THE WRITE CHOICE

By
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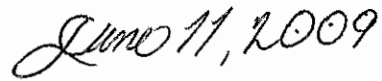Bachelor of Independent Studies (BIS)

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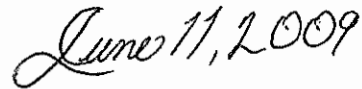
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1 Abstract

This paper compares and contrasts movies, television, and video games from the perspective of the writer. This is done in order to determine which is the superior story telling medium. It is accomplished by examining how each are written, who else holds influence over the story, and the regulatory bodies involved.

The relationships between the three media are discussed and then illustrated in order to demonstrate these relationships and the theories discussed in this paper.

2 Summary

The thesis of this paper is that television is a superior medium for writers over that of movies and video games. This will be established by investigating the method each uses to be written, by comparing who besides writers influences the story, by evaluating the groups that regulate and limit each, and the relationship between them all. We will concluded by creating a story and taking it through each medium to evaluate its strength and weaknesses.

The methods that movies, television, and video games use to write their stories are similar. Movies are written by the writer alone. Television shows use many different writers working together under the supervision of a showrunner. Video games have no standard method of creation, when it comes to the writing, and are designed rather than written.

Writers aren't the only ones involved in telling the story; whether movie, television, or video game. In both the movies and television, there are directors, actors, and editors. In video games there is the player who ultimately decides what story gets told. Since all three are commercial media, there is always the studios, who fund development, and the influence they exert.

The content of movies, television, and video games are also subject to regulation and limitation. The movies are rated by the Motion Picture Association of American. Television is subject to both the Federal Communication Commission and the network's Standards and Practises legal division. Video games, much like movies, are rated to provide parents with information about the content of video games. They are rated by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board.

Despite their differences in how they are created, there is an underlying relationship between the three media. There's a central story where a character undergoes a transition from one state of being to the opposite state. This central story is that of a movie. This central story takes place in a world, which could have many side stories to help the main character complete the central story. This describes a video game. If these particular side stories and main story are put in a particular order, it would describe a television show.

To illustrate the principles and the central claim of this paper, a story will taken to outline stage for each of the three media.

Ultimately, television is shown to be the superior medium for story telling. Movies are too narrow and give to much control to nonwriters. Video games give all control to nonwriters and nonstory tellers: the game designer and the player. Television gives full control to writers and who are able to use their characters to tell robust stories.

3 Introduction

This paper argues that television is the superior story telling medium. This is established by investigating the method each uses to be written, by comparing who besides writers influences the story, by evaluating the groups that regulate and limit each, and the relationship between them all. We will concluded by creating a story and taking it through each medium to evaluate its strength and weaknesses.

The methods that movies, television, and video games use to write their stories are similar. Movies are written by the writer alone. A writer will create a hook that gets people interested in their story. They will flesh the hook out into a log line, which includes a title. The writer will then turn their story into a summary, make sure to hit a few predetermined key story points or beats. They will then compose an outline, describing the scenes and the conflict and emotional change in each scene. From there, they can write the script.

Television shows use many different writers working together. They work under the supervision of a showrunner, who is a senior writer and often the show's creator. When the show is created, a template for future episodes is established. The template describes what the show will be like, what the audience will see every week. This includes a hook, an attractive fantasy, characters we never get tired of, venue, genre, tone, program length, and network and time slot. Once the template has been established, the writer's will use it to generate springboards, or episode ideas. The springboards will then be "broken." This is the process of establishing what will happen before the episode cuts away to commercial. The idea is to ensure that the act outs generate enough interest for the viewer to wait through the commercial break. After stories are broken and scripts are written, the entire writing staff will rewrite the script together until they are ready to be shot.

Video games have no standard method of creation, when it comes to the writing. Though video games offer intriguing possibilities for the writer, the fact remains that video games are designed and not written. They are created by a game designer and not a writer. This means that the game's designer has control over the characters, the setting, and how the plot unfolds.

Writers aren't the only ones involved in telling the story; whether movie, television, or video game. In both the movies and television, there are directors, actors, and editors. In video games there is the player who ultimately decides what story gets told. Since all three are commercial media, there is always the studios, who fund development, and the influence they exert.

For movies and television directors, actors, and editors all influence the story and the way it is told. Directors have two main responsibility: the shooting of the script and working with the actors. The directors choose which shots to make, which can emphasise different parts of the story. As a director brings a script to life, so an actor brings a character to life. The actor relies on the feedback from the director to steer their performance. The editor is responsible for assembling all the footage into a coherent visual story. In video games the player ultimately decides how much of the story gets told. The player is given the controls through the uses of the game's mechanic. The studios have influence in funding. They will only fund those projects they believe will earn a return.

The content of movies, television, and video games are also subject to regulation and limitation. The movies are rated by the Motion Picture Association of American. They claim to provide ratings in order to help parents decide which movies are appropriate for their children. After investigation, it seems to be an entirely commercial system which favours the studios. Television is subject to both the

Federal Communication Commission and the network's Standards and Practises legal division. The Federal Communication Commission is a government body charged with regulating the public broadcasting sphere. The Standards and Practises legal division protects the network and their advertising revenue stream. Video games, much like movies, are rated to provide parents with information about the content of video games. They are rated by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board.

Despite their differences in how they are created, there is an underlying relationship between the three media. There's a central story where a character undergoes a transition from one state of being to the opposite state. This central story is that of a movie. This central story takes place in a world, which could have many side stories to help the main character complete the central story. This describes a video game. If these particular side stories and main story are put in a particular order, it would describe a television show.

To illustrate the principles and the central claim of this paper, a story will taken to outline stage for each of the three media. The movie version will be shown to have the narrowest story. The television version will be shown to have the greatest story telling capacity. The game version will come a close second, but only because it is written as a campaign for *Dungeons & Dragons*. If it is turned into a video game, the choices available would be severely limited because the player's choices would have to be predetermined.

Ultimately, television is shown to be the superior medium for story telling. Movies are too narrow and give to much control to nonwriters. Video games give all control to nonwriters and nonstory tellers: the game designer and the player. Television gives full control to writers and are able to use their characters to tell robust stories.

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4 Writing the Story

This section answer the question, "which has the best method for writing a story?"

4.1 Movies

4.1.1 Writing

4.1.1.1 In the Beginning..

The two main source of ideas for movies are the studio and the writer. When the studio creates the idea, the writer is pretty much locked into following it through until the end, which is marked by a pay cheque. Writers have much more leeway when creating their own idea. This is the usual route as movie writers are rarely, if ever, on staff and can afford to pursue their own ideas.

The best method I've discovered for writing a movie begins with the hook. With the hook you boil the idea of a movie down to an essential concept that intrigues people. This is key to focusing on the core of the story. If you can't get people interested from the get-go, no amount of star power can save the movie (see *Gigli*. Actually, no. Don't).

The term "hook" is also used in conjunction with "high concept." No one seems to be able to identify concretely what a high concept is, but Epstein's definition of hook fits rather nicely. The best example of high concept comes from the movie *Liar, Liar* written by Paul Guay & Stephen Mazur: A lawyer can't tell lies. This is a simple, intriguing statement that implies a movie.

While the hook comes from Epstein (2002), once you have it you can begin on Snyder's log line (2005). The log line is related, and almost overlaps, with the hook. Snyder gives it some more defining requirements, however. In his words, a good log line is

1. ironic

2. gives a compelling mental picture

3. suggests an audience

4. suggests a cost

5. has a killer title.

Snyder's first requirement of irony is exactly the idea of Epstein's hook, which itself is the idea behind a high concept. This is the idea that gets people intrigued to know more. Since movies are visual, setting up a compelling mental picture will give the writer an idea of what the movie will look like. Figuring out who the audience will be helps not only as a sales tool, but also helps the writer establish the tone and audience's knowledge and expectations of the movie. The cost gives the studios an idea of potential profit, in conjunction with the audience, and also lets the writer know if there will be a helicopter chase across the Grand Canyon or a heated debate in a coffee shop. The title is often solely used by the movie going audience to determine if they will see the movie (a la *Snakes on a Plane*).

The importance of getting all these elements together this early in the process can not be overstated. If the writer can't get their idea to fit into these requirements they probably don't have a viable movie. If they can't get their idea to fit into these requirements they certainly don't have a saleable movie. As

Epstein (2002) says, there's no point in writing a screenplay that won't get produced. I would modify this a bit to say there's no point in writing a screenplay that won't get sold.

If the writer has followed these steps they can now do their own testing. They have their log line, which is a log line is a one or two sentence version of the movie with a title. This can be unleashed hundreds of times a day by the writer on the unsuspecting public. Every time the writer goes into a grocery store, coffee shop, or even just on the street, they can stop people and ask if they're interested. If the writer, using only the title and log line, can stop someone and generate interest, the writer has an idea for a movie that can actually go somewhere.

This method of idea refinement can also be adapted for the other two media because it highlights the importance of starting small and checking with the potential audience. That is the movie version and the television version would be quite similar, given the similarities between movies and television. The version for video games tends to be an actual game itself, something like a board game, but the idea is similar. To check if there is any merit in following through. Are you just wasting time, or do you have something?

Once the writer has created their log line they can move on to the next step. It is possible to sell the idea (log line) on its own. This is the preferable method because the writer can receive payment to then write the script, or at least take the idea to the outline stage. Most scripts are written on spec (speculation), that is, with no promise of payment. This latter option has some advantages, which will be addressed in the Helping Hands section.

4.1.1.2 Structuring the Story

The next step in creating the script comes from Snyder (2005). This is the "Blake Snyder Beat Sheet," abbreviated to B2S2. I find it important to note that the fifteen steps in the Beat Sheet correspond quite highly with Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey and Christopher Vogler's interpretation of the Hero's Journey for movies. To me, this is no accident. Campbell (1973) has analyzed the world's myths and found an underlying structure he calls the Monomyth or Hero's Journey. After working as a development executive Vogler applied Campbell's ideas to movies and wrote about his findings in Vogler (2007).

Here's a quick comparison of the three:

Campbell	Vogler	Snyder
Departure, Separation	*Act One*	
World of the Common Day	Ordinary World	Opening Image, Theme Stated, Setup
Call to Adventure	Call to Adventure	Catalyst
Refusal of the Call	Refusal of the Call	Debate
Supernatural Aid	Meeting with the Mentor	
Crossing the First Threshold	Crossing the First Threshold	Break into Two
Belly of the Whale		
Descent, Initiation, Penetration	*Act Two*	
Road of Trials	Test, Allies, Enemies	Fun and Games, (B Story)
	Approach to the Inmost Cave	(B Story)
Meeting with the Goddess	Ordeal	Midpoint
Woman as Temptress		
Atonement with the Father		
Apotheosis		
		Bad Guys Close In
		All is Lost
The Ultimate Boon	Reward	Dark Night of the Soul
Return	*Act Three*	
Refusal of the Return		
The Magic Flight	The Road Back	Break into Three
Rescue from Within		
Crossing the Threshold		
Return		
Master of the Two Worlds	Resurrection	Finale
Freedom to Live	Return with the Elixir	Final Image

Snyder doesn't line up exactly, but fairly close on the main beats. Snyder's beat sheet has more to do with the structure of a saleable movie than pure storytelling. I think it's important to note the Snyder has been a working spec screenwriter for over twenty years, has over twelve spec sales, and "written by" credits on two movies. Campbell and Vogler have none. We can still see quite clearly the relationship between classic mythology and salable movies.

Snyder's beat sheet with page numbers in brackets. One page roughly equals one minute of screen time:

- Opening Image (1)

  The very impression of what a movie is – its tone, its mood, the type and scope of the film – are all found in the opening image.

- Theme Stated (5)

  Somewhere in the first five minutes of a well-structured screenplay, someone will pose a question or make a statement that is the theme of a movie.

- Set-up(1-10)

  This is the make or break section of the script. Every character must be introduced or at least hinted at. The main character's flaws must be shown. This is also where the Six Things That Need Fixing are shown.

- Catalyst (12)

  In the set-up the screenwriter, have told us what the world is like and now in the catalyst moment they knock it all down. This sets the main story in motion.

- Debate (12-25)

  This is where the main character debates whether to purse the story or not.

