolworth Building  
(<https://www.archdaily.com/4771-classics-woolworth-building-cass>



Madison Square Garden  
(<https://www.msg.com/classicsmadison-Sq>

### **Brooklyn Bridge**

The Brooklyn Bridge is not only one of the most iconic bridges in New York City, but also one of the symbols of the gangster genre in cinema. For instance, starring in the classic shot in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time in America*.



Brooklyn Bridge



Screenshot from *Once Upon A Time in America* (1984)

<https://thecharnelhouse.org>.

**INT./EXT. CAR (MOVING) - STREETS**

Gallagher cruises by a neighborhood. A hive of activity.

Restaurants flooded with customers. MEN gamble, sharing cigars and booze right in the open.

**SUPER: Little Italy**

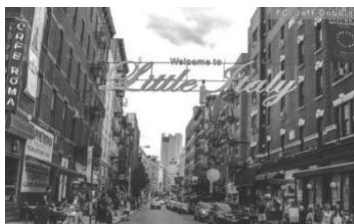
Couples smooch. Kids play. Laughter. Music. The Italian language echoing on every corner.

Gallagher yanks the gear to a stop. Gazes at a building off sight.

*The Runaways*, p.13

**Little Italy**

Little Italy comes next — the heart of the Italian community. The following scene needed to establish the American-Italian community, unified, close. It also needed to possess this care-free feeling to it. The streets of Little Italy, as a place where everyone would come together, sit in front of a café and store to socialise with no fear, as if out of a scene from HBO's *The Sopranos*.



Little Italy



Little Italy



Screenshot from *The Sopranos*

<https://www.boweryboyshistory.com> <https://i.imgur.com/WaF19b9.jpg>

Still in Little Italy, Gallagher heads and enters a church, listens as children sing in a chorus, a sense of purity. At least, a house of God untainted by the corruption of the outside world. Or so it seems, as we see a statue of Pietà purchased and offered to the church with Falco's blood money. A holy place by nature now tainted, corrupted by Falco's blood money.

**INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS**

Gallagher enters. The church is empty, except for a CHOIR OF CHILDREN who sing in unison at the altar.

A PRIEST stands opposite to the choir, conducting their voices into a crescendo. Then, into a diminuendo - allowing a lasting echo of the melody hanging in the air.

Gallagher ambles towards the music, as if guided by the children's voices. He takes it in until the melody fades.

The priest bids farewell to the young choir. The children pass by Gallagher as they leave. The priest follows.

Gallagher walks towards a stunning golden replica of Michelangelo's Pietà at the altar.

On its pedestal, a golden plaque reads:

"A gift for your service and contribution to both the parish and our community. From your friend, Johnny Falco."

*The Runaways, p.14*

One mentioned earlier when it comes to formatting, how transitions are important in screenwriting and how underrated they are. I could have finished the scene with Gallagher alone, but I thought doing a transition from Gallagher with his head low helpless, to that of a man, too with his head low, scared for his life, would not only be a great visual transition but also allude to how Gallagher and the man in a way are both victims of Falco's doings. This also seemed a good opportunity to add another layer to Gallagher's vulnerability. Thus, the choice to end the scene with Gallagher sitting alone on a pew, helpless, a moment of surrender and doubt.

He turns around and sits in a pew with his head low, wrapped in his own thoughts, alone.

MATCH CUT TO:

A MAN with his head low, whimpering.

Reveal: his HANDS and BARE FEET tied to a METAL POLE which stands at the very center of a...

FALCO (CONT'D)  
Often times, as the warmth of the sun hit my face, I'd fall asleep and wake up terrified that the waves had swallowed him away. Of course they hadn't, and of course he was still out there batting his arms and legs.

A pause for reflection.

FALCO (CONT'D)  
I found that in many ways my father and I were really alike, almost as if we were molded out of one another. But when it comes to our relationship with the sea, we couldn't be more apart.  
(a beat)  
(MORE)

*The Runaways*, p. 14

So, now we have established the main characters and the world, and yet I felt I should at least have one more scene with Falco. Until now, we only had one scene, his character introduction in the teaser. At least one more scene starring Falco was needed. Feeling the need to develop Falco's character deeper, not only his flaws but also his empathy.

I did not want him to be another kingpin trope. Falco is a strategist, he does not make a single move without thinking about its pros and cons like a chess player. I took inspiration in the character of Al Capone, as he rarely killed criminals in person, avoiding capture for years.

