

3.

STORY

*"I can tell you everything
that you need to know
in one word: story."*
—Hans Zimmer

SUBCHAPTERS

- Live in the World of the Story
- Learn the Rules of the Story
From Your Director
- Establish Rules and Break Them

CHAPTER REVIEW

Your job as a composer is to tell a story; stick to the story and never abandon it. You will develop a score that coexists elegantly with the images and words, and colors the world the director creates. To do this, you must live in the world of the story. To begin living in the world of the story, learn the rules of it from your director. Hans would rather sit down with the director than read the script, to try to get at what's in the director's head. Your goal is to arrive at a common language that informs how you'll approach composing for the story.

In that first conversation, learn the rules of the story from your director. Hans says that the rules can often surprise you, and can give you a framework from which you can build the score. Working within these rules is like playing a game. The rules help us avoid arriving at a mashup of different Play-Doh colors.

For Hans, the rules for Sherlock were "maintain intellectual integrity" and "don't be pretentious," but still have fun. Only once you've established a strong framework of rules for yourself to build from, you can then start to break those rules to add a bit of "freshness."

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans shares the story of sitting with director Terrence Malick for nearly a year prior to shooting *The Thin Red Line* to underscore the importance of understanding Malick's unique vision for the film. Read [the script](#). Note where Malick's insight and input impacted the outcome.

ASSIGNMENT

- Practice writing a theme by working within a set of rules that a director might give you. If you need inspiration for a rule: Think about a director you've worked with or research one online, and write a theme that's inspired by that director's favorite band. Stay within the rules and ethos established by that band. Then write one cue that breaks those rules to add some freshness. This exercise takes you out of your comfort zone and functions as a study in satisfying your director, a crucial skill of the successful film composer.

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