- Break into Two (25)

  This is the act break where we leave the old world.

- B Story (30)

  The B story is generally the "love story." It is also the story that carries the theme of the movie.

- Fun and Games (30-55)

  This is the promise of the premise. This is the section of the movie where most of the trailer moments come from. In this section we see the log line actualized.

- Midpoint (55)

  The main character has either a false victory or false defeat that is mirrored in the All is Lost Section, although generally a false victory.

- Bad Guys Close In (55-75)

  After a false victory this becomes where the antagonist regroups. If the midpoint was a false defeat this becomes where the protagonist begins to regroup.

- All Is Lost (75)

  This section is the opposite of the midpoint. Often includes a death or something death related.

- Dark Night of the Soul (75-85)

  This is the "darkness before dawn" moment for the protagonist.

- Break into Three (85)

Both in the external story (the A story) and internal story (the B story), which now meet and intertwine, the hero has prevailed, passed every test, and dug deep to find the solution. Now all they need to do is apply it.

- Finale (85-110)

    This is where the lessons learned are applied and the antagonists are overcome.

- Final Image (110)

    This is the opposite of the opening image. It is the proof that change has occurred.

This beat sheet will fill up one page. Only a sentence or two are needed in each section. This just give the story some structure, not a straight jacket.

Epstein (2002) has a great alternative to writing up a beat sheet. He recommends telling the full story out loud to as many people as possible. My own view is that both are great tools. The beat sheet puts the story into a structure, the oral telling allows the writer to see the reactions to the story and its progression. The boring parts, the obvious parts, the scary parts, the funny parts, all become immediately clear to the writer. The writer can them emphasis some or leave others out. Anything the writer can't remember can't be important.

The beat sheets orders the story beats in a step that is useful to writer in helping to structure the story. It is only for the writer and no one else will see it. The writer can now move on to the outline.

4.1.1.3 The Board

Outlines have a specific meaning under the WGA contract, as writers do get paid for their creation. In a generic sense, the outline is a document that details each scene of the final screenplay with short description. An outline gives a sense of how the structure determined in the beat sheet will come together to form the final movie. Most writers will structure an outline with a scene line and a description of what will happen in that scene.

Snyder has a wonderful alternative for this traditional outline. He calls it The Board. It is a regular cork board divided into four sections. One for act one, two for act two, and one for act three. Act two is split before and after the midpoint beat. On this board will go forty index cards each representing one scene. He recommends nine for each section and four additional scenes where ever the writer best sees fit.

Onto each card goes a scene line (eg, `INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY`), the basic action of the scene, the conflict, and the emotional change. The basic action of the scene is a simple description like "Bob confronts Helen about her secret." The emotional change in the scene might be "Bob starts out hopeful, ends up disappointed." As for conflict, "Bob wants to know the secret, Helen can't tell him." Using this card system ensures each scene in and of itself is interesting and contributes to the development of the movie.

This board allows the writer to be able to see the movie and each scene within the movie all at once. The writer can easily identify holes in the structure and compensate for them. While this isn't a device one can readily have the general public read like the previous steps, it can be shown to other writers if help is needed. It also lets the writer move scenes around, or switch them in and out before any time has been spent writing. This helps save time and energy fixing the structure before anything is written.

Once all these ducks are in a row, the writer can begin the actual task of writing the screenplay from

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start to finish. There are no tips, tricks, or techniques to this. The writer must simply sit in their chair and start typing.

> I've probably said this before but: *inspiration never strikes*. When you've got a job to do you have to *sit your ass down in the chair and just start*. Some days it starts to flow, and some days it doesn't. Nevertheless, you still have to put in the time. This is called "*fighting the good fight*." It has everything to do with craft and discipline, and very little to do with artistic inspiration.
>
> Denis McGrath (2005).

Once the screenplay is written, then the real work begins. For works are not written, they are rewritten. There are various techniques and tips for rewriting, but they boil down to ensure that the resulting screenplay conforms to the criteria, ie beat sheet & outline, that was written first. There are also a couple of checks to be applied as well.

These include things like checking to see if the hero leads the action. There isn't a lot of room in a movie, Epstein has compared it to a short story. The hero needs to drive the action, not just react to it. Does it make sense? This can also be applied to the outline stage. A plot is a connected series of events that tie together logically. The writer needs to make sure that this logic makes sense. A big mistake is for the characters to talk the plot. This is almost like having the plot discussed rather than acted. Dialogue shouldn't be flat and on the nose; it shouldn't be obvious. Flat dialogue is also known as "asked & answered" (Sandler, 2007). If a character gets an answer that is expected, it is a sign that the dialogue is flat.

The screenplay is then sent off to various studios to see who is interested in buying. Or, if the writer is new, to various agents to see if they can find buyers. The writer gets their cheque and the studio gets their screenplay.

That is the general, spec screenplay way that movies are written, especially by new writers. There are some modifications for established writers. First off, most movie writers earn their living, or at least the greatest part of their incomes, from rewrites. Once a studio purchases a spec script they will generally want changes. This job will be assigned to a different writer than originally wrote the script. After this second writer is done with the script, the studio, or other attached elements (actors, directors), may want further changes. These will be assigned to a *third* writer. This process can continue through many rewrites spanning many years. If this happens, the script is said to be in Development Hell. It is a fate that most screenplays are never spared.

4.1.2 Examples

So let's look at these stages using *Miss Congeniality* by Marc Lawrence & Katie Ford & Caryn Lucas as an example.

4.1.2.1 Log Line

The log line: An ugly duckling FBI agent goes undercover as a contestant to catch a killer at the American Miss pageant.

- Irony/Hook/High Concept: This is the mismatch of the ugly duckling/tomboy FBI agent thrust into the world of a beauty pageant.

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- Compelling Mental Picture: I first imagine a lost, frumpy, poorly dressed female FBI agent surrounded by the carefully design and choreographed pageant contestants. The contrast makes me chuckle.

- Audience: I see date movie. Glamour and guns.

- Cost: Couple of big pageant set pieces. Could get some star names for some of the roles (as they did). Estimating budgets is something of a skill that many outside the industry lack. My guess would be $20 million, more if bigger names sign on. Actual budget was (allegedly) $45 million (Numbers, 2000).

- Title: Miss Congeniality is the title given to the runner up at the Miss USA pageant. I'm not quite sure how that connects to the change in the lead role. The best example ever: Legally Blond.

4.1.2.2 Beat Sheet

Here's how the beat sheet breaks down (Snyder, 2005):

- Opening Image: opens on Sandra Bullock's character in flash back as a playground tough

- Theme Stated: When Sandra declares that she doesn't need to worry about being "feminine" because she's an FBI agent, that statement is the movie's theme.

- The Set-up: By page 10 we have met everyone who will appear in the A story of the movie and "set up" the world.

- Catalyst: News comes that there's been a murder threat at the American Miss Pageant. We also meet those is charge of the pageant. To stop the murders, Sandra must go undercover at the pageant.

- Debate: But can she pull it off? It is answered after several meeting mentor Michael Caine who agrees to take on the challenge of turning Sandra into a sexy contestant.

- Break into Two: Sandra strides from her makeover looking hot in her mini-skirt. Everyone seems impressed, but she stumbles at the end.

- Fun and Games: Includes Sandra's water-glass talent show demonstration that ends as she leaps off the stage to nab a suspect.

- B Story: The love story is actually between Sandra and the female contestants, with Sandra learning from them how to be feminine.

- Midpoint: A new threat to the pageant is announced and Sandra's stakes are raised.

- Bad Guys Close In: Sandra's doubts about her femininity grow, her conflict with her mentor deepens, and, in this case, actual bad guys move closer, unseen in the shadows of the pageant.

- All is Lost: Told by her boss to stand down, Sandra refuses. She is given an ultimatum: either leave the case or be fired.

- Dark Night of the Soul: Sandra arrives for the pageant finale and is a total mess. She is lost in the netherworld of being neither FBI agent nor full-fledge woman.

- Break into Three: With the help from the friends she has made as part of the B-Story, she is put back together by the other contestants for the pageant finale.

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- Finale: A classic bit of synthesis as Sandra uses her FBI skills on stage. This answers the question raised in Theme Stated: Yes, she can be both tough and sexy.
- Final Image: The opposite of the opening, Sandra is surrounded by women, receiving the Miss Congeniality Award.

4.1.2.3 The Board

Here's an example of a card that would go up on The Board for the All Is Lost beat:

`INT. HOTEL ROOM – NIGHT`

Sandra Bullock pleads with Ernie Hudson to investigate Candice Bergen.

+/- Sandra is excited over a promising lead; ends deflated

>< Sandra wants to follow the new lead; Ernie wants to close the investigation

4.1.3 Analysis

So what can we say about this system? I think it is important to note that I have been discussing screenplays and not movies. That is a big and important difference. I'll get into it more in the Helping Hands section later, but the bottom line is that directors make movies, not writers.

There are advantages to writing movies. Most people know how movies get made and there is a certain glamour with working in the movies. That was the original point of Hollywood: to make movies. Television came later. Not that one writes for glory, but it is nice.

The biggest disadvantage to writing movies that there is a very slim chance you'll see them produced. Most scripts don't go anywhere and the ones that do will probably be rewritten. So even if your script is produced, it probably won't look anything like what you wrote.

4.2 Television

First we'll discuss how television shows are created before how television shows are written. Television shows are created a lot like spec screenplays are written. There are a couple of differences.

4.2.1 Getting on the Air

A quick word about the structure of the television world. The production company is the company that develops and produces the show (Gervich, 2008). Studios finance shows and supply them to the networks, which distribute the the shows themselves. The most recognizable networks are the six broadcasters: ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, CW, and MyNetworkTV. With all of these levels, there are still only seven companies that make and air television shows (Gervich, 2008). There are seven parent companies, seven media conglomerates: CBS Corporation, General Electric, News Corporation, Time Warner, Walt Disney Co., Sony Corporation, and Viacom.

In the film world, movies are being written and produced year round. The larger film studios do schedule specific film release dates for specific types of films, but it a writer can write a screenplay whenever they want. This is not true in television. Though the 2008 WGA Strike caused many to wonder about moving to a year round pilot schedule, the reality is that television operates on a a specific time table.

Getting a new show on the air is essentially a two year process (Douglas, 2007). The basic outline for a creator is to pitch the production company, to get paid to write the pilot, to shoot the pilot, to air the pilot, to pick up the series. At each stage, less and less make it to the next, to the point where only one to three series are picked up. That's just for the first season. Getting renewed for the next is an entirely different matter.

Year one, for creating a series, begins in April with the proposal, some kind of example of the show (Douglas, 2007). This can take a couple of different forms. A television format is a proposal document that outlines what to expect from a show. Sometimes a spec pilot will be written. This is not always a desirable option because writers can be paid later in the process for writing the pilot. Still, Marc Cherry wrote a spec pilot called *Desperate Housewives* and it seemed to work out okay for him. A back door pilot is a story told in a different medium with the intent of adapting it for television. The idea here is to demonstrate to executives (whomever they may be) that the series concept is viable. This is what Joss Whedon did with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* He wrote the movie with the idea of turning it into a television series. The advantage here is even if it can't be adapted, you're still left with a movie.

The next step is to take the pitch to a production company (Douglas, 2007). As mentioned above, it is the production company that creates the show. Production companies hear a lot of pitches, but only from approved sources. Those sources tend be co-executive producers and up. While in the movie world studios will read anyone's screenplay, television production outfits won't. The reason is simple: with movies, they're buying your idea; in television, they're buying your ability to deliver a show. Production companies are looking for solid ideas, but only from people with proven track records.

If the production company likes the idea, they'll go look for a studio to help with the financing (Douglas, 2007). Television shows are deficit financed. They are paid for at a loss. Networks that air the shows only pay about 75% of the cost per episode. So if a show cost $5 million per episode, the production company will lose a more than a million dollars every week. They just don't have the ability. Studios do. Studios make their money when a show enters syndication. That is, when a show is resold to networks other than the original broadcasting network. This happens after about one hundred episodes or four to five years. Only a few shows make it that far so when they do, they make up for all the ones that don't. *Seinfeld* is recently being renewed in syndication and will earn over $3 billion dollars through 2011 (Stepakoff, 2007).