From the horrible death of the two men, we then cut to Gallagher once again. We find him in Hell's Kitchen, his home, far away from the luxurious lights back at Times Square. Then, we are back to Gallagher who arrives at his home. Hell's Kitchen was known as one of the toughest neighbourhoods in New York City.



FALCO (CONT'D)

When I was a boy, I spent most of my summer in Dei Turchi's beach. While my mother read her novels, my father would swim. It was a thing of beauty... It seemed as if he belonged there in the sea, instead of firm land. The way he moved, how he swung his arms, hips, body...

The man now listens enraptured by the tone of Falco's voice.

From the very first cough to the sudden CHOKING, and ultimately Bobby's EYES JERKING OPEN as his insides burn, giving way to a gut-wrenching SCREAM.

*The Runaways*, p. 14

### **Hell's Kitchen**

After the killings and riots in 1881, the Hell's Kitchen name stuck. Although there were a lot of German, Italian and Jewish communities within the neighbourhood with the Potato Famine in Ireland during the mid-1850s a lot of Irish folk immigrated and soon took "control" of Hell's Kitchen. In terms of employment in Hell's Kitchen, it was not aimed for the faint of heart either.

Employment was found on tanneries, building railroad lines and the shipping docks. The latter was surveilled by organised gangs. If one complained, floating on the Hudson River was always an option. This would escalate towards the Great Depression, immortalised in the classic *On The Waterfront* by American director Elia Kazan.

**INT./EXT. GALLAGHER'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT**

DRUNKARDS scream at each other with their hands up, ready to fistfight. HOMELESS PEOPLE lie on the sidewalk shaking, frozen to the bone. KIDS smash the windows of a house nearby and cackle as they run away.

SUPER:

**Hell's Kitchen**  
*The Runaways*, p.18

I imagined Gallagher's home as a place where blue collar folk lived, where immigrants and outsiders tried to survive and struggled to pay the rent. Where crime and drugs corrupted the lives of a people that were already being exploited. In my mind, this was the world where Gallagher grew up in,

and where his anger toward Falco comes from. Therefore, Hell's Kitchen seemed like a great setting for Gallagher's home

So once again, we are back with Gallagher and he shows us his home. Hell's Kitchen streets filled with homeless. As he exits his car, he sees Falco's people, selling drugs right in the open and Gallagher can no longer hold in his rage. To at least get a small win against Falco. Get some kind of justice in the streets when the courts are corrupted. In a way, to get a small win against Falco and use his rage in someone.

Action is not just a form of making scenes entertaining, but also allow to show without dialogue, a character's nature. Does the character flee or fight? Fighting is also an expression of one's personality, and one's style of fighting can tell much about a character's strengths and weaknesses. Through fighting, and how one reacts to it, someone's true nature is shown. I did not want the action scenes to be "shootouts", but close, personal, hand to hand combat. Not with guns, but fists and knives, violent and raw, something out of the television show *Peaky Blinders*.

Because the influences of *The Runaways* are from *film noir*, I wanted to make sure the action scenes had that style. Such as silhouettes on walls. Gallagher, does not give up, no matter how much punishment he takes. He either slugs his way through a brawl or he goes out on his shield even when trapped against a brick wall. The latter happens. As he tries to get any kind of justice, Gallagher can get in a corrupted world, J.J Gittes-like, as if out of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, but in return he gets beaten down, knocked out, and passes out.



*Chinatown* (1974)

The same fist but now in form of a hook cracks his jaw, his body goes limp as multiple drops of blood stain the ivory snow.

*The Runaways*, p. 20

## Act Two

Act Two opens like it closed, with snow, except now it is not tainted with blood, but the color of ivory — hinting innocence and purity of the setting, but is it? Then, the reveal we are back at the Orphanage. Not inside its narrow walls, but outside, in the Courtyard. Where the girls could witness a little bit of freedom, or so it appears.

They play in the courtyard, throwing snowballs at one another, while Sam and Hannah play baseball. Sam hits the ball with her baseball bat which one introduced in the opening of the pilot, smashing the ball through a window. This moment will be the catalyst to the inciting incident like a snowball rolling down and giving way to more trouble — cause and effect. From the courtyard, we smash cut to an office in the middle of a sentence, jumping straight to the next scene.

### INT. ORPHANAGE - COURTYARD - MORNING

Snow covers the courtyard, glistening in the morning sun.

Peggy and Jean throw snowballs at each other while Hannah and Sam play ball.

*The Runaways, p. 20*

Hannah pitches the ball with all her might. We follow the ball's course as it travels through the yard.

SHE HITS IT!

The ball gains great altitude and gradually begins to lose ground and it CRASHES--

Through a WINDOW. But, not just any window...

