

50.033

Foundations of
Game Design
and Development

STORYTELLING

Tips

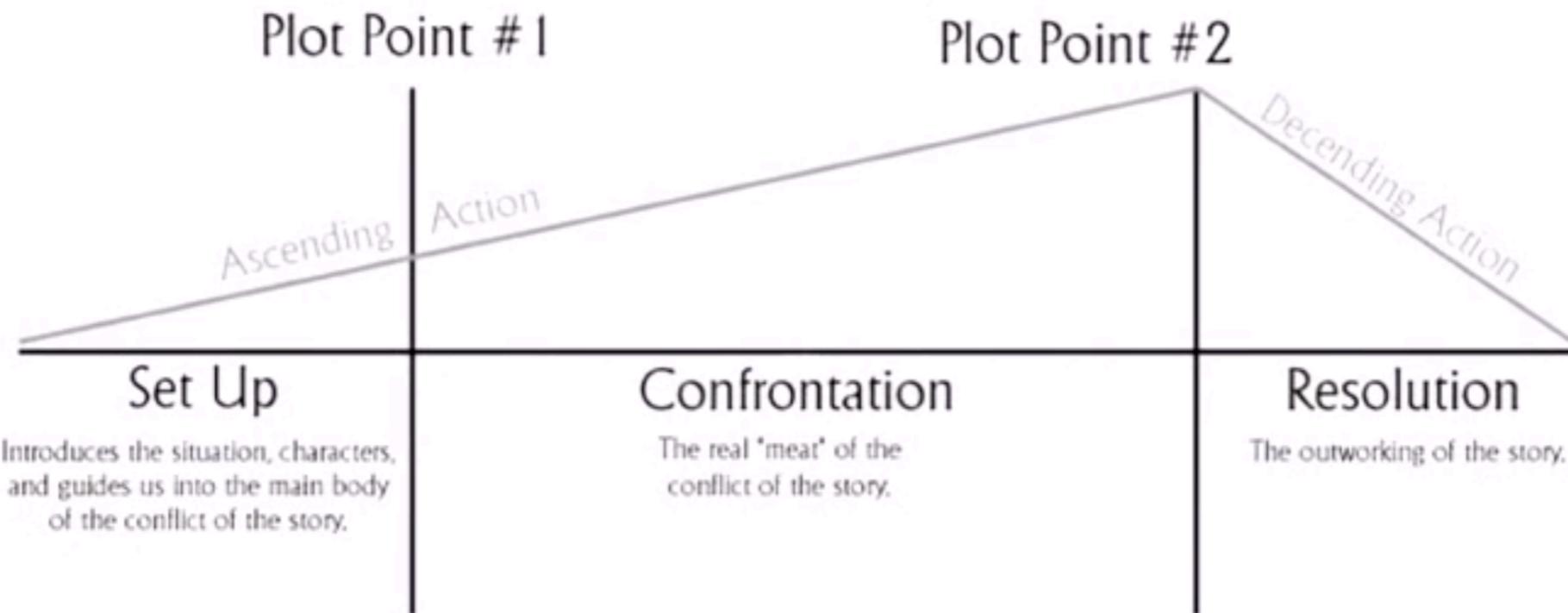
Materials taken from GDC presentations

THE 3-ACT STRUCTURE

- The beginning
- The middle
- The end

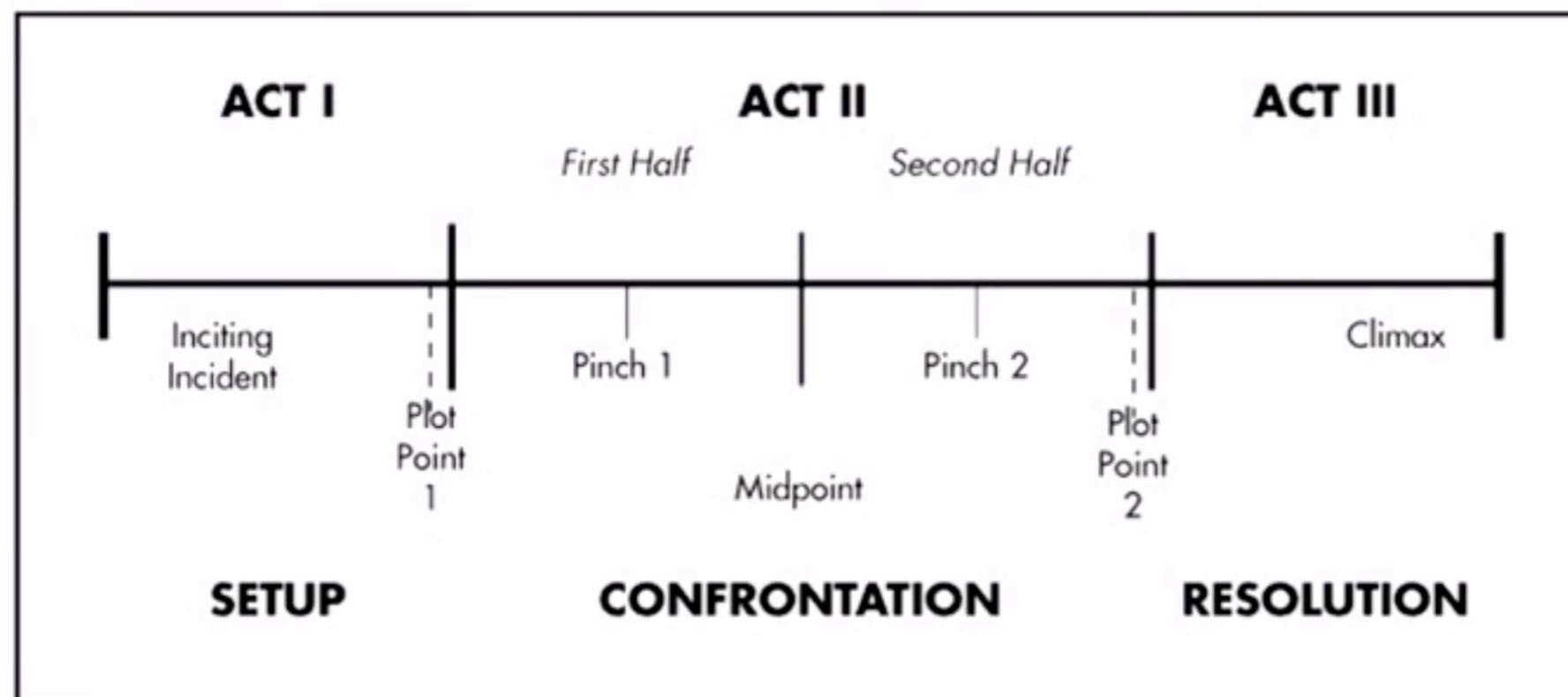
HOLLYWOOD 3-ACT STRUCTURE

The Basic Film Paradigm



HOLLYWOOD 3-ACT STRUCTURE

The Syd Field “Paradigm”



FROZEN



- (Setup) Inciting Incident: Elsa hurts Anna with her power
- (Confrontation)
 - Pinch 1: Elsa accidentally unleashes her power in court
 - Pinch 2: Elsa accidentally freezes Anna's heart, and Hans revealed his evil plot
- (Resolution) Climax: Anna saves Elsa by her act of heroism, Elsa realises how to control her power

UNCHARTED 2



- (Setup) Inciting Incident: Nate is betrayed by Flynn, leaving him to be arrested after stealing the map
- (Confrontation)
 - Pinch I: Meeting Elena
 - Pinch 2: Train crash
- (Resolution) Climax: Choosing Elena or Chloe? and Lazaravic was defeated