Sometime in the summer the networks begin hearing the pitches that have made it this far (Douglas, 2007). In contrast to the studios and production companies, that make their money from syndication, networks make their money from the actual airing of the show. They make this money from advertisers. This makes for a bizarre television twist: it is the viewers that are the product. When pitches are at this stage, there is about a 20% pass rate for the next few stages (Douglas, 2007). Of the five hundred or so pitches that the network hears, about one hundred pilot scripts will be commissioned. Of those about twenty will be shot. Of those about four or five will be put on the air. Of those only one or two will be picked up.

The next step for the creator is to write the pilot (Douglas, 2007). Pilots come in two flavours: ongoing and premise. Ongoing pilots show the world and the characters already in place. *How I Met Your Mother*, *Friends,* and *ER* had ongoing pilots. Premise pilots are origin stories. They demonstrate how the characters and the world came together. Pilots for *Lost*, *Alias,* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* show how the characters came together. Which ever type is chosen, it is the pilot's job to show what a typical episodes is going to be like. It will give the production company, studio, network, and,

ultimately, the viewer and idea of what the show is like.

February through April is known as pilot season (Douglas, 2007). This is the time of year when those pilot scripts that have been green lit are now produced. Pilot season is a tricky time of year because all the production companies are trying to line up the best talent, above and bellow the line, at the same time. This makes getting good help on lesser profile pilot shoots tricky. Still, George Clooney was in fifteen failed pilots before *ER*. Once the pilot is shot, the networks do testing on it in Las Vegas, since Vegas attracts tourists from all over the world.

In May comes the announcement for "pick-ups" (Douglas, 2007). Pick-ups come in one of four varieties: full season, short order, mid-season, or backup scripts. Full season network pick-ups are for twenty two episodes, which are usually ordered as thirteen plus the back nine. That is, the network is committing to thirteen episodes with a contingent placed on the last nine. Short orders are generally for six episodes, but can be less. The network isn't very confident in the show and wants to see how it does on a limited run. The American version of *The Office* had a six episode pick-up and the aforementioned billions-of-dollars-earning *Seinfeld* had a short order of four episodes for its first season. Mid-season pick-ups are used to replace early cancelled shows or are put on later in the year, often in January or February. These pick-ups tend to have a reduced number of episodes made and are becoming more common as networks try for year round programming. The network asks for backup scripts when they like the series idea but the pilot didn't work, for whatever reason. More scripts are asked for and another pilot may be shot.

June is a very important month for television writers. June is staffing season (Douglas, 2007). Staffing season is when the all the series that have been picked up for the fall begin to hire writers. Hiring can even begin as early as late April, when the jacaranda tree begins to bloom all around LA (Stepakoff, 2007). Once the staff is assembled, often by July, they begin writing the show. The writing staff works ahead of the production staff (shooting the show) so everyone can stay ahead of the network's air date. Even with that lead time, television is the closest of the three to instant cultural feedback. Video games take three to five years to be produced and screenplay to screen, a movie can take seven to ten years. *South Park* has an episode on air in under a week (Driver, 2009).

The staff will continue to write the show while getting feedback from network and studio executives, Nielson ratings, critics, and the viewing audience (Douglas, 2007). The writers will discover about where the show is headed and how they're going to bring it there as they are writing. They'll write until the end of February, when the whole cycle is going to begin again.

So that's how a television *series* gets on the air, how about an individual *show*? Well, first we need to talk about what a television show is and what is does.

4.2.2 The Template

The key to a successful series is consistency (Epstein, 2006). The viewers tune in every week to see the same thing. For *CSI*, they tune in to see a case solved with forensic evidence. The key to this consistency is the show's template.

In a nutshell the template is the structure of the show that is delivered each week. The template includes a hook, an attractive fantasy, characters we never get tired of , venue, genre, tone, program length, and network and time slot.

- The hook functions much like that of a movie. It is there to entice people into watching.

- The attractive fantasy is a situation that the audience would like to be in. The characters on *The OC* still have all the problems of regular people but are rich and beautiful. Or consider *Friends* where not one of them could afford the apartments they lived in. There is a flip side, a negative fantasy, where the audience *doesn't* want to be in that situation: *Oz, Sopranos*, or even *Seinfeld*.

- A television show can function without a hook or and attractive fantasy, but not without its characters. If a movie is its plot, then a television show is its characters. The characters are the reason most people tune in to watch a television show.

- The venue can help generate potential stories. This is partly the reason their are so many cop, lawyer, and doctor shows on the air.

- The genre refers to what type of story is told. Examples include crime, sitcom, romance.

- The tone defines how the story is told. Is it serious or light hearted?

- Program length obviously defines how much story can be told, but there is little cross over between the half hour sitcoms and hour long dramas; though there are hour long comedy-drama shows, like *Ugly Betty*.

- The network and time slot have an effect for two reasons. Networks do try to brand themselves and will consequently only air certain types of shows. The old WB network had a particularly strong youth oriented brand. The time slot has an effect as to what kind of stories are told. The later in the night, the more adult oriented stories that can be told.

The last consideration to be made is if the story is episodic or serial based story telling. Episodic stories tell only one story per episodes while serials tell a story over the course of a season or series. Many often combine the two. *Veronica Mars* is a good example of balance between the two.

The creator or creators are the ones that setup the template for the show. It is part of the pitch to the production company, studio, and network. It then becomes the job of the writing to staff to fill this template with every episode for the next several years.

So how do they accomplish this?

4.2.3 Writing TV

4.2.3.1 Springboards

The first step is to create springboards (Epstein, 2006). Springboards are ideas for the show in a nutshell. Great springboards use the show's central conflict to tell a new story or deepen an old one. In a properly constructed show, the main character wants something their never going to get; at least not while the show's on. How the characters struggle to get what they want is the essence of any show. So a great springboard will cut to the central struggle. Great springboards use the template to what no other show can do. Episodes of *The West Wing* that deal with the high powered world of Washington politics. When John Wells took over for Aaron Sorkin, the show became more about the lives of the main characters and ratings suffered. I for one, stopped watching. There is no one formula for great televisions episodes, the hope is to challenge the main characters in a way that hasn't been done before.

Once the springboard is created (and approved) the outline can be written. This is where television makes a huge distinction from movies. In movies, it's convenient to talk about their structure in acts, but they're not really there. There's one continuous story. In television, every so often the story stops

dead, and commercials are run. Television has real live act breaks. These are addressed in the outline stage and the process is referred to as "breaking" the story (Epstein, 2006).

4.2.3.2 Breaking the Story

There are three general turning points that go into a television show: teasers, tags, and act outs. The teaser is also sometimes referred to as a cold open. It is the part of the story that appears before the opening credits. It's job is to set up the story in a way that draws the audience in and makes them want to keep watching. In *House* the teaser is used to set up the patient of the week. Tags appear at the end of the show, often over the credits. It can either be used to draw the viewer back next week, or to wrapped up one of the story lines. In sitcoms, it either wraps up the B story, a runner (a recurring gag that isn't substantial enough for its own story line), or is just a stand alone gag. The act outs are the story beats that occur just before the commercials. They are what the act goes out on. These are designed to keep the audience watching through the commercials and back for the rest of the show. As *Charlie Jade* showrunner Bob Wertheimer said: "We make our money on teasers, tags, and act outs" (Epstein, 2006).

On many shows, the episode will be outlined by the room. That is, the whole writing staff will get together in a room and work together to "break" the story. This means that the teasers, tags, and act outs are determined. Since this is the most important part of television writing, the more writers working on it, the better. All sitcoms are broken by the room and many hour long dramas are too. Some hour longs do let the individual writer break the story by themselves, or the showrunner hands a story already broken to the writer. Once the story is broken, it can be outlined and submitted for approval. First to the showrunner and then up the chain to the studio and the network. Once the outline is approved the script can be written.

4.2.3.3 Rewriting, and rewriting, and rewriting, and...

In writing the first draft, the writer will simply sit down and pound out the episode. Any problems they encounter will be discussed with the showrunner for their approval. Some story problems are just not evident at the outline stage, sometimes they are only visible when writing the script. Once the first draft is written, the writer will submit it to the showrunner. The showrunner will give their notes and the writer will write the second draft. After a the second draft, there's more notes, but fewer than for the first draft. The writer will then make a final polish. It is then taken for a table read.

The table read is just what it sounds like: the actors, writers, and certain producers sit around the table and the script is read (Stepakoff, 2007). Table reads are more common in sitcoms than hour longs. This gives the writers a chance to hear how the lines are delivered and which jokes work and which do not. After the read through, the script goes back into the room to be rewritten. That is, the entire writing staff will go through the script and edit it. This happens on day one of a typical sitcom schedule.

On day two, the writers will pick back up where they left off: rewriting the script and punching up the jokes (Stepakoff, 2007). The production staff will begin building any sets that are necessary while the actors rehearse.

Day three is for polishing and punch up (Stepakoff, 2007). At least, for the writers. It is not uncommon to have writers brought in for just this day. These writers are comedy machines who will come in and may only put in one or two jokes, but they will be the most memorable and funniest of the episode. It is not uncommon for these specialists to make more for one day's work than the other

writers will make for that episode. Being able to deliver quality material under tight deadlines and high pressure is a highly valued skill.

Day four is the dress rehearsal (Stepakoff, 2007). It is not uncommon for the writers to be working until 4am trying to get the script ready for the actors in the morning. While the actors are rehearsing, the writing staff is watching the performance and deciding if any material needs to be changed.

Day five is show day (Stepakoff, 2007). This is when the show is taped or filmed in front of a live studio audience. Now with the added benefit of an actual audience, the show is still being written as it is performed, If a joke doesn't work the scene is stopped, the writers converge, and begin pitching replacement jokes. This is an ultimate pressure cooker and those that can come through with new jokes in this situation are worth their weight in gold.

So what is the writer's room? This is a term that generally refers to an actual conference room with a big table and a projection screen that all the writers congregate in to do rewrites and pitches. Specifically it used to speak of all the writers as a group, rather than any physical location. The number of writers depends on the show's budget and the type of show. Sitcoms have larger writing staffs as more people are need to create comedy. The room, and the whole show, is led by the showrunner. As the title suggests, they run the show. All of it. They are often the creator of the show, but are always in charge of every aspect of the production. They are responsible for the hiring, inspiring, and firing of all staff and crew, from the lead actor to the lowest grip (Gervich, 2008). They deal with network and studio executives, publicists, managers, and agents. They set the long term story arcs for the show and run the writer's room.

The writers are credited according to rank. Here's the general structure, starting at the bottom (Gervich, 2008):

- Staff writer
- Story editor
- Executive story editor
- Co-producer
- Producer
- Supervising producer
- Co-executive producer
- Executive producer

The assignment of the producer credit is getting a little out of hand these days, most of the producers credited on a series are actually writers. The big difference is the "produced by" credit, which is given to the line producer. The line producer manage the physical production (Gervich, 2008). They organize the schedule, maintain the budge, and hire the crew. They are ultimately responsible to the showrunner and do these tasks so the showrunner can focus on the creative side of production.

4.2.4 Examples

Just as we used *Miss Congeniality* to illustrate movies, we'll use the show *Leverage* to illustrate television.

4.2.4.1 Template

The short form version of the template: on *Leverage,* an evil corporate industrialist will screw a poor person out of their money and a high tech team of con artists and thieves will get revenge on their behalf.

- Hook

  A high tech team of con artist and thieves pull off audacious capers in order to get revenge on evil corporate industrialists.

- Attractive fantasy

  There are two. The first is that we, as an audience, get to fantasize that a group will protect us from evil corporations. The second is that we can be part of a highly skilled group of outlaws living purely by their wits.

- Characters

  o Nathan Ford: The boss.

  o Alec Hardison: Internet and Computer Fraud.

  o Eliot Spencer: Retrieval Specialist (the muscle, the heavy).

  o Parker: Thief.

  o Sophie Devereaux: Grifter.

- Venue

  Leverage has a standing set for their crew's office. The show gets many of its stories from those who insurance companies won't help with high medical costs. Since the show takes place in the pay-for-health-care-services United Sates, there is no shortage of stories.

- Genre

  The genre of *Leverage* is that of the caper/heist show.