HANNAH

Oh, Sam. You're in tr-

SMASH CUT TO:

*The Runaways, p.21*

## **'Enter Late, Leave Early'**

Alfred Hitchcock once stated "What is drama, after all, but life with the dull parts cut out".<sup>50</sup> If the latter is true in all drama, even more so in the mediums of Film and Television.

As one aforementioned, in television, one does not have the luxury of time. A screenwriter has to choose one's words carefully, be economic about them. There is a famous screenwriting mantra 'Enter Late, Leave Early.'

Author and screenwriter William Goldman, who penned American classics like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *All The President Men* and *Princess Bride* said the following quote which seemed to echo Hitchcock's words. " You always attack a movie scene as late as you possibly can. You always come into the scene at the last possible moment." <sup>51</sup>

In essence 'Enter Late, Leave Early' technique means to cut the dull bits of the scene and keep the action and dialogue which are paramount, driving the story forward efficiently. Goldman, added this is the reason why a scene in a movie where a teacher always starts with the teacher saying "Well, class..." because one does not need to watch the entire lecture, only the point the teacher is making to His or her students; to be efficient as one can, with less words as possible.

The beginning of the upcoming scene was to play with the word "Trouble" (which happens to be the title of the episode) by using the sound transition tool called "Pre-Lap" by using the sound of the earlier scene.

**INT. ORPHANAGE - STUDY - DAY**

A PORTRAIT OF A MAN fills the frame. His features stern, his chin high, his garment wealthy.

Its plaque reads: SOLOMON HYDE, patron of Staten Island's Orphanage for Girls.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Trouble.

*The Runaways*, p. 21

A woman's voice (which we will realise is the Headmistress seconds later) saying the word while we stay on Hyde's portrait. Playing and alluding, through subtext, with the fact that it is not Sam that is the trouble, but in fact the Patron. We are introduced to a portrait of a man who gives one the frights, Solomon Hyde, the Orphanage's Patron.

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<sup>50</sup> François Truffaut, *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (Simon & Schuster; Revised Edition, 1985), 244.

<sup>51</sup> John Brady, *Craft Of The Screenwriter* (Simon & Schuster, 2013), 53.

Following the introduction of the owner of the Orphanage through his portrait, one is introduced to another character, the Headmistress — who like the Patron — is an antagonist.

Close on A HAND which holds a CANE and produces THREE RHYTHMIC TAPS on a wooden floor. The tapping comes to a halt. Silence.

Meet the **HEADMISTRESS**, 60, bony, languid, sitting behind her robust, Victorian desk, peering at Sam.

The painting hangs on the wall behind her.

*The Runaways*, p. 21

The Headmistress' introduction was written in a way to establish her character as an opposing threat toward Sam. Thus, the use of a slow pacing, the sound of her cane (influenced by the character of Carmen performed by Marisa Paredes in Guillermo Del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone*)— to link to her authority figure creating suspense in order to provoke the audience and reader, make one uncomfortable.



*The Devil's Backbone* (2001) Directed by Guillermo Del Toro

When we finally meet the Headmistress, we find out fast she is not exactly best friends with Sam and takes away her bat — starring our Chekov's Gun once again — and we cut back to Hell's Kitchen.

Detective Gallagher, who happens to be in rough state due to the beating he took in the previous night, back in his apartment. This was an opportunity to show Gallagher's state of mind, his home as a window to his soul, which happens to have paperwork on Falco all over the place — a portrait of his obsession to nail Falco.

Gallagher wakes up to the sound of not only Falco avoiding jail, which was no news to him, but then he hears, stunned, on the radio that his partner is now the chief of NYPD which lights a fire inside him. With a matching visual transition of Gallagher's eyes burning with anger and the fireplace at the dining hall of the Orphanage. We are amidst the girls as Sam gets back, giving her friends the news that the bat is gone, for now.

**INT. ORPHANAGE - DINING HALL - NIGHT**

The SOUND of embers crackling.

TWO GIRLS add logs to an already feeble fire.

Sam walks to Hannah, Peggy and Jean who are seated at one of the multiple tables in the hall.

HANNAH  
... And the verdict?

SAM  
Not grounded, but she did take the bat.

PEGGY  
Aw, shoot.

SAM  
But, maybe this doesn't have to be the end of it.

The girls share looks.

*The Runaways, p. 23*

Once again, the girls go on an adventure through the dark halls of the Orphanage, this time with the mission to recover Sam's baseball bat. But this mission had to have some kind of obstacle, so as the girls try to get in through the window, they find it covered with a wooden board.