SERIALIZED TV-DRAMA STRUCTURE

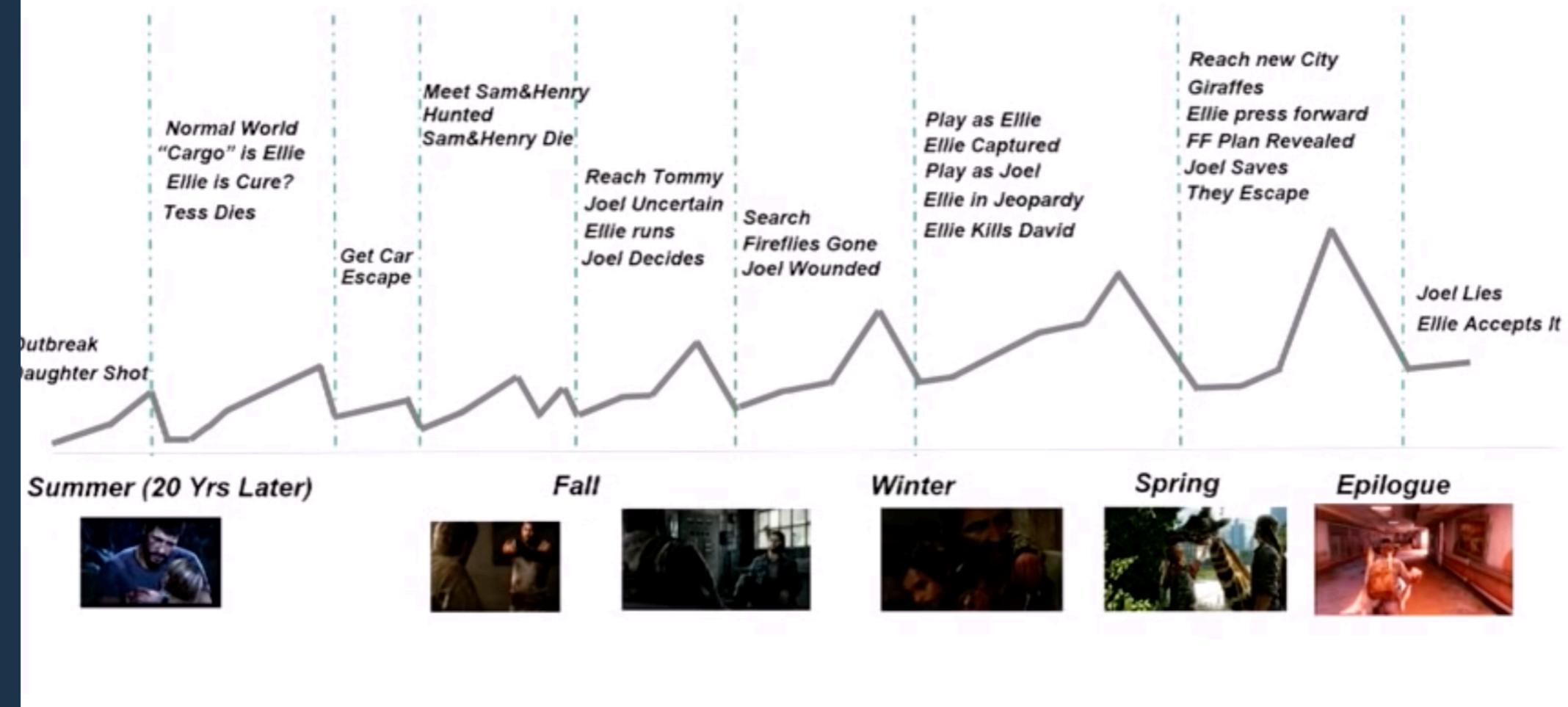
- Long serialized tv-series form might be more suitable for games
- *The cut scenes that break up sequences*
- Half-season / full-season arc: Breaking bad, The Wire
- Even multi-season: Game of Thrones
- Whole-season arc: Mad-men
- Design a story with ***multi-level magnification***

SERIALIZED TV-DRAMA STRUCTURE

- They have to keep hours of complete storytelling experience episodes to leave audience feeling satisfied
- Introduce characters in each episode (sequence)
- Each episode has its own little arc
- That either resolve on its own or
- Affect the bigger arc of building the story as a whole