- Tone

  One of the showrunners is a former stand up comedian so the show is also a comedy in addition to being an action show.

- Program length

  Leverage is one hour long.

- Network and time slot

  Leverage airs on TNT on Tuesday nights at 10pm.

4.2.4.2 Springboard

The basic elements for a springboard are (Epstein, 2006):

1. A compelling central character
2. with a goal, a problem, or an opportunity
3. who faces obstacles and/or an antagonist.

4. If they succeed, they and/or the world wins something he didn't have before (stakes), and/or

5. if they fail, they and/or the world is worse off than if he hadn't tried (jeopardy).

For the pilot episode of *Leverage* the springboard breaks down like this:

1. Ford and crew

2. have the opportunity to take money from Pierson Avionics

3. who face Victor Dubenich, head of Bering Aerospace

4. If they succeed, they get money and revenge and

5. if they fail, they will end up in jail.

4.2.4.3 Breaking the Story

The next step is to break the story to determine the act outs:

Teaser	Victor Dubenich asks Nate Ford to head up a team of thieves he's hired to steal data from his rival company
Act One	With the heist completed, the team split their money and walk away
Act Two	After being double crossed by Dubenich, the team recruits a new member to help get revenge.
Act Three	The team bugs Dubenich's office and the new member Sophie is running a new con on him.
Act Four	Dubenich discovers the bugs and calls the FBI.
Act Five	The team executes their plan, steal back the data, send Dubenich (the real criminal) to jail, and cash in on Bering Aerospace's falling stock price.

Though it doesn't have a true tag, there is a scene at the end of the episode which sets up the rest of the series.

4.2.5 Analysis

Television writing has some advantages over movie writing. Television writers work with many different writers in television, so a writer has more opportunity to learn from those around them. Television also has an hierarchy that writers move up through giving television writers something like an apprenticeship, which allows them to improve their writing skills over time. Movie writers work alone and compete with each other for work. Television writers work in groups and collaborate together to get work and write stories (this tends to make television writers more sociable and friendly). The production requirements of television place more pressure on the writers to work harder and under a schedule. Does that mean that television writers are always doing their best work? No. But it does make them generally more reliable and able to meet deadlines; which is a highly valuable skill with millions of dollars on the line.

Television gives writers an apprenticeship, a mentorship, and gets them used to working with tight deadlines. The showrunner, who is in charge of all aspects of production, is a senior writer with seven to ten years of experience in television writing. For these reasons, the method television works with is a superior method.

4.3 Video Games

As we switch to talk about how video games, their creation, and the input from writers, we're going to hit a major snag: that of terminology. Hollywood has been making movies from the early 1900s and making television from the early 1940s. The jobs, development cycle, and language has been standardize for more than one hundred years. While terms like DP, UPM, and showrunner may not have much meaning to someone outside the biz, they are well know inside and require no further explanation. This is not always true for video games. The language of the video games has no industry wide standardization, and often not even between a publishing or production company's divisions. As such, I'll be using a generalized language, borrowed mostly from Hollywood or as descriptive as I can make it.

4.3.1 The Development Cycle

The video game development cycle begins with Concept Development (Bates, 2004). In this stage the game designer may work alone, or with a tech lead, concept artist, or producer. The game designer is mainly responsible for the game mechanic (Fullerton, Swain, & Hoffman, 2004). The game mechanic is the moment-to-moment decision making and response cycle that the player engages in during game play (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). What does this mean? The mechanic is essentially what actions the player can do and the results of those actions. Consider *Donkey Kong:* the player can move, climb, and jump. When the player jumps, the character (Mario – yes that Mario) will move up in the air a certain distance. The player can use this action -> result to decide on a method for avoiding barrels. This player informing feedback closes the loop of the mechanic and begins it again. That is the essence of game design. Bad game mechanic means a bad game, just like a bad script means a bad movie.

The next phase is Preproduction or Proof of Concept (Bates, 2004). In this phase the designer will create some kind of prototype of the mechanic in order to test it. The simplest way to prototype is to create a board game version of the game. This can be done quickly and cheaply, and testing can begin almost immediately. Once the designer is armed with a prototype, they can be recruiting just about anyone to play it. With this immediate feedback the designer can make changes, either to fix problems or expand game play. These changes can then be tested and the whole process repeated until the designer is satisfied. This is, of course, the theoretical ideal. The video game industry is still dominated by programmers, and programmers program. The time to develop and fully test the game mechanic is often not used and many companies plunge ahead with faith that any problems can be fixed during production. They cannot.

After Preproduction comes the long haul of Production (Bates, 2004). Production is where the game is programmed, the art is created, voices are recorded, and the text is written (more about that later). This is the Bataan Death March of video games. The more work done before production, the easier it is to get through. Some projects never make it out of production, and have become famous for it. The first that comes to mind is *Duke Nukem Forever*, which was first scheduled for release in 1997 and has yet to be released. The last stages of production are called Alpha and Beta. The Alpha is the first mostly playable version of the game. When Alpha is reached, the focus switches from creating to polishing. Beta is the first full version of the game. After Beta, the only work done on the game is bug fixing.

The last step in development is Post Production (Fullerton, Swain, & Hoffman, 2004). Like the movies and television case, post production in games is largely about adding the music and sound effects. Video games also add a step of quality assurance. This is where the video game is treated like a piece of software and tested against the original design documents in order to see if it has accomplished what

was set out to do. The game can also be tested to ensure it is still as fun as the original prototype.

4.3.2 Design vs Writing

The closest analogy the writer of movies and television has in the game world is that of the game designer. This is true while at the same time it misses the point. In movies, it is the writer who delivers the a script that outlines a story, it's characters, plot, world, and development. In television the show's creator has created the world and it's characters and the writer's room delivers the plot every week. It is often the game designer who creates the world, the characters, and any development, though the designers primary responsible is to create the mechanic. Others are often brought in to deal with the world, any levels, and the characters. The story is second to the mechanic. The mechanic is created first and then the story is created in order to service that mechanic (Fullerton, Swain, & Hoffman, 2004).

Movies and television are written while games are designed. Games require an entire different set of skills. There is overlap, but the set for games is distinct. We'll look at the actual writing that goes into most games, for which writers are brought in to do, and then discuss the overlap between design and writing.

Video games contain a tremendous amount of written words. These are written by freelance writers, often technical or copy writers, and doesn't fall under the kind of writer or writing that we've been talking about up to this point. None the less, their work is there. Like any piece of software, video games are accompanied by manuals. These manuals are substantial writing projects in their own right. They are generally completed by technical writers during the production phase. These manuals are supplementary material created to help the player understand the game and answer any questions they might have. Most modern video games are full of dialogue spoken by voice actors. These lines are again created by freelance writers. Like most software, video games contain any number of menus for various in and out of game options, including in game help. Like the manuals, these will be written by writers. Many games also have in game material that has to be written. In the video game *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* has many books in the game that the player can collect and browse through.

4.3.3 The Spectrum

So writers are still involved in the creation of literary works, outside of the design and creation of the game. I've already talked about the creation of the game mechanic and its primacy, and uniqueness, to video games. What about the world, characters, and the story? And what is the analogy for levels? This is an important concept for video games that we don't see in movies or television. Their creation does not always fall to the designer, nor are they always present in a video game. We need to cover where we find story in video games and where we don't. We'll talk about what I call the Story Spectrum, which is entirely my own creation, so I'm not providing any references. It is based on solely on my experience playing video games and my awesome intellect.

The Story Spectrum has four main categories: Player Created, Contextual, String of Pearls, and Sandbox. I've dubbed them a spectrum because games will overlap and not be one type or the other. None the less, much like it is hard to tell when red becomes orange, the difference between yellow and blue is obvious. And like the colours, these four types are the strongest and most descriptive points on the spectrum.

First the Player Created. With this type the entire story is created in the player's mind. It does not exist

in the game at all, but rises from the player playing the game. I've noticed a tendency for humans to connect events regardless if their a connection or not. Or rather, given a string of events, a human mind will connect the dots with an underlying story. This category of games includes, and has its best real world analogy, in sports games. From a design standpoint, there is no story. There are simply games in which two teams compete in some contest for victory. Another example is the very popular *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* franchises. There are simply songs to be played. When speaking to people about their experiences with *Guitar Hero*, I will invariably hear some story about a time they played one song or another. This story is created by the player, it does not exist in the game in any way, shape, or form.

The second type is Contextual. These games, like Player Created, have players who create their own story through the game's events. Unlike the last type, there is often a concerted effort on the part of the designers to provide some back story or motivation for the players and the world. This back story gives rise to the "context" in which the game events occur. A great example is the *Red Alert* series; in fact, many real time strategy games fit in this category. With *Red Alert,* players are told that there is a world wide conflict and they guide their chosen army through a series of encounters. There is often a story in which the player participates (making very close to the next type), but the story the player recounts is largely their own creation; it's how they managed their way through the levels.

The next type is the String of Pearls. We can imagine a string of pearls: large areas connected by thin threads. Here we have a type of structure where the player is essential free to do whatever they want, and have many different kinds of encounters, as long as they hit key tasks to advance to the the next stage. The old Sierra and Lucas Arts adventure games are great examples: *Police Quest, Space Quest,* and the *Monkey Island* series. In the first *Police Quest* game, the player was free to roam around the police station and have encounters with the personnel inside, but the game only advanced when the player got into their squad car.

The last type is the Sandbox. This can be thought of as several Strings of Pearls all within the same game. Here we can think of each individual string as a quest, where each step generally doesn't not need to be completed all at the same time. *Grand Theft Auto 3*, *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, and *Fallout 3* are all examples of this type. Here the player is afforded almost complete freedom to explore the world and encounters different quests that can be completed at any time in any order. There is often one main quest that is the "story" of the game. With these games the multi-layering of the threads gives the appearance of a totally interactive and realistic world.

So we see that not all video games need a story or have one. And for many of these, a separate story specialist, a writer, is not need. The designer themselves, or in collaboration with the any or all members of the development team, can put together some kind of Context or String. This has been the traditional way story in video games is created, with the hiring of freelance writers to fill out manuals, menus, and the like, as described above. Having looked at the Spectrum, we can now get a better handle on the designer and the design team.

4.3.4 The Design Team

The design team consists of the game designer, the level designer, and puzzle designers (Bates, 2004). Again, these are more descriptors of functionality, rather than job titles or even separate people. As discussed previously the game designer's main responsibility is the design of the primary game mechanic. More than that, they are generally seen as the project's lead; the showrunner. The game designer is generally the reason a game is being created. They share that trait with the a Hollywood writer – nothing happens without them. Level designers are responsible for creating the sections of a

game that will eventually make up the whole. If a television season is one story and each episode is written by a different staff writer, then the level designer can be thought of as a staff writer. They must be conscious of how their part will help the whole experience. Puzzle designers are responsible for creating the obstacles and solutions for the player to encounter during a level. They must be careful to make sure that the obstacles are challenging, but the solutions are available to the dedicated player.

These jobs are found in all points on the spectrum, but we only start to see true story elements in the last two. The worlds and characters do require special attention as these types of games rely heavily on story. When people discuss the importance of story in games, they mean these last two types; when others claim that games don't need, or shouldn't have, stories, they mean the first two types.

The last two design functions to discuss are that of world design and character design. World design here means the creation of the full and total environment that the player will roam around in. On a practical level, world design can simply be the sum total of the level design, but it is better to have a unifying vision from which to design the levels. The world design lays out the possibilities for the player to experience, and the characters they will encounter. Whether one just describes the types of characters found, and leaves the details for another, or does the details themselves. Character creation/ design is just like that discussed for movies and television. The one exception may be the player character. This will be discussed when we come to the limitations of stories in games.

4.3.5 Examples

Video game stories have no standard method of creation; if they exist at all. If I were asked to create a story for a video game, I would use a combination of the movie and television techniques described above; as we'll see later.

4.3.6 Analysis

Video games are the domain of designers. Stories, when they exist, are tacked onto an existing mechanic in an attempt to differentiate one title from another. While this may change at some point in the future, this model is a poor choice for the professional writer.

4.4 Conclusion

So what are we to make of all this? In this section we were looking at how each is written, so let's look at the various advantages and disadvantages for each.