The second obstacle, the baseball bat inside a locked safe, which Hannah manages to unlock. Sam is able to get her baseball bat back, but then the girls hear someone at the door... the sound of voices and footsteps, the doorknob turning, the door opens as the girls manage to get inside a cabinet without no one noticing.

He heads for the door. Then, stops sharp in front of the cabinet.

SAM'S POV - Hyde's shoe right in front of her eyes. She tries to remain calm, while Hannah tries not to make a sound.

We hear the sound of the door clicking shut, followed by--

*Pre-lap: SOUND of a HAMMER HITTING A WALL repeatedly...*

*The Runaways, p. 26*

Two figures enter. One of the voices are familiar to Sam, while the other is not. This is when we truly get to know the Orphanage's patron from Sam's eyes. As much intimidating as the Headmistress can be, she does not come close to Solomon Hyde who is revealed to be Falco's lawyer. Therefore, now we have a connection between the girls and Falco's storylines.

Another aspect that is important to be mentioned is I wanted this scene to feel claustrophobic; the girls hiding inside a small space, Hyde's feet right in front of Sam's eyes, inches away from danger; the films *Stand by Me* and *Road to Perdition* inspired me immensely when it comes to this scene.



*Stand by Me* (1986) Directed by Rob Reiner

This scene is essential because it sets up several things. One, the baseball bat is mainly a tool for the girls to get to the Headmistress's office; two, to hint something big is about to happen during Christmas night, as Solomon says the following words: "I waited all year for this. It has to be as good as last year." and three, Sam seeing Hyde for the first time in person and at the same time showing Hannah's reaction to it, how she behaves when she sees him.

If the earlier scene hints that something happened in the Headmistress's office that deeply affected Hannah, the following scene reinforces it, as Sam watches Hannah break down.

I wanted to add another layer with sound, the hammer pounding on a wall, the headmistress fixing the wall, working as if the countdown of a clock, a ticking time bomb, a subtext that says it is just a matter of time until something big happens; a dark force coming the girls' way, something corrupted within the orphanage that the Headmistress is trying to hide, but lies always come to the surface. The Headmistress is not the only hiding something, for Hannah is too; as her best friend tries to console Hannah, she rejects her aid by suddenly stopping weeping altogether.

The crying abruptly stops.

*PRE-LAP of the continuous sound of the hammering as it merges with the SOUND of...*

**EXT. SULLIVAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

POUNING on a door.

Gallagher stands on the porch. Waiting. He wears fedora casting a shadow over his bruised eye.

A drowsy Sullivan opens the door. Not sure about of his late-night visitor.

SULLIVAN  
James? Is that you?

He walks his way. Closer, notices his black eye. Attempts to lift Gallagher's hat. He backtracks.

*The Runaways, p. 26*

Once again, the use of the tool of a non-diegetic sound transition, to add an extra layer, and depth to the rhythmic beating of the cane, the knocking on the door to the incoming doom visual composition to move from one location to the next, from a character to another character.

Jean laughs. Hannah forces a smile. Sam noticing it, smiles too. They turn to each other and for a brief moment, all's well.

But gradually, Hannah's smile fades as she sees...

The Headmistress, heading in their direction with a BOTTLE OF CHARDONNAY in hand. Hannah freezes. Sam notices her tension.

*The Runaways, p. 30*

From the Orphanage at Staten Island and Sam and Hannah, to Gallagher as he arrives at his ex-partner's home to question him about the new job, feeling like he was stabbed in the back.



Solomon Hyde makes a grand entrance in a three-piece tuxedo. FIVE SECURITY MEN dressed in black follow behind.

He scans the hall and stares at the two lines of girls. They smile at him in an obviously rehearsed, contrived manner. He smiles back, it's awkward.

*The Runaways*, p. 30

But Sullivan is able to convince him, this is going to work in the long run, as Falco now feels safe and that nothing can touch him. Then, we get back to the Orphanage as Hannah disappears. Sam finding her on the rooftop of the Orphanage, scared and hopeless. This is when Sam and the reader is aware that something really serious is going on with Hannah as she states staying at the Orphanage means essentially dying.

At this point, all the characters have been introduced and developed we realise that nothing and no one is what it appears to be. The same can be said about Hannah. When we meet her, she is this vibrant girl that loves spending time with her best friend Sam, making her laugh to distract her from the sadness of their lives. They go to the rooftops and wander the orphanage halls at night. But then something changes and one begins to realise something is bothering Hannah.