THE LAST OF US

THE LAST OF US STRUCTURE

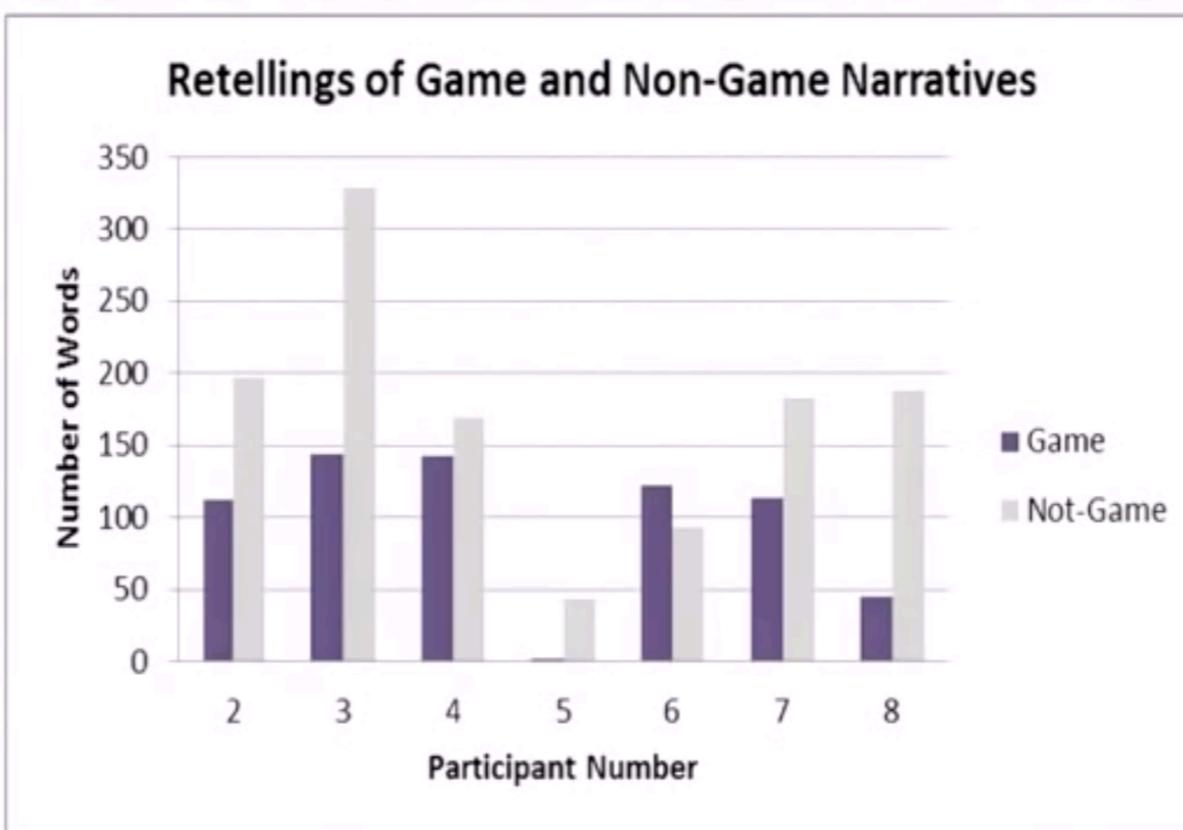


OPEN-WORLD GAMES

- Players can have their own freedom to do the order of the sequences : Fallout 3
- Non-linear sequence structure
- Doesn't have rising narrative
- But yet people still love the game, why?

DO PEOPLE REMEMBER GAME PLOTS?

MICROSOFT USER RESEARCH STUDY



Collapsed across participants, the average number of words used to retell game narratives was significantly shorter than the number of words used to retell other narratives.