The advantage of the way movies are written is that it is the most "traditional." What do I mean by that? The method is very close to that of play writes and novelists, especially screenplays written on spec. The writer dreams up their idea, fleshes it out, and begins to write. The screenwriter can try to sell the concept before starting, or they can begin whenever they want. If going the spec route, they are totally free to write any concept no matter how startling or challenging the material is. The advantage here is the studio can see how the whole story is executed without having to guess based solely on a pitch. The other big advantage is that movies still get more respect than television or video games. They are firmly entrenched in the public mind. The movies also have quite a lot of glamour surrounding them.

The disadvantages to writing for movies don't fall into this category. The disadvantages are linked to the control over the way the story is told, so it'll come up in later section. The only real disadvantage for this section is that television has more advantages.

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So what are the advantages to writing for television? They are a plenty. The short production pipeline for television is very short, much shorter than movies and video games, so the writer's work is on air very quickly. This allows television to be a much more current piece of culture. The nature of the writer's room gives any one writer access to the opinions, methods, and talents of many different experienced writers. This gives the television writer almost a built in apprenticeship. The short time frame of television also place a great demand on the writer to write well and quickly. These means more writing. The more one does a task, the better they get at it. A screenwriter may write three scripts a year, while the television writer will participate in the writing of more than twenty two scripts in a season (this depends on the stability of the show, but we'll take it as a given that the show has a full season order). The shorter pipeline also gives the writer faster feedback on the episode, whether that's ratings, critics, or fans on the internet.

The disadvantages to television writing? Television writing is highly formal; that is, given the nature of ad supported broadcast television, with its commercials, television writing must fit a prescribed pattern of storytelling. There also needs to be consistent voice or style for the show, that of the showrunner; and generally that of the creator. Many can find this stifling of their creativity as writers are not free to tell whatever story they want, however they want. This can be balanced with television's hiatus during the summer. During this down time, the writer can write plays, novels, or even movies.

And what of video games? I hope it is abundantly clear from above that VIDEO GAMES ARE NOT WRITTEN. Furthermore, they often don't use a a trained story writer during their design phase. There aren't any advantages or disadvantages to speak of. There just aren't. There are some sever consequences of this, which I'll mention briefly. Most notably, the stories and the ways they are told in video games is very poor. They are often illogical and contradictory. Dialogue is flat and uninteresting. Characters are superficial and unsympathetic.

The conclusion is that the model for writing television is superior to the other two. This is because television uses multiple writers, gives new writers an apprenticeship, and places the control of the show to a senior writer.

5 Helping Hands

Writers aren't the only ones involved in bring a story to screen; whether movie, television, or video game. So who are those others and what do they do? There is a lot of similarity between how movies and television shows are shot, so we'll discuss movies first and then the similarities and differences for television.

5.1 Movies

5.1.1 The Studios

The first entity to have influence on the story is that of the studio. In the old days, the studios were wholly responsible for bringing the story from script to screen (Norman, 2007). That is, under the old "Studio System" producers were given ideas from executives and would guide the production from start to finish; a producer or the executive themselves. This is the way a studio generally ran, all though certain above the line talent did pitch ideas to executives or producers. The studios are the ones with the money to pay for production. They hire the writer, often after the writer has pitched studio executives an idea (Eszterhas, 2006). This is the first of two ways studios have sway over the story: by choosing which writers to listen to, and which stories to develop into scripts. Studios also have to approve staffing decisions, though are only generally concerned with directors and actors.

Studios,or at least their parent companies, are generally publicly traded companies. Publicly traded companies have responsibilities to meet revenue forecasts. They are, therefore, going to insist that only commercially viable products are funded and that they are completed on time. Even though there is no writer or director set for *Transformers 3,* the movie has already been scheduled for release on July 1, 2011 (McClintock, 2009).

5.1.2 Directors

A director brings the script to life. They control a movie's artistic and dramatic aspects, while guiding the technical crew and actors in the fulfilment of the story. On the movie side of Hollywood, the director has become the person ultimately responsible for a movie (Norman, 2007). This means that they get all the glory for successes and the all blame for failures. They are also involved with with casting, picking locations, approving sets, and approving costumes.

They also work in conjunction with the director of photography (DP), sometimes called the cinematographer, to set up the shots and provide coverage. Coverage is the act of shooting a scene from multiple angles with the purpose of assembling the final sequence in the editing room (Mackendrick, 2004).

One way the director influences story telling is via choosing of the shots to make a scene. Early directors found that through the use of different screen sizes and framing of the shots, the juxtaposition of camera angles and point of view, expressive music and lighting, and principles of editing, they found that the camera can, uniquely, photograph thought (Mackendrick, 2004). Framing and editing determine the eye path of the audience. A director can be said to direct the audience's attention (Mackendrick, 2004).

Those directors who have made the best use of the film medium have used the camera to communicate

to audiences at a level far more immediate and primitive than the spoken word (Mackendrick, 2004).

Hitchcock has said of silent era directors that they "had reached something near perfection. The introduction of sound, in a way, jeopardized that perfection" (Mackendrick, 2004). Since there was no sound when movies began, it was, therefore, only natural for the directors to rise to the top of the film medium. This, somewhat, explains the tension between writers and directors in film. Many believe that the dialogue driven screen play is actually a wholly misguided blue print for a film, though it is the job of the writer, not the director, to decide whether the film story will be built with images or merely decorated with them (Mackendrick, 2004).

When it is said of a director that "they're a good shooter" that's a code for "all you get from this wingnut is cool visuals" (Badham & Modderno, 2006).

The other way directors influence story is through casting, as the next most influential party on story telling is that of the actor.

Casting is one of the most important functions that the director serves (Badham & Modderno, 2006). As John Houston told Michael Cain: "the key to being a great director is casting. If you get the right actor, you can just stand back and they'll do it."

All films are cast from the top down (Badham & Modderno, 2006). That is, the lead is cast first and then the smaller roles. This also goes back to the previous section where a star is part of the package that is sold to a studio. The actors, just like the characters they play, need to be orchestrated in order to get a balanced film.

5.1.3 Actors

As a director brings a script to life, an actor brings a character to life. The actor's task has always been to interpret and present the story to the audience (Badham & Modderno, 2006). An important part of this job is to communicate. It is not enough to inhabit a character, the actor must communicate this character to the audience.

Actors work in conjunction with the director during the rehearsal phase. Here the actors "find" their characters and how they are going to play their characters. They work with the director as the director is the one who is over seeing every aspect of production. Until directors came around, the actors did whatever they thought was best (Badham & Modderno, 2006).

It is important for an actor to retain a child's sense of play (Badham & Modderno, 2006).

On set, a director can hide behind staging, lighting, scenery problems, and alleged failings of the writer. Who can the actor hind behind (Badham & Modderno, 2006)? Part of the directors job, as noted above, is to give feed back to the actor. To do so, they must actually interact with the actors on a continual basis. The actors need the director to do more than set up the shots and call "action!". In theatre the actors have the benefit of instant audience feedback, in film they must rely on the director.

5.1.4 Editors

Film editing is a unifying blend of story and delivery; delivery in images – editing is story showing (Pepperman, 2004). Once principle photography is finished all the film (or digital tape) is delivered to the editor how begins to make sense of it all. They will put together a first cut of the film, sometimes known as the "editor's cut," for the director to look at.

As the editor looks for places to cut from one shot to another, they will look for blur (Pepperman, 2004). That is, they will look for spots in the shot where there is a maximum amount of motion in order to better cover the cut. This is because, while technically there is no such thing as a "bad cut" (all cuts are choices), jarring cuts are regarded as poor choices in general (Pepperman, 2004). Jarring cuts can be used for specific effect, but for the bulk of the movie, smooth cuts will be used.

An editor can make very mechanical style cuts. That is, they can time say, a head turn, in one shot to be six frames, and plan the cut to occur such that there are three frames in one shot and three in the next. While this method leads to technically correct editing, it shifts the focus inappropriatly. Editing is another form of story telling. Kevin Smith in the *Clerks 2* extras said that editing is like doing another draft of the script. With this in mind, the editor must always cut for proper value rather than proper matches, that is, serve the story rather than accuracy (Pepperman, 2004).

Story telling in cinema is at its best when constructed in an assembly of juxtaposed images (Pepperman, 2004). A movie tells its story with images and the way to give those images meaning is to contrast them with a following one. While this certainly the idea behind a montage, it applies even more to how one shot follows another. For example, consider a shot of a longing man. Now follow it with:

- an apple
- a woman
- a car

The juxtaposition of each the example shots imparts meaning to the sequence. While these examples are fairly obvious, they do impart the idea. Consider a shot of a man followed by a woman in a:

- long shot (full body)
- close up (face)
- extreme close up (say, eyes)

Not the same blatant contrast as the previous example, but each choice imparts a different relationship between the man and the woman. David Mamet has even said that juxtaposition of images is the first and only rule he knows as a director (Mackendrick, 2004).

There is a visual logic to be followed; an order in which visual information is to be presented (Pepperman, 2004). Like writing must be in logical sequence in order to produce the desired results, so too must the images be placed in a logical sequence to achieve the right sequence of juxtapositions. An extreme example would be showing a robber entering the bank before they point a gun at a teller.

Once the editor is finished with their version, the "editor's cut," the director will work with the editor to produce the "director's cut." After that, the producer will sit will work with the director and editor to produce the "producer's cut." This means that the editor, director, and the studio's representative (producer) will have a say in the final visualization. The film will then be locked and go for music and sound editing.

5.2 Television

5.2.1 Studios

Studios are the organizations that fund television production (Gervich, 2008). Television studios are generally subsidiaries of larger corporate entities which are publicly traded and therefore have those have those same financial pressures placed upon them.

5.2.2 Networks

Networks air the shows that studios produce (Gervich, 2008). In addition to being subsidiaries of larger corporate entities, networks also must respond to advertisers. Advertisers are the network's primary customers, and they are looking for eyeballs; generally those belonging to eighteen to forty-nine year olds. So in order to get money from advertisers, networks need shows from studios, who needs shows from production companies, who are writers tellings stories. These writers need not only writer coherent stories, but they must also appeal to viewers aged eighteen to forty-nine.

5.2.3 Directors

Directors are generally not part of the continuing crew. They are brought in to shoot episodes on an individual basis. In television the directors are responsible to the showrunner.

5.2.4 Actors

Actors have a different kind of leverage in television than in moves since it is harder to replace a television actor than a movie actor (Rannow, 1999). Television actors also have the benefit of playing those characters for years.

5.2.5 Editors

Editors perform largely the same function in television that they do on movies. Rather than answer to the director and producer, they answer to the showrunner; who is also a producer.

5.3 Video Games

5.3.1 Publishers

Publishing companies act like studios in that they finance the game's development. They are also the primary distributors. Publishers, like studios and networks, are generally publicly traded companies and have those same pressures placed upon them. Which, they pass along to the development company.

5.3.2 Designers

As mentioned in the Writing section of this work, designers have more influence over the way the story gets told in video games than any other development person.

5.3.3 The Player

Designers attempt to make the game as interactive as possible, which puts much of the story control in the hands of the player. Chris Crawford's definition of interactivity: "A cyclical process between two or more active agents in which each agent alternately listens, thinks, and speaks" (Crawford, 2005).

This puts the interactivity of the video game in the designer's game mechanic. This also means that there is no interactivity in moves. There is, however, a fair amount of interactivity in television. Not as much as video games, but some.

Interactivity is not a binary switch but more like a spectrum (Crawford, 2005). The three factors that determine the degree of interactivity are speed, depth, and choice. Speed is just that. Depth is a measure of how close "something" is to what makes one human. Choice is fundamental to interactivity, especially the choices the user wants to make.

Using these criteria, we see that on depth movies and television score very well and video games score poorly. Video games have offer no commentary on the human condition, traditionally. An interesting counter example is the mega hit *The Sims*. An article from Psychology Today says that designer Will Wright was very conscious of how a person's consumerism can illuminate their inner person (Thompson, 2003). It is also note worthy that many of the interesting behaviors come from how players relate to the game, rather than how the designer intends the relation. This is something Will Wright is known for.