So, as one arrives page twenty-nine, and Act Two ends with Hannah's line "I'd rather freeze to death." Which begs the question — what happened that is so horrible that this young girl would rather die than stay in the orphanage?

### **Act Three**

Thus, one starts Act Three with Hannah in the same mental state as she was in the end of Act Two. Nothing has changed, and Sam remains concerned and not knowing what to do, or what is going on with Hannah. Then, we follow the girls to the entrance of the Orphanage to officially meet its Patron, Hyde.

One realises right away he is wearing a mask, pretending to be a man he clearly is not, due to earlier, through Sam's eyes, one has seen hints of his real character who is not as charming as he portrays himself to be in this grand entrance. We also learn how the Headmistress looks up to him and how she works so hard to please him.

The annual Christmas party is at its peak. Sam tries her best to make Hannah smile, succeeding temporarily, until it vanishes as she sees the Headmistress heading their way which makes Sam *feel* in her bones something is not quite right. She notices Hyde whispering to the Headmistress, witnessing

her. Sam watches Hannah as she is led out of the room by the Headmistress, but there is nothing she can do but watch her go.

**INT. ORPHANAGE - DINING HALL**

A Christmas Party in full swing.

WE GLIDE THROUGH the dining hall, past a Christmas tree.  
WAITERS in expensive tuxedos carry trays with dessert.

There's so much to focus on, but Sam is interested in one thing...

HYDE.

*The Runaways*, p. 30

The latter does not deter her though, she is determined to aid her best friend in whatever danger she might be in. She asks her friends to create a 'situation' so she can escape the dining room in order to follow Hannah, without being seen, which she manages to do successfully. Sam follows the Headmistress through the hallway to see her friend get ordered to enter the study. She waits for the woman to pass by her in order to get to Hannah.

As soon as she is gone, she approaches the study's door, made of frosted glass, noir-like, — heavily inspired by a shot from the opening of the television show *Jessica Jones* — on the other side? A dark reality. A silhouette of a man beside Hannah — a threatening, far bigger than her, which surprises Sam, making her step back.



*The Devil's Backbone* (2001)



*Jessica Jones* 'Pilot' (2015)

As Sam sees the chardonnay bottle, close to Hannah, she connects the dots — the wine to Hyde. This is no longer a moment that she feels it is not right — she *knows* it. The reason why the latter works is because of a storytelling technique called foreshadowing. “Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, “Boom!” (...) The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene. (...) Now, let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it. In these conditions this innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the public is participating in the secret.”<sup>52</sup>

**LARGER SILHOUETTE**

Engulfing Hannah’s outline.

Stunned, Sam immediately takes her hand off the knob and steps back. She lowers herself and peeks through the keyhole.

Sam steps back from the keyhole to place her ear to the door, attempting to eavesdrop, but fails to pick up anything.

BACK TO THE KEYHOLE and to the hand which now holds a-  
BOTTLE OF CHARDONNAY.

Sam’s eyes pop open as it dawns on her...

Solomon Hyde - The Orphanage’s benefactor.

She turns back and SPRINTS down the hallway.

*The Runaways*, p. 33



*The Devil's Backbone* (2001 )



*Road to Perdition* (2004)

Considered the master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock, states in the quote above, this can only work if the information and links are planted beforehand, earlier in the story — a foreshadowing<sup>53</sup> of what is to come — along with main character, in this case Sam, letting the reader and audience in on it. I reflected quite a bit on how Sam would save Hannah, silently, sneaking into the office as in David

<sup>52</sup> Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (Simon & Schuster; Revised Edition, 1985), 172.

<sup>53</sup> literary device used by a writer in order to give an advanced hint of what is going to come later in the story. It allows the audience to develop expectation about the events further down the story.

Fincher's adaptation of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, when Lisbeth (Rooney Mara) sneaks in to save Blomkvist (Daniel Craig) from the killer, or just storming in and go for it.

Sam, essentially a child, seeing a friend in trouble, I thought she would just go for it, not really understanding the consequences of it all, and to get Hannah out of there as soon as possible. But it could not be easy. The Patron would definitely be much stronger than her, so there had to be a fight, an instance where they both would struggle to get the baseball bat. If Sam were alone, she would most likely lose the battle, but as one girl is in danger the other comes to help, Sam and Hannah, while alternating with one another persevere, bringing the monster down, together.

Still, there had to be a side effect of two kids seeing a dead body in front of them and having killed a human being, for this is a moment that will change both of them forever.



*Thelma and Louise* (2001)

More blood gurgles from his mouth as he begins to choke.

He brings his hands to his throat.