STUDIOS USER RESEARCH

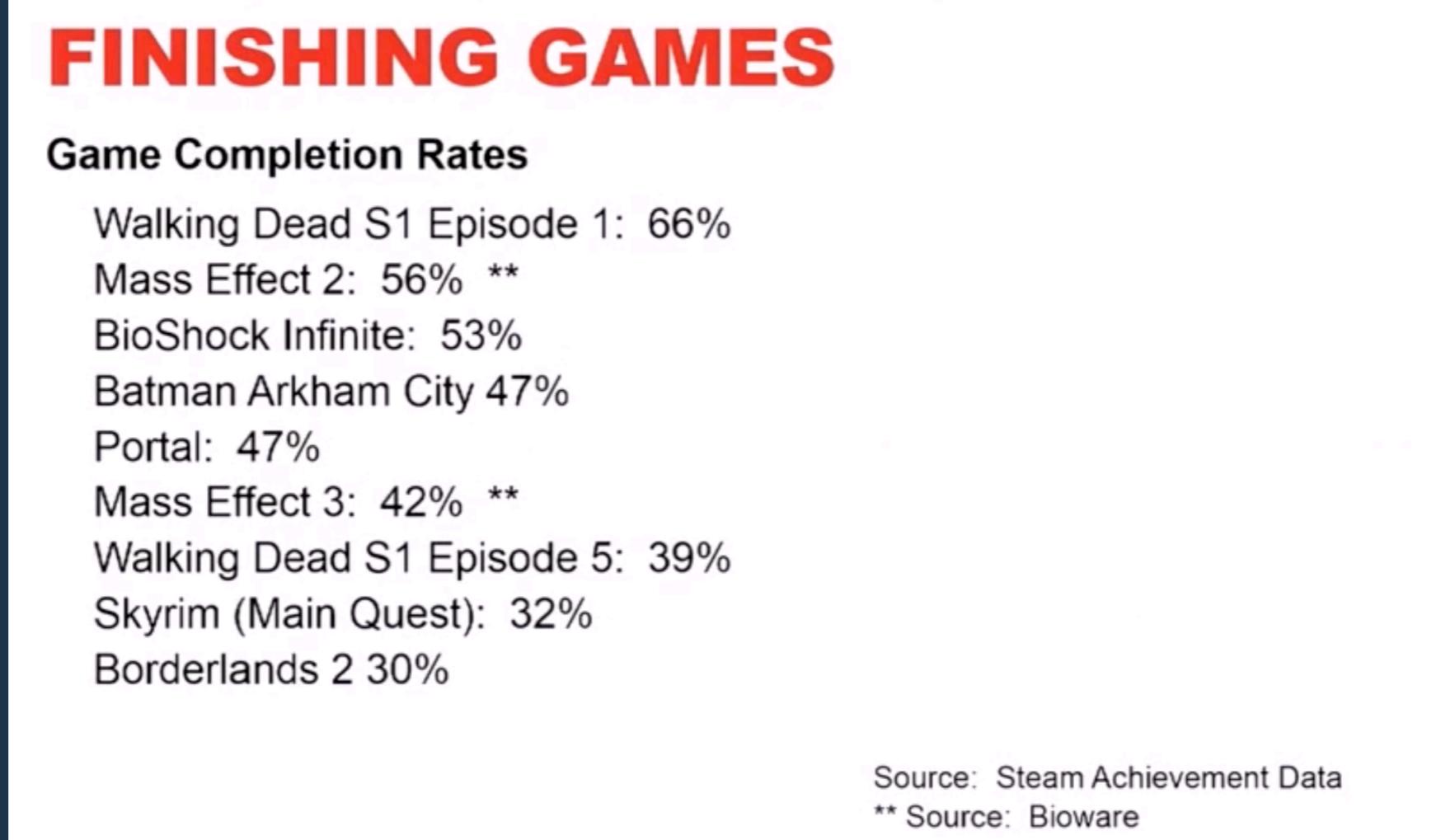
- Deborah Henderson, User Researcher

DO PEOPLE REMEMBER GAME PLOTS?

- They remember characters but not relevance to the plots
- They remember narrative if its relevant to gameplay
- Players only form episodic memories of the narrative