Video games have the advantage in speed. The game mechanic functions in what is essentially real time. Movies move slowly. This is largely because a movie is a stand alone entity. The Industry as a whole can respond to audience feed back, but only after the fact. Though this doesn't include prerelease testing. This testing happens post production, so several months have elapsed. Television does surprisingly well here. Shows staff in July for shows that will air in September (Gervich, 2008). This is the longest lead time for the season, which means that at its slowest, television shows can incorporate audience feedback in three months. Of course, television and movies respond to large audiences, whereas video games can respond to people individually. Choice is why movies and television is not truly interactive.

Choices in video games seem to be limited by technology. If this is the only limitation, that is, the only reason there are only violent games and not, say, romantic games, then as time goes on, this will become less of an issue. Since the "think" phase of the interactive cycle requires decision making, the more advanced artificial intelligence becomes, the more complete game mechanics will be, and the better video games should become.

5.3.4 Problems

One of the (current) problems with video games is that the story is tacked on to the mechanic (Crawford, 2005). This was the case with *Half Life*. *Half Life* is a pretty standard first person shooter. What made it different was it had cut scenes integrated into the game. They were rendered by the real time engine so they looked like game play.

On a personal note, I played *Fallout 3* after hearing that the story was one of the best story based games of all time. It was not. *Fallout 3*, like *Half Life*, simply had a few story elements added. Namely:

● Characters, with back stories

● a beginning, middle, and end

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- plot twists

- a romantic interest

- obstacles to overcome

All these elements were present but it doesn't make for a "story game" or interactive experience. There were "threads," quests in the world, but they were simple linear stories that required no story work from the player. The player simply executed the mechanic (which revolved around shooting enemies). There was no variety, or even cross over between the two.

This leads to an interesting hitch. Some people, such as my friends, claim to play some games just for the story. This is something of a misnomer. While they clearly enjoy the stories, there isn't anything unique to the game. The story could easily be told in a movie, or book. So why play the game at all? I think it is a case of double duty. A decent game mechanic plus a decent story. *Fallout 3* did have a pretty fun mechanic: it incorporated both real time and turn based combat. They story had decent hooks too.

While this doesn't make the way stories are currently told in video games unique or separate, it does suggest a connection to movies and television that will be explored in the next section.

So video games thrive on choice, the choice of the player. These choices are ultimately limited by technology, but are played out on an individual basis. They are not in the hands of the production staff and what control there is, is generally in the hands of the designer.

5.4 Conclusion

Movies, television shows, and video games all require the hard work of many different professionals, such as musicians, artists, and designers. However music is not story. Art is not story. Design is not story. Only story is story, and only the writer is trained in story and story telling. In the movies, these people are responsible to the director. In television, all decisions require the approval of the showrunner, who is a senior writer. In video games writers are not involved in the creation of the game at all. Thus television is the superior medium.

6 Regulation and Limitation

6.1 Movies

6.1.1 Ratings

The primary regulation and limitation organization for movies is a division of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) called the Classifications and Rating Administration (CARA). CARA is operated in conjunction with the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO)(MPAA, 2005). CARA's board members view each film, discuss it, and vote on its rating. The ratings are intended to provide parents with information so they can decide which films are appropriate for their own children. The board uses the same criteria as any parent making a judgement: theme, language, violence, nudity, sex, and drug use.

The current ratings are (MPAA, 2005):

- G

    A G-rated movie contains nothing in theme, language, nudity, sex, violence, or other matters that would be unacceptable for children.

- PG

    A PG-rated movie should be investigated by parents before they let their younger children attend.

- PG-13

    A PG-13 movie may go beyond the PG rating in theme, violence, nudity, sensuality, language, adult activities, or other elements, but does not reach the restricted R category.

- R

    An R-rated movie may include adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually-oriented nudity, drug abuse, or other elements.

- NC-17

    An NC-17 rated movie is one that most parents would consider patently too adult for their children 17 and under.

The MPAA instituted a ratings policy in 1968 under Jack Valenti (MPAA, 2005). According to Valenti, the reason for creating the ratings system: "... was the film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, in which, for the first time on the screen, the word 'screw' and the phrase 'hump the hostess' were hear." CARA was created as a replacement for the Hayes Code which was an active form of censorship, as it prevented film makers from including various elements in their movies. The Hayes Code was part of an agreement between the major studios in order to keep government censorship out of the movie industry.

6.1.2 Criticism

Kirby Dick's 2005 film *This Film Has Not Yet Been Rated* investigated the MPAA's rating process and identified many flaws, inconsistencies, and problems:

- Violence versus sex

    o Even Kevin Smith's *Clerks,* which centres on people talking, received an NC-17 ratings based on the sexual talk.

    o *Jersey Girl* initially received an R rating based on a conversation about masturbation.

    o Four times as many pictures receive an NC-17 for sex as opposed to violence.

    o *American Psycho* had more problems with the sex than the violence.

- Homosexual relationships versus heterosexual ones

    o *But I'm a Cheerleader,* a lesbian teen comedy received an NC-17 rating despite being no worse than the R rated straight teen comedy *American Pie.*

    o *This Film Has Not Yet Been Rated* includes an enlightening montage showing side-by-side comparisons of heterosexual sex scenes from R movies and similar sex scenes from NC-17 films where the only difference was the latter depicted homosexual scenes.

- Secrecy

    o The MPAA is the only films rating board world wide that does not disclose its members.

    o The MPAA uses the threat of government interference/censorship to keep control, despite Supreme Court decisions that guarantee First Amendment protection for movies.

    o A First Amendment lawyer went as far as to say that government censorship would be better than the MPAA ratings since government censorship would be subject of judicial review.

- Lack of Standards

    o Film raters receive no training and there is no set of standards that is applied. Raters simply give their opinion.

    o At the time of filming, film makers were not allow to make reference to other films (citing precedence). According the extras on *Zack and Miri Make a Porno,* Kevin Smith says that *This Film Has Not Yet Been Rated* managed to change (at least) that one procedure and film makers may now cite precedence.

- Studios versus independents

    o Studios won't release NC-17 rated films.

    o Studios receive very specific notes as to how to lower a rating whereas the independents only get the rating and no advice.

- Money

    o The difference between an R rating and an NC-17 rating can be millions of dollars.

    o Many theatres refuse to show NC-17 rated films.

    o Both Blockbuster and Walmart refuse to carry NC-17 rated films.

The ratings systems seems to no longer be concerned with providing parents with information and now favours studios and their ability to make and market a commercial product. PG and PG-13 rated films earn the most money at box office (Texas A&M, 2000).

6.2 Television

There are two organizations which need to be discussed for television. The first is the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC is a federal organization entrusted with regulation of the broadcast airwaves for both radio and television. The second is generic term for a special part of each network's legal department: Standards and Practises (S&P). While S&P may take on a different form in each network the idea behind them is to check each script and final show to prevent fines from the FCC or unwanted attention from pressure groups (Stepakoff, 2007).

6.2.1 FCC

The Federal Communications Commission is an independent United States government agency (FCC, 2009). The FCC was established by the Communications Act of 1934 and is charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable.

The FCC is broken up into bureaus which are responsible for various functions of the FCC's mandate. (FCC, 2009). The bureau that concerns us for this discussions is the Enforcement Bureau (EB) which is the primary organizational unit within the Federal Communications Commission that is responsible for enforcement of the Communications Act. Major areas of enforcement that are handled by the Enforcement Bureau are

1. consumer protection enforcement
2. local competition enforcement
3. public safety/homeland security enforcement

The FCC does not regulate the broadcasting of violence on television (FCC, 2009). Neither does the FCC actively monitor radio and television program. It only responds to complaints and investigates those complaints. It reviews each complaint and determines if the complaint is valid. If it is, then the FCC will fine the station involved. Complaints centre around obscene programming aired at any time and indecent or profane programming during certain hours. It is a violation of federal law to do either.

Obscene, indecent, and profane programming have specific legal definitions, as does the safe harbour (FCC, 2009):

- The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that to be obscene, material meet pass a three prong test:
    1. an average person, applying contemporary community standards, must find that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest
    2. the material must depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law
    3. the material, taken as a whole, must lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value
- Indecent material is that which contains sexual or excretory material that does not rise to the level of obscenity
- Profane language includes those words that are so highly offensive that their mere utterance in the context presented may, in legal terms, amount to that of a nuisance
- The safe harbour refers to the time period between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., local time. During this time period, a station may air indecent and/or profane material. In contrast, there is no safe

harbour for the broadcast of obscene material. Obscene material is entitled to no First Amendment protection, and may not be broadcast at any time

There are also voluntary ratings that the television industry will insert into the first fifteen seconds of a television show (FCC, 2009):

- TV-Y

  All Children -- This program is designed to be appropriate for all children

- TV-Y7

  Directed to Older Children -- This program is designed for children age 7 and above.

- TV-G

  General Audience -- Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages

- TV-PG

  Parental Guidance Suggested -- This program contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children

- TV-14

  Parents Strongly Cautioned -- This program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age

- TV-MA

  Mature Audience Only -- This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17

The FCC's mandate only applies to the public broadcast space and therefore does not apply to the cable channels. *HBO* and *Showcase* have no established brands of edgier, more adult oriented programming.

While it seems that television is more restricted, especially when one considers S&P (see below), the FCC operates within a specific and well know legal frame work, applies its standards only in response to complaints, and considers each complaint in context. For example, on November 11, 2004, ABC aired the complete and unedited version of *Saving Private Ryan* for Veteran's Day (FCC, 2009). Their broadcast included extra warnings, as well as a special introduction from WWII veteran Dr. Harold Baumgarten and Vietnam veteran Senator John McCain. Both provided the context for the broadcast and verbally warned parents about the intensity of the violence and strong language contained in the film. The FCC received complaints about the broadcast afterwards and decided that the context of the broadcast was appropriate, the complaints would be denied, and no action would be taken against ABC and its affiliates.

6.2.2 Standards and Practises

Standards and Practises (S&P) are part of the network's legal department who check scripts and final shows to ensure that nothing illegal, immoral, or unethical gets onto America's airwaves (Stepakoff, 2007). They also act as a prescreen to possible FCC action taken against the network.

In order to deal with the limitations asserted by S&P, many shows end up putting more than they want in the script in order to negotiate down to the level they want (Stepakoff, 2007). Says Ken Levine: "On MASH it was routine that we'd get a memo from S&P saying "cut the casual profanity in half".

Whether we had four 'hells' or 'damns' or eight, we'd get the same directive. So of course we'd start padding our scripts with double the casual profanity in order to keep the ones we needed" (Levine, 2006).

Many writing staffs invent new terms to pass S&P (Stepakoff, 2007). Examples include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creating such terms as "wiggins" and *Battlestar Gallactica* using of "frack." *Dawson's Creek* terms even migrated into contemporary teen slang.

S&P maintains list of unacceptable terms (Levine, 2006).When he was a producer for the ill-fated *Mary* starring Mary Tyler Moore, the script called for her to say "ying yang" in a speech. S&P flagged it. According to the S&P representative, "ying yang" was a slang expression for penis. Levine told S&P he was unaware of that and it was not being used in that context. The S&P rep insisted it was on the list of unacceptable words for penis. Because it was on the list, it was not allowed to remain in the script.

6.3 Video Games

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is a non-profit, self-regulatory body that assigns computer and video game content ratings, enforces industry-adopted advertising guidelines for the interactive entertainment software industry (ESRB, 2009).

The ESRB created its rating system after consulting a wide range of child development and academic experts, analyzing other rating systems and listening to parents (ESRB, 2009). The ESRB found that what consumers wanted in a video game rating system was both age-based rating categories as well as information about what type of content was in a game. Parents felt strongly that a rating system should inform and suggest, not prohibit (ESRB, 2009).

The ESRB uses the following ratings (ESRB, 2009):

- EC

  Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate

- E

  Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language

- E10+

  Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10 and older) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes

- T

  Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language

- M

  Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles

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in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language

- AO

Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity

The ESRB also uses various content descriptors (ESRB, 2009):

- Alcohol Reference - Reference to and/or images of alcoholic beverages.

- Animated Blood - Discoloured and/or unrealistic depictions of blood.

- Blood - Depictions of blood.

- Blood and Gore - Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts.