His eyes dart around, his body twitches, his breath whizzing in his throat, mouth jerked open, but there are no words, nor whispers, only silence.

#### **SAM AND HANNAH**

Take in the scene as blood pools behind his head. Wheels slowly turning, realizing the consequences of it all.

*The Runaways*, p. 36

A scene depicting the aftermath of Hyde's death and Sam checking on Hannah, making sure she is alright and that what happened was not her fault, while also giving the audience time to breathe, is what led to the scene at the rooftop, outside the walls of the Orphanage where for at least a minute they do not feel trapped, seemed the right choice.

**EXT. ORPHANAGE - ROOFTOP**

Rain pours down. Sam catches her breath.

Hannah stands next to her puking her guts out.

*The Runaways, p. 37*

After Hannah tells Sam it is not her fault, then we can move on to the escape from the Orphanage. Now there is no alternative, they have to leave, while still being chased by the Headmistress and Hyde's security, but how?

In the opening of the pilot, while at the rooftop, Hannah comments on catching the ferry from Staten Island to the city, which happened to be a glimpse at what was going on with her at the time, but because one was not aware of it, it felt like a simple joke back then, but she meant it.

The girls would now have to escape the Orphanage and catch the ferry before it leaves Staten Island. But after that happens, they need to get their friends to come with them, and clothes, so they can survive the freezing cold of winter in New York. We then follow Sam and Hannah as they leave the rooftop to go back to their dormitory, where they barely escape the Headmistress.

**INT. ORPHANAGE - GIRLS' DORMITORY - MOMENTS LATER**

Sam and Hannah put clothes inside their bags.

Then: The SOUND of VOICES and FOOTSTEPS closing in fast!

Sam places a chair under the doorknob.

The handle rattles. THUMPS and SLAMS on the door.

*The Runaways, p. 37*

Sam and Hannah throw the rope out the window, and disappear when...

The Headmistress and staff ram through the door.

The girls nowhere to be found.

While THE MAIDS look under the beds, the Headmistress runs to the windows. Opens them, looks down...

Watches the two girls as they reach the ground.

*The Runaways, p. 38*

It is time for them to meet the girls, and they watch them from outside the orphanage, trying to find a way to get their attention, but then the Headmistress enters, looking a mess, and Sam sees no alternative but to smash the window in order to get her friends out.

Peggy and Ruth, at first, not sure of what is going on, but then decide to trust both Hannah and Sam, leave with them. They cross the courtyard as they are being chased, and almost get caught climbing over the entrance gate, but at the last moment are able to make it, and literally head into the woods, and in page forty-one, enters Act Four.

Hannah and Sam finally jump over the gate, onto wet, muddy, unknown land.

Hannah steps over the gate and offers her hand to Sam. So do Peggy and Jean.

Sam gains momentum, JUMPS. Grabs Hannah's ARM and expertly pulls herself up with her help when she gets pulled by her leg.

Sam kicks her two feet against the men, until... There's nothing they can do, but let go.

*The Runaways*, p. 39, 40

The beginning of Act Four needed to feel like a 'all is lost' moment. A time when the girls have struggled so much to get to this point, and yet it feels for nothing. They are close to the ferry station, and yet, they are completely surrounded. Flashlights could not be nearer, how could they possibly escape? Sam happens to have an idea, using the surroundings around them to their advantage and herself as a decoy, a distraction which everyone objects to, to no avail, because it is the only way.

**EXT. STATEN ISLAND - NIGHT**

The wind howls. Feet crush the snow and stagger up a steep hill. Up ahead... UPPER BAY.

**MOMENTS LATER...**

Flashlights in pursuit. SEVERAL FEET smash over water, bolting past us.

Reveal: the girls running for their lives.

CLOSE ON THE GIRLS' FACES highlighting their physical strain, exhaustion, hopelessness.

**EXT. WOODS (STATEN ISLAND) - NIGHT**

Snow falls. The lights of Manhattan blend in the shimmering, apparent infinite ocean.

Heavy footsteps and flashlights beams approaching...

*The Runaways, p. 40*

This moment of planning, as if out of a heist film, allows one another breather and for the other girls to understand what happened, while also showing how loyal and great friend Sam is to Hannah. A time where she could have told what really happened but she chose to protect her best friend.

Sam stares at her aghast.

SAM

This is not the same thing.

Jean looks away, shaking her head.

SAM (CONT'D)

You have no idea! That monster tried to hurt--

Sam quickly glances at Hannah, then back at Jean.

SAM (CONT'D)

Me!

JEAN  
(bewildered)  
What monster? Hannah what kind of  
stories have you been telling Sam?