- People spend their time playing the game more than paying attention to plot twists
- This is because plot twists require prior memory on the storyline so far to ‘surprise’ the audience

DO PEOPLE REMEMBER GAME PLOTS?

- Statistically, people don't finish games



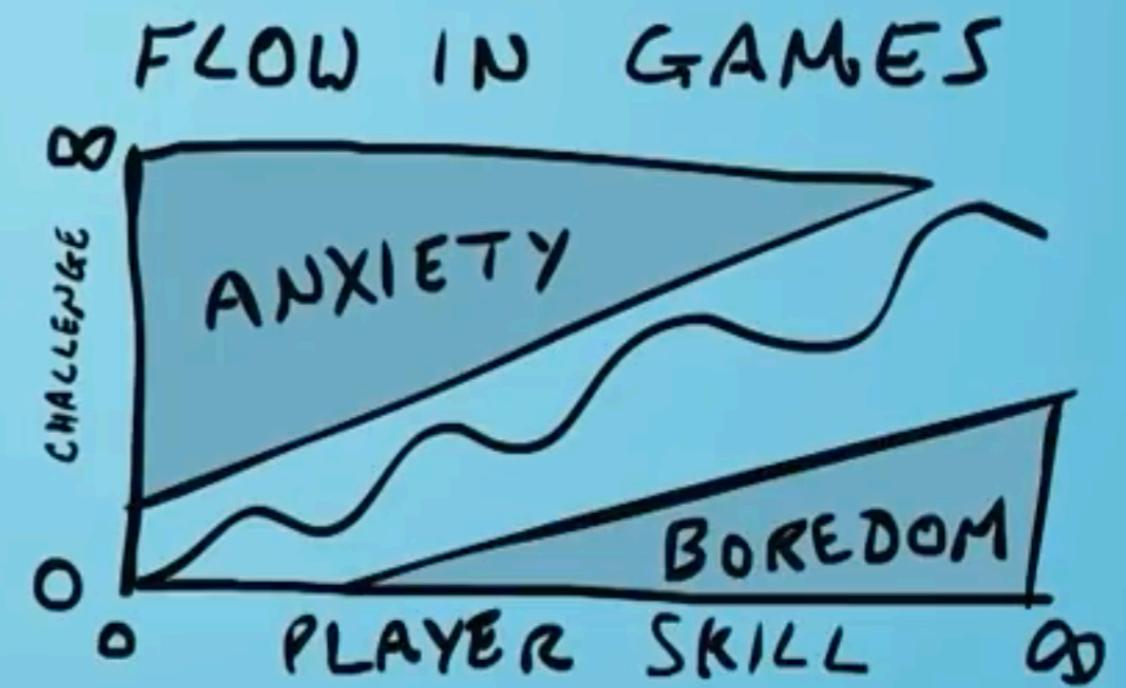
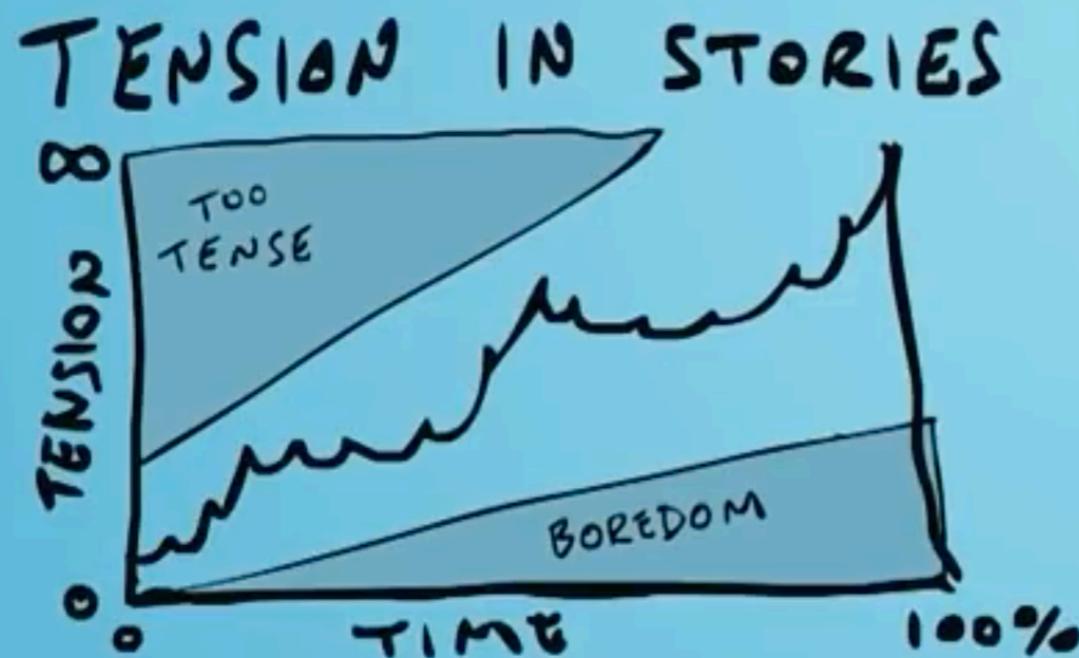
DO PEOPLE REMEMBER GAME PLOTS?