- Cartoon Violence - Violent actions involving cartoon-like situations and characters. May include violence where a character is unharmed after the action has been inflicted.

- Comic Mischief - Depictions or dialogue involving slapstick or suggestive humour.

- Crude Humour - Depictions or dialogue involving vulgar antics, including "bathroom" humour.

- Drug Reference - Reference to and/or images of illegal drugs.

- Fantasy Violence - Violent actions of a fantasy nature, involving human or non-human characters in situations easily distinguishable from real life.

- Intense Violence - Graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons and depictions of human injury and death.

- Language - Mild to moderate use of profanity.

- Lyrics - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol or drug use in music.

- Mature Humour - Depictions or dialogue involving "adult" humour, including sexual references.

- Nudity - Graphic or prolonged depictions of nudity.

- Partial Nudity - Brief and/or mild depictions of nudity.

- Real Gambling - Player can gamble, including betting or wagering real cash or currency.

- Sexual Content - Non-explicit depictions of sexual behaviour, possibly including partial nudity.

- Sexual Themes - References to sex or sexuality.

- Sexual Violence - Depictions of rape or other violent sexual acts.

- Simulated Gambling - Player can gamble without betting or wagering real cash or currency.

- Strong Language - Explicit and/or frequent use of profanity.

- Strong Lyrics - Explicit and/or frequent references to profanity, sex, violence, alcohol or drug use in music.

- Strong Sexual Content - Explicit and/or frequent depictions of sexual behaviour, possibly

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including nudity.

- Suggestive Themes - Mild provocative references or materials.

- Tobacco Reference - Reference to and/or images of tobacco products.

- Use of Drugs - The consumption or use of illegal drugs.

- Use of Alcohol - The consumption of alcoholic beverages.

- Use of Tobacco - The consumption of tobacco products.

- Violence - Scenes involving aggressive conflict. May contain bloodless dismemberment.

- Violent References - References to violent acts.

The ERSB uses raters who are adults and typically have experience with children through prior work experience, education or by being parents or caregivers themselves (ESRB, 2009). The raters also receive special training.

During the final stages of development and prior to release, game publishers submit a questionnaire, supplementary material (lyric sheets, scripts, etc.), and specify exactly what kind of content will be in the game (ESRB, 2009). Publishers must provide a DVD which captures all pertinent content. This includes typical game play, missions, and cut scenes. Pertinent content that is not playable but will exist in the code of the final game must also be disclosed.

This last criteria was enacted in response to the Hot Coffee Controversy involving Rockstar and their game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.* The initially game contained a minigame where the main character could have sex with their girlfriend. In the final release of the game, that minigame was locked out and could not be accessed. With the release of the PC version, various hacking tools were created to unlock the minigame.

Upon reviewing the submitted material, each rater recommends an appropriate rating category and content descriptors(ESRB, 2009). This initial recommendation is merely intended as a starting point from which the raters will collectively deliberate about what rating should be assigned to the game. Similar games and previously rated games may also be reviewed so raters can take into account precedent.

Much like movies, video games with more "family friendly" ratings do better commercially (Caoili, 2009). Again like movies, both Blockbuster and Walmart refuses to carry AO rated games.

6.4 Conclusion

Though all these organizations work to set limitations on artists & creators, and television's reputation of being the most sanitized of them all, I find that the FCC is actually the best of them all. It's standards are open to review, well known, and always evaluated in context. Ironically, the worst seems to be the network's S&P division. There are alternates to broadcast in television, with *HBO* and *Showtime* producing ground-breaking shows like *The Sopranos, The Wire,* and *Dexter.*

7 Relationship Between Movies, Television, and Video Games

As we've seen, there are different rules and guidelines for construction movies, television, and video games. It seems as if they all are mutually exclusive. Through my research I've begun to notice a relationship between them. It comes mostly from my examination of table top role playing games; specifically *Dungeons & Dragons*. So in this section we will look at that relationship: how it exists, and ultimately what the consequences of that relationship are.

For this section until the end of this paper:

- Heinsoo, R., Collins, A., & Wyatt, J. (2008) shall be referred to as the Player's Handbook.

- Wyatt, J. (2008) shall be referred to as the DM's Guide.

- Mearls, M., Schubert S., & Wyatt, J (2008) as the Monster Manual.

7.1 Dungeons & Dragons

We'll begin where I begun which was with *Dungeons & Dragons*. Specifically, after doing some preliminary research of story telling techniques in video games during my prethesis phase, I decided to apply my knowledge by becoming a Dungeon Master and running a game for my friends. This would allow me to put my theories into practise and observe the results. The advantage of using table top role playing games is that the game mechanic has already been designed and I would not have to devote energies away from story telling. The mechanic has been set since 1977, although three major updates have been made. This way I could focus purely on the story telling and not have to worry about any interference from a poor game mechanic and/or flawed design.

One of the key aspects for story telling in games is the world in which the story takes place.

Why is the world important? Like the key to interactivity beings with choices in the game mechanic, see the last section, so too the story is served by having many choices in the quests. It is the ultimate question of "what can the user actually do?" With the linear media, the audience can either sit there and watch or not watch. That's about it. By fashioning a world, the designer gives the player many options of what to do.

7.1.1 The Mechanic

While true that the D&D mechanic does allow for a near infinite amount of choices, and it does in fact reward creative and nonstandard choices. While on the surface it may look like killing monsters, and there are some games that do fall into that, there are some games that have that. The reality is that the mechanic, as stated, as long as there is a chance of failure, you roll the twenty sided die to see if you pass or fail.

The *Dungeons & Dragons*' mechanic works like this (DM's Guide):

1. The player decides what they want their character to do and tells the Dungeon Master.

2. The Dungeon Master figures a the target number, the difficulty class or DC, which decides the chances for success or failure.

3. The player makes their check by rolling a twenty side die (d20), adding some numbers (modifiers) and try to hit the target number decided by the Dungeon Master. So, they roll a d20,

add all relevant numbers, and compare to the DC.

4. If the check number is equal to or higher than the DC the action is a success. Otherwise it fails.

The key thing to note about this is the involvement of the Dungeon Master in setting the chances of success and failure. The advantage here, of course, is that the Dungeon Master can make that decision on the fly for any type of action. *Dungeons & Dragons* is not limited in the same way that video games are. This system works just as well for diplomacy and romance as it does for combat.

Armed with this mechanic (and a few supplementary rules) the players need a world to explore, to encounter the story in.

7.1.2 Core Assumptions

The *Dungeons & Dragons* world, in general, is built around a couple of core elements that set the direction of the game, the style, or even genre. Here are some of the assumptions it makes (DM's Guide):

● The world is a fantastic place

Magic works, servants of the gods wield divine power, and fire giants build strongholds in active volcanoes. The world might be based on reality, but it's a blend of real-world physics, cultures, and history with a heavy does of fantasy.

● The world is ancient

Empires rise and empires crumble, leaving few places that have not been touched by their grandeur. Ruin, time, and natural forces eventually claim all, leaving the Dungeon &Dragons world rich with places of adventure and mystery.

● The world is mysterious

Wild, uncontrolled regions abound and cover most of the world. City-states of various races dot the darkness, bastions in the wilderness built amid the ruins of the past.

● Monsters are everywhere

Most monsters of the world are as natural as bears or horses are on Earth, and monsters inhabit civilized parts of the world and the wilderness alike.

● Adventurers are exceptional

Player characters are the pioneers, explorers, trailblazers, thrill seekers, and heroes of the Dungeon & Dragons world.

● The civilized races band together

The character races in the Player's Handbook all drew closer together during the time of the last great empire (which was human dominated). That's what makes them the civilized races – they're the ones found living together in the towns and cities of civilization.

● Magic is not everyday, but it is natural

No one is superstitious about magic, but neither is the use of magic trivial. Practitioners of magic are as rare as fighters. People might see evidence of magic every day, but it's usually minor – a fantastic monster, a visibly answer prayer, a wizard flying by on a griffin.

- Gods and primordials shaped the world

  The primordials, elemental creatures of enormous power, shaped the world out of the Elemental Chaos. The gods gave it civility and permanence, and warred with the primordials for control of the new creation.

- Gods are distant

  Gods exist, though most of them maintain a distance and detachment from the everyday happenings of the world. Exarchs act in the world on behalf of their gods, and angels appear to undertake missions that promote the agendas of the gods they serve.

These core assumptions only define the general setting, or style, and not the specific world. Creating the world is entirely up to the Dungeon Master. This includes civilization (cities, towns, and villages), the wilderness (mountains, forests, and deserts), and the planes, where the Gods and demons live.

7.2 *Dungeons & Dragons* and Television

When we think of creating a world where stories naturally create themselves, immediately we are drawn to the idea of television. Television faces that same issues in the creation of shows. A great new television show has fresh and compelling characters in a situation in a situation that allows stories to be told in entertaining and consistent way (Epstein, 2006). It has a fresh hook and a fresh format (template).

The way television shows specifically relate to *Dungeons & Dragons*:

- A hook

  Hooks are used to attract the players attention and interest them into the quest, adventure, or campaign.

- An attractive fantasy

  The attractive fantasy for *Dungeons & Dragons* is laid out in the core assumptions above.

- Characters

  Since the players are the characters, they players are inherently interested in the plight of the characters.

- A venue

  The venue is the story world; it is the place where "stories walk in the door" (Epstein, 2006). Since the characters are adventures in a fantastic world, there is a lot for them to do.

- The genre

  The genre is fantasy, as covered in the core assumption.

- Tone

  Tone is set by the players. The Dungeon Master responds to how scary, silly, or serious the players want the game to be.

- Program length

  Though at first glance, program length doesn't seem to apply, various gaming groups do play for

varying length of time. This does affect the story telling because what can be done in a three hour session can not be done in forty-five minute session.

- Network & time slot

  This, of course, has no parallel in table top gaming.

7.2.1 Story Telling Structure

The story telling structure of *Dungeons & Dragons* is essentially telescoping. At the smallest level you have encounters, both combat and noncombat. A bunch of encounters make up an adventure. A few adventures make up a campaign. And campaigns take place all over the story world.

7.2.1.1 Encounters

An encounter is a thing that happens. The most common example of encounters are combat encounters. That is, the group of players encounters a group of monsters and they fight. When the fight is over, the encounter is over. There are also noncombat encounters in *Dungeons & Dragons* which can have each have different emphasis. This is where table top role playing games shine over their computerized counter parts. Because of the presences of the Dungeon Master there's a human being responding to the players, not preprogrammed, computerized choices. Examples of noncombat encounters include (DM's Guide): negotiations where the players need to gain assistance or favour from a local leader or other authority figure; chase through a city; finding their way through the wilderness. Encounters relate directly to movies and television as story beats. These are the little points of action that drive the story forward.

7.2.1.2 Adventures

The next level up from encounters are adventures. An adventure is a series of encounters. How and why these encounters fit together from the simplest to the most complex is the framework for any adventure. An adventure revolves around a particular expedition, mission, or series of task in which the players are the heroes. It is to be thought of as a distinct story in which all the elements are tied together. Continuing the previous example of the Duke and his enemies, that's an adventure made up of a series of encounters. Using the examples from above to make an adventure:

- The players start off by meeting a local Duke. The Duke wants the players to defeat some of his enemies and the players negotiate for more details – a noncombat encounter.

- The players must find their way through the wilderness – a noncombat encounter.

- The players meet the Duke's enemies and they fight – a combat enoucnter.

- One of the enemies gets away and the players have to chase them – a noncombat encounter

- The players and the last enemy fight – a combat encounter.

That's five encounters, which is very much like the five act structure of hour long television dramas. This also qualifies as an adventure so we have an illustration of the direct link between games and televisions shows.

Encounters also have characters. The major characters of the recurring cast are the players' characters of the adventuring group. There are minor characters who are used in adventures and even those nonplayer characters can be used on an ongoing basis for further adventures through out a campaign.

7.2.1.3 Campaigns

Just like adventures tie encounters together, campaigns tie adventures together. This quite like television in the serialized stories that occur over the course of a season. A great example of this is the first season of *Veronica Mars*. In this show there was an overall season long story of that had the protagonist solving a murder that was committed before first episode but not solved until the last episode; with various clues gathered along the way. An each campaign can focus on different themes or plots, just like each season can focus on different themes or plots. In the television show *24* once they've captured the bad guy, they don't try to capture him again, they try to capture a different one.