SAM  
I'm serious! That crazy Patron.

Jean turns to Hannah. Hannah nods.

*The Runaways, p. 37*

Now the girls not only are again back together, but also understand what is at stake, they are ready to move forward and let Sam take the lead, give them a path to get to the ferry.

A montage is a great way to show several actions happening at the same time. The planning and the action of Sam both distracting Hyde's security while the other girls camouflage into the crowd to get into the ferry which would then lead to Sam's cinematic jump onto the train, where this time, Hannah is the hero and saves her from falling. They embrace and we end Act Three

LANDS HARD on the TOP of the ferry, TWISTS her foot. A cry of pain, and due to the snow she steep falls and--

**TWO HANDS**

Grab her arms to pull her onboard.

Sam gazes UP to see-- |

**HANNAH!**

Then, Peggy and Jean join. Together they pull Sam onboard.

*The Runaways, p. 48*

Act Four begins with hope, almost as a fresh start for the girls. A symbol of the latter, adds to that effect, and what better symbolism for hope than the famous landmark which stands between Staten Island and New York, just across the Hudson River, lighting the way to New York, and a woman holding the flame, which adds deeper to the overall feminist tone of the story.



**INT. FERRY - OPEN DECK**

Sam and Hannah peer overhead as an enormous SHADOW towers over them. Peggy and Jean enter and gasp in unison, as a--

**ROARING FLAME**

Blazes and illuminates their EYES, as the giant elegant figure of...

**STATUE OF LIBERTY**

Gives path to the glimmering lights of Manhattan.

A second gasp in unison and as we glide past the monument in the background of the clear New York sky.

*The Runaways, p. 49*

This is when the girls finally make the cross from the ordinary world to the special world and it is everything they expected, and more. This is still their illusion of the real New York City, like the facade of the shiny skyscrapers, deceiving smoke and mirrors.

**EXT. LOWER MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS**

The girls' eyes widen. Another gasp and now, far ahead, New York City's SKYSCRAPERS.

They halt; their mouths agape, as if they can't breathe or aren't able to find their voices yet.

They pull their heads backwards and we follow their gaze as it drifts upwards to reveal:

THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING piercing the blue sky, vanishing amidst the clouds. The girls take it all in, once again, gasping in unison.

The deafening SOUND OF HONKS AND SHOUTS ECHO through the entire roadway block, snapping them back to reality, making them realize they're at the very center of a TRAFFIC JAM.

*The Runaways, p. 50*

## Act Five

As one might have noticed Gallagher barely made an appearance in the second half of Act Three. There is a reason for that. While writing the second half of it, I felt that by cutting from the Orphanage to Gallagher, would have an alienating effect regarding what is going on with Hannah. It was a matter of respect for what Hannah was going through; In no way I wanted to make it seem trivial, to use her being sexually harassed to feel like an action to further the plot. Thus, the choice to staying with Hannah and Sam the entire time.

Therefore, in page fifty, we return to James Gallagher, and witness him trying to leave the past behind by putting all things related to Falco inside the box, and sealing it for good. Until it is not, when Sullivan, his ex-partner, makes another appearance.

Gallagher is still in the same emotional state toward Sullivan as he was in the first half of Act Three, angry that Sullivan did not trust him enough to tell him about his raise both in rank in the Department (N.Y.P.D nowadays). He tells James about the murder of Solomon Hyde. Another opportunity for Gallagher to get Falco through Hyde, lands in his lap. Like the girls, Gallagher sees a glance of hope. As he grabs it, we are back with the girls, right back where we started in Times Square. Hannah's dream all along. But this time, the lights are gone, Times Square a figment of what it was during the day.

They run into Falco's Christmas giveaway for the less fortunate. Thus, answering the question of how the two storylines of the girls and Falco intertwine. But for it to work, I needed to be able to answer to the following question. Why would the girls accept the help of another white rich man?

Falco stands in front of his Rolls.

FALCO (CONT'D)  
(to the girls)  
There's still some space left. The girls look around.

The cold wind blows, the remaining New Yorkers on the Square now head home, theaters and stores close up shop.

Only adult centered establishments remain open. In b.g, drunkards begin to holler.

The girls are frightened, not knowing what to do. Hannah turns to Sam, who can barely stand on her hurt foot.

She turns back around and walks towards Falco. Sam, Peggy and Jean follow.