- How are they OK with not knowing the game's ending?
- How much does the 3rd Act (ending) payoff?
- If the majority of the players never even see it, do they still get any kind of satisfaction from the game?
- Hence, game stories aren't 100% about structure
- It is about player experience and game character

IN THE LONG RUN

- What do people retain in the long run, if its not storyline structure?
 - **Focus on character:** character motivation aligns with player motivation
 - **Align narrative** with structural needs of your game UX, level design, or the learn-practice-master loop
- Remember the game you like. Realise what you remember about the game?
- You're remembering the characters because you spent a lot of time with them and the unique world they are in

BOOSTING NARRATIVE



BOOSTING NARRATIVE

- How to keep players in the flow channel?

MOTIVATIONS

- Pay attention to internal and external motivations
- Internal motivation: Overcoming a problem or grief, or emotional block, learning something new
- External motivation: Gaining \$, travelling, obtaining status or revenge
- When external motivation is fulfilled but internal motivation is not, a tragedy happens
- A story is always about change

PLOT STRUCTURE

- Making that ‘change’ happen and not just leave it as being ‘desire’
- See Prince of Persia: Sands of Time and Harry Potter - The magic world means nothing unless it is in contrast with the ordinary world

1. THE TUTORIAL MISSION

- Normal world setting, slide into the problem
- Know the internal and external motivation of the character
- Kick-off without confrontation yet

2. THE INCITING INCIDENT

- Break the usual situation
- Overcoming this incident is called the *external motivation*

3. THE INCREASING COMPLEXITY

- Basic abilities seem less effective
- The player no longer go straight to fixing the problem
- They explore, avoid, or attempt smaller battles
- The change can be seen through the narrative or mechanics of the game (Tetris)
- We increase complexity through the story to avoid boredom (avoid player fatigue)

4. WITH EFFORT, HOPE OVERCOMES FEAR

- Final boss is killed but its not its final form yet
- Tragedy happens
- Or, we can just have happy endings
- All scenes / sequence must have : objective, which leads to conflict, and end up with outcome

DO PEOPLE REMEMBER GAME PLOTS?

- What about The Witcher 3? It has *Overwhelmingly Positive* review (both recent and all times). We don't see this very often.

The screenshot shows a forum post on a website. The title of the forum is "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt". Below the title, there is a navigation bar with tabs: All, Discussions (which is highlighted), Screenshots, Artwork, Broadcasts, Videos, News, Guides, and Review. Underneath the navigation bar, the URL is visible: "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt > General Discussions > Topic Details". The post itself has a profile picture of a person with glasses and the name "NEILLLLLL". The timestamp indicates the post was made on "8 Mar, 2018 @ 9:28am". The main content of the post is a large bold text: "26% completion rate". Below this, there is a block of text: "How can a game be considered great if the overwhelming majority who played it didn't even bother to finish it? I keep seeing people talk about this game like it's one of the best ever made, but you would think people would enjoy it enough to finish it."

THE WITCHER 3 – WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

- CD Project Red wanted to create a **cohesive game**,
- **Not just pretty game** packed with things to do that don't feel connected to one another

“The Witcher 3 had other pop culture strengths, including the popularity of the book series the game franchise is based on and **the recent, successful Netflix adaptation of those books**. But none of that would have mattered if the game itself hadn’t been good.”

ENTERTAINMENT \ TECH

Netflix's The Witcher has made The Witcher 3 way more popular

The show's popularity has boosted the game on Steam and Twitch

By Bijan Stephen | Dec 30, 2019, 1:56pm EST

f t SHARE

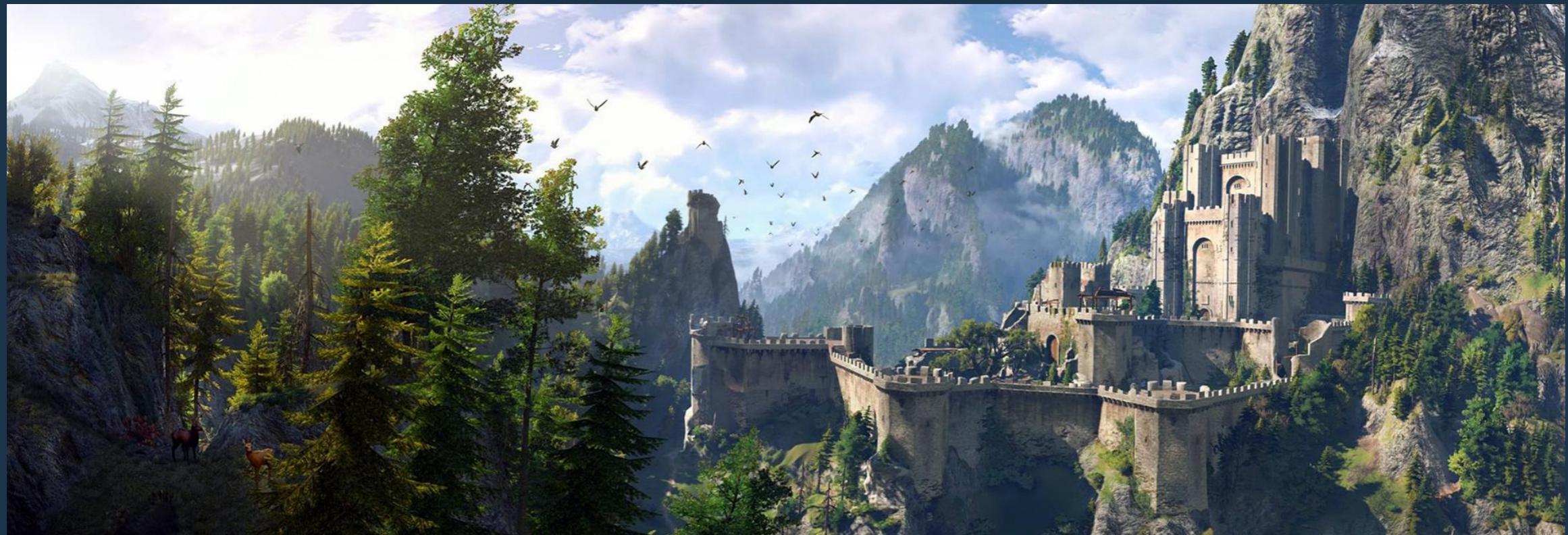


Photo: Katalin Vermes / Netflix

MAIN QUEST, OPENING SCENE

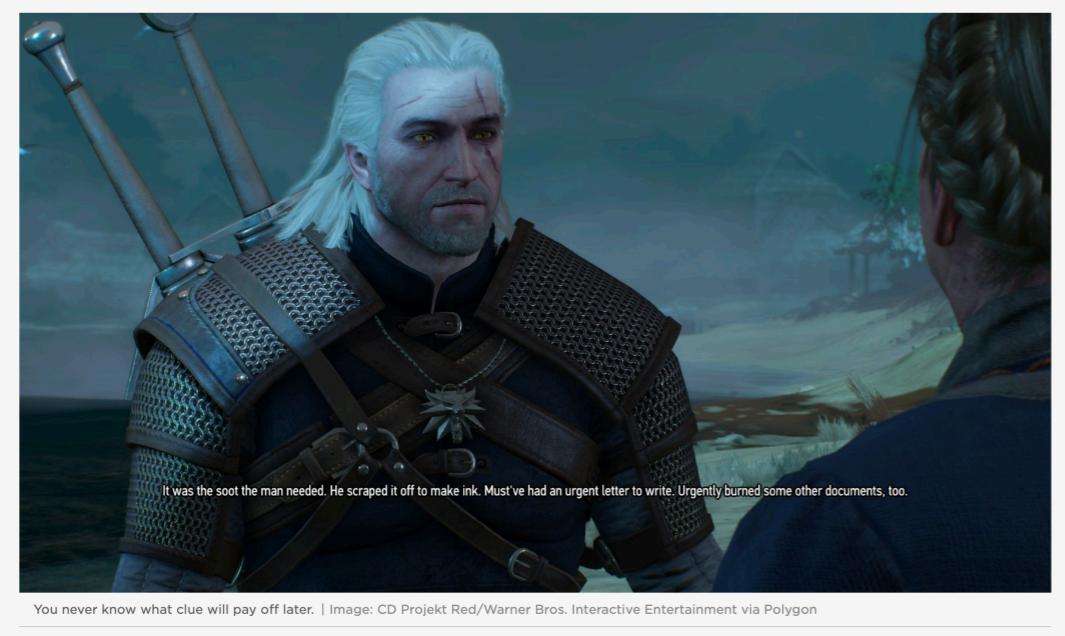
Prologue

The opening cutscene depicts [Yennefer](#) fleeing some unknown danger in the midst of a large battle and [Geralt](#) and [Vesemir](#) several days later tracking her escape from various signs left in her wake. At the scene's conclusion the story officially starts with Geralt in a guest room at [Kaer Morhen](#), the stronghold of the witchers in the [Blue Mountains](#). After proceeding through brief tutorials on movement and combat mechanics, and the sudden and terrifying appearance of the [Wild Hunt](#), we learn that the time Geralt is actually dreaming about the events at Kaer Morhen. Geralt awakes to discuss his dream with Vesemir and they resume their tracking of Yennefer's flight as seen in the opening scene.