Falco grins and flourishes a hand towards his Rolls Royce, inviting the girls in. The girls climb in. The Rolls Royce's door closes and we--

**FADE TO BLACK.**

It had to come from character, not plot. The only way it could work was if this happened due to Hannah caring for the well-being of Sam — since she sacrificed so much to save her. She sees Sam's injured leg, and she takes the first step. So, Hannah gets in first. As he delivers toys and money to the kids swarming around, his eyes land on the orphan girls. He enters his Rolls Royce limo as the girls admire the luxury. Then, the window rolls down. The door opens. Falco's hand beckons the girls... After a moment... They decide to get in. Changing their fate forever.

## BEYOND THE PILOT

What sets apart writing a pilot from a feature is the fact one needs to be aware of the entire arc of the season before writing it. The work is not finished when one has penned the first episode. Working on a series treatment or outline comes right after in order to show producers what the television show would look like. The Runaways, as a mini-series, would go as the following. Throughout the series our characters will see their beliefs of what is right & wrong get shaken.

And, by the end of the story, whether for better or worse, they will be changed.

Gallagher will realise he was betrayed by whom he thought he could trust — his only family. This is the case of his ex-partner Sullivan who was aiding Falco all along, as he made sure he did not get charged for murder and get the position of Chief of Police as a reward for that. Gallagher learns that the reason he is so angry and chasing Falco is because he is alone. Especially, after finding out about Sullivan being in bed with Falco. The ultimate betrayal. And contrary to the girls, he has no family. He finds out in the end that the girls are not criminals, but victims of the system and society. That his real purpose is to help them out. So, he joins the girls to defeat Falco in the end. Sacrificing his life in order to save them.

Falco will come to see that his empire is not what matters most to him, but his son. But he only realises this when it is too late. When his son Mickey is gone, dead. Killed in self-defense by Sam as Mickey tries to attack her. Falco lets go of all the values that used to define him, not to act from a place of emotion. He follows the girls all the way to the orphanage for revenge, which in the end will be his downfall.



*The Devil's Backbone* (2001)

Sam's rebellious spirit and the things she witnessed in the orphanage; being chased by the police and Gallagher for the murder of the Patron; seeing that the police have no interest in helping orphans, her best friends, and people of color, makes her believe there is no such a thing like justice in this world. She believes that the only way for them to survive on the streets is to take care of your own,

that you need to make your own rules in order to survive. But that will all change, in the end, as she comes to the realisation that she is just still a kid. She is not a mafia boss, killer or criminal. She belongs by Hannah's side and they don't belong in this violent world.

Therefore, like a circle, the series will end where it started in the Orphanage. The girls will go back to where it all began. Hannah will face her trauma, seeing Falco as Hyde, as what she went through still haunting her, facing her fears and ultimately, defeat Falco. After facing their inner fears and demons the girls will leave the Orphanage as it burns in the background, leaving it all behind.



*The Devil's Backbone (2001)*

## CONCLUSION

My passion toward screenwriting comes from the telling of stories through cinematic images and actions. Human beings often hide behind words, and as we follow characters on a screen, we see them naked, vulnerable, as we are, and that always felt incredibly honest to me. A contrast of a world and society which can be riddled with so many masks and disguises.

Speaking of masks, I have always felt like an outsider even in my own country. I have always felt the need to get away, and I do that by writing. Sure, I am not an orphan, or an American girl from Staten Island, but I have yet to meet a woman who has not been afraid to walk alone in an empty, dark alley worrying a dark figure might hurt her. The idiom "Write what you know" is often used in relation to knowledge one has acquired throughout life, but to me it is also about connection. To write what you know, emotionally. It must come from the heart. The latter is what inspired me to write *The Runaways*, it is a feeling, and fear I surely know about. Therefore, one could talk about the fundamentals of storytelling, plot, story structure, and outlining until the end of time, but in my view, writing what you know emotionally is the most important aspect when writing a story.

"No one knows anything." is one of the most used phrases in the screenwriting world. No one knows which script is going to make a fantastic film, series, or which one is going to fail. Thus, there are no ultimate rules, which means one can use the format of a screenplay, to one's advantage. This happens to be one of my favourite aspects when it comes to screenwriting. The freedom to bend its format to highlight one's voice, giving you absolute freedom as a writer to express who you are, what you want to say, your uniqueness as a human being, your voice as a writer.

Furthermore, the writing of this report made me realize there are not many texts about the craft of screenwriting in Portuguese, and they are mostly in English, therefore I would not only like to contribute by writing a text in the future about this craft in my mother language, so it can be more easily accessed, but also to give further details about how the business side of the film and screenwriting industry work in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to screenwriters who are looking to rather pursue a career overseas or to implement that knowledge for their own careers.

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