SIDE QUESTS

“You don’t have to be the hero, but they need someone to be”



- You began in White Orchard, you stalked a Griffin — part of your Main Quest, finding Yennefer. Something is obviously wrong, you’re looking for clues
- Meanwhile, you came across A little house is seen down the river
- An elderly woman crying for help, asking for you to find her frying pan that’s been taken from her by a man who disappears
- Your job: investigate on her behalf
- Moment-to-moment wise: Geralt is a detective, doing good old CSI work.
- Tons of other jobs like this, all clues made sense — scraps of papers, book, blood spatter, scent, etc

ONE BIG WORLD WHERE CHOICES MATTER

- Quests are connected to one another across dozens of hours
- The entire world is filled with smaller stories that have nothing to do with Geralt, but *everything to do with each other*
- If you played the game and both the DLCs, pretty sure you know this guy. Why? What is so special about him?



Into Geralt of Rivia himself. The Butcher of Blaviken.

THE ENDING

- The ending that you get and the fate of the characters and even cities you came across depends on the choices you made on your previous quest
- Of course, they are all related to the main idea introduced by the author: “Evil is Evil. Lesser, greater, middling... Makes no difference. The degree is arbitrary. The definition’s blurred. If I’m to choose between one evil and another... I’d rather not choose at all.”

— Andrzej Sapkowski, The Last Wish



SUMMARY

BASICS OF STORYTELLING

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Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:

OBJECTIVE

What does the protagonist want to do or expect to learn in this scene?

CONFLICT

What prevents this from happening?

OUTCOME

What happens that sends the protagonist on a new course, or makes their life more difficult?

The more times they fail to get exactly what they want, the more challenging their life becomes, and the greater their final achievement will be.