7.3 *Dungeons & Dragons* and Movies

With the similarities between games and television shown, we now turn our attention to including movies. Movies are different than television in a few ways. They are a longer and they don't have a recurring nature. A movie is its own self contained story. A movie's protagonist change from one pole to the other. They start out happy they end up sad. They start out poor they end up rich. Whereas television & video games can be thought of as a bunch of stuff that happens. Now, obviously game and television characters change, certainly one of the defining characteristics of role playing games is that the players develop level to level. It is, however, a different kind of change than what happens in movies.

Going forward to add in movies, we need to shift our discussion from table top role playing games, specifically *Dungeons & Dragons*, to video games. We'll be using Bethesda's *Fallout 3* (*Fallout*), *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (*Oblivion*), and Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto 3* (*Grand Theft Auto*).

These three games are structurally related because they are all Sandbox style games. They also illustrate the relationship between movies, television, and video games and tie back to the idea of a story world. In *Grand Theft Auto*, player plays as a nameless protagonist, who is a criminal. The game starts off with a cut scene of the character being betrayed during a bank heist, sent to the hospital, eventually to jail, and escapes with a essential his cell mate. His cell mate has some ties to a low level criminal organization and the player begins working with them. The game is largely about how this nameless protagonist moves up through the ranks of various criminal organizations in a fictionalized New York City/New Jersey. Structurally *Grand Theft Auto* is similar to *Oblivion* and *Fallout* with a central narrative. *The Grand Theft Auto,* the player goes from outside the criminal organization to taking down the entire Columbian Cartel, along with smaller organizations along the way. Once those missions are complete, the game is over. In *Oblivion*, the player has to close out is essentially another dimension from invading the realm. Oblivion has a fantastical element, so it's really more like another plane rather than another dimension. In *Fallout*, the player has to leave a bomb shelter to track down their father. That is the main thread, and it is quite evident how that relates to a movie. And that is the relationship between these sandbox games and movies. The main quest is essentially a movie.

In *Grand Theft Auto*, once the main quest is completed, the game ends. In *Oblivion*, it does not. Which raises the question what does the player do? There's a multitude of side quests, called such simply because they're not related to the main quest. These are very much smaller adventures/quest that add a depth to the game and allows the player to strength themselves or increase resources. *Oblivion, Fallout,* and *Grand Theft Auto* have many resources such as weapons, money, guns, cars, etc. These side quests allow the player to build their strength in many ways that makes the main quests easier, and in some games the only way possible, to complete at all. These side quests/adventure are, again, very much like television episodes. They're recurring in nature, they involve the same principle cast with a

few recurring rolls, which are like guest starts.

The advantage of these Sandbox Games is these quests can be done in just about any order. So it ends up being very much like episodic television. Some of these side quests are much like tiny campaigns of there own. They have multiple stages and when one adventure is over the player is then free to complete other ones. For example, in *Fallout*, one of the nonplayer characters is looking to put together a post-apocalyptic wasteland survival guide. What she asks the player to do is go and gather various data for her. So the player through various stages must get certain kinds of injuries, research certain events, and find various foodstuffs. Each of these are separate quests so once the player achieves a certain injury, that quest is over and the player is free to go and do other things before trying to collect foodstuffs.

7.4 Conclusion

There's a central story where a character goes from one thing to another; that's the movie. This central story takes place in a world, this world has many options to help the main character get strong enough to complete the main story; that's the game. If these particular side stories, and main story, are put in a particular order; that's the television show which spans several seasons. That's the relationship. Central story = movie; world = video game; specific order = television series.

Here we have the movie as the pillar, the world and its possibilities as the game, and the television series as the specific choices and the order in which they occur. This is the relationship and that gives us a brand new way of looking at these media.

8 Relationship Examples

In this section I'm going to fully demonstrate not only the relationships between the three media but how each is created. I'm going to do this by taking a story and creating/adapting that story for each medium.

Taking each one to a final scripts or design documents is beyond the scope of this work and is unnecessary. In order to demonstrate the relationships, I will take each to an outline stage. This will also allow me to comment as each stage develops. The point is not to demonstrate originality, illuminate the human condition, or create the next *Citizen Kane*, the point is to fully show the relationships, strengths, and weaknesses of each medium.

Since this thesis is not about game design, rather than a video game, I'll produce a campaign for 4th Edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. That way, the mechanic is take care of and I can simply focus on the story side of the equation. I'm going to take the monsters from the Monster Manual for this section.

8.1 Movie

8.1.1 Hook

Given the constraints of this section, rather than boiling the idea of a movie down to an essential concept that intrigues people, I'll boil the idea of a movie down to an essential concept that would intrigue years ago, except it's 2009 and the idea is something of a cliché.

I also know that the hook has to serve both a television series and video game, so I want it to be versatile. Since *Dungeons & Dragons* is a multiplayer game and television shows require a central cast, I won't quite be going with a single protagonist.

So, the hook is: "A group of adventurers band together to stop an end of the world prophecy from coming true."

That's not bad. It's no *Liar, Liar*, but I might actually be tempted to go see that picture. It'd probably depend on the commercials. That's enough to get us started.

8.1.2 Log Line

A good log line is ironic, gives a compelling mental picture, suggests an audience, suggests a cost, and has a killer title.

The first thing we need to do is inject some irony into that hook. Right now it's pretty boring. So, if a group of adventures end up banding together to save the world, what's the furthest point from that? Individuals on their own, out for themselves. This also gives me the theme, because team work is required to achieve the true heights of greatness (my own personal belief; if you don't share this belief, I wouldn't recommend coming to this movie), the theme is "team work brings better results than individual efforts can."

Now with irony: "Detached, loner adventures must put aside their personal quests and band together to stop an end of the world prophecy from coming true."

Let's see if we can get some imagery in there: "In a medieval fantasy world, detached adventurers must put aside their personal quests and band together to stop an end of the world prophecy from coming

true."

Well, it sounds like *Lord of the Rings*, which lets us know that it'll probably be rated PG-13, cost hundreds of millions of dollars, and the audience will skew to male ages 12-18.

We need two more things for the long line. We need a title, and to change it enough so people don't think it is exactly like *Lord of the Rings*, but not so much that the same audience won't come. Considering how much money and awards *Lord of the Rings* took in, we don't have to change it that much.

Here's what I brainstormed for titles:

- Save the World Together
- EverQuest (name of an existing computer game, but hey, I'm brainstorming)
- Band Together
- Together We Can
- Hearts of Gold
- Hearts of Purity
- Hearts that Save
- Group Hearts
- Band of Hearts
- Links of Strength
- *Bonds of Glory
- Unite for Glory
- Glory United
- *Links of Glory
- Ties of Strength
- Unify Glory
- Symbols of Power
- Symbols of Strength
- Scepter of Glory
- Crown of Glory
- *Crowning Glory
- Crowning Strength
- Supreme Strength
- Supreme Glory
- *Last Glory
- *Lasting Glory

Entries marked with an asterisk (*) are ones I considered for the title. I liked Bonds of Glory, but "bonds" just didn't feel right. It felt too strong in the wrong direction. Links of Glory I like, though it'd probably make a decent golf movie title. I spent a LONG time considering Crowning Glory. In the end I decided to keep brainstorming because it felt more like a monarchical political thriller than a medieval fantasy flick. So, I'm going with Lasting Glory, er *Lasting Glory*. It has more a sacrificial theme feel to it, so I'm going to modify the log line a bit to incorporate that.

Lasting Glory: In a medieval fantasy world, detached adventurers must put aside their personal quests and band together to stop an end of the world prophecy from coming true.

Not bad. In order to flesh it out, I'm going to throw in the E5; Alex Epstein's five check points for good story telling:

1. A compelling central character
2. with a goal, a problem, or an opportunity
3. who faces obstacles and/or an antagonist.
4. If they succeed, they and/or the world wins something he didn't have before (stakes), and/or
5. if they fail, they and/or the world is worse off than if he hadn't tried (jeopardy).

What's missing is a concrete antagonist and no stakes. There is the jeopardy of the world ending, but the adventurers don't win anything. I'm going put the fulfilment of the prophecy in the hands of an evil cult. That will give not only a main antagonist working against the protagonists, but it'll give us minions galore.

1. A group of adventurers
2. seeking glory
3. who face an evil cult.
4. If they succeed, they will be rewarded with treasure and glory, and
5. if they fail, the world will be destroyed.

Lasting Glory: In a medieval fantasy world, five lone adventurers seeking fame & fortune must put aside their personal quests and band together to stop an evil cult from fulfilling an end of the world prophecy.

Good stuff. Let's move on.

8.1.3 Characters

Before going on to the beat sheet, we need to figure out who's going to appear in this thing. Movies are more of their plot and the characters can be reverse engineered from the log line, which is what we'll do. Because we know we're going to turning these characters into television and video game characters, we'll need to leave room for some extra depth, but right now we'll only consider the needs of movies.

We've got five protagonists, one of which we're going to designate as the main character. They are the one who is going to make the largest change and drive the A story. We've just mentioned an evil cult on the antagonist's side, but cults have leaders and lieutenants. We'll need one of each, with the leader being the main antagonist. That's seven main characters.

Since this will end up in the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe, I've taken races and classes (professions) from the Player's Handbook.

- The Good Guys
    - Thom Vankod, Male Human Fighter
    - Vistra Thoradin, Female Dwarf Cleric
    - Lucann Gennal, Male Elf Ranger
    - Hadronis Magnus, Male Human Wizard
    - The Kat, Female Half Elf Rogue
- The Bad Guys
    - Akmenos Therai, Male Tiefling Warlock (evil)
    - Melech, Tiefling Female Cleric (evil)

To decide who to make the main character, we need to ask who was got the most to learn from the theme? Who needs to learn the most of team work? Who has got the furthest to travel from individual to team member? Well clerics and wizards already work in large organizations, especially in a *Dungeons & Dragons* context. I'm tempted to go with the rogue, but thieves work in teams all the time. According to *Dungeons & Dragons* lore, the best choice here is probably the ranger. They tend to work alone in forests and woods.

This will also give the protagonist something concrete to focus on. End of the world is pretty abstract, but losing the good times communing with nature; that's easy to related to (and film).

Writers are not penalized for having poorly designed characters before they start writing. Writers are criticized if their characters are not consistent through out their scripts. Some teachers suggest inventing complete back stories, but I'm not into that. Characters are mostly defined by their actions, and their contrast to the other characters. We'll just make some quick notes about their needs, wants, and how would they react in a tavern brawl. This is a *Dungeons & Dragons* action movie after all.

The difference between wants and needs? Let's go back to our standby: *Miss Congeniality*. Sandra Bullock's character *wants* to solve the case, she *needs* to learn to be feminine and tough, which is the theme. On one level all our Good Guy characters want fame & glory and they all need to learn to work together, though we'll tailor each so they don't come out the same person.

- The Good Guys
    - Thom Vankod, Male Human Fighter
        - Wants

            Martial prowess.

        - Needs

            To have someone protect his back.

        - In a Tavern Brawl

            Charges in head first.

    - Vistra Thoradin, Female Dwarf Cleric

- - - Wants

    To spread the influence and power of her Order.

  - ■ Needs

    To be more gentle and persuasive (dwarves have a reputation for beating people into agreement).

  - ■ In a Tavern Brawl

    Probably started it by lipping off to, well, everyone.

- o Lucann Gennal, Male Elf Ranger

  - ■ Wants

    To protect the woods around his village.

  - ■ Needs

    To have the help of others.

  - ■ In a Tavern Brawl

    Is overwhelmed by the combatants while trying to draw his bow.

- o Hadronis Magnus, Male Human Wizard

  - ■ Wants

    To be the greatest wizard in history.

  - ■ Needs

    To let others help him research his spells.

  - ■ In a Tavern Brawl

    Tries to stop it and is knocked out in the first five seconds.

- o The Kat, Female Half Elf Rogue

  - ■ Wants

    Money. Followed by money. And then some more money.

  - ■ Needs

    To learn the value of a honest day's work.

  - ■ In a Tavern Brawl

    Picks as many pockets as possible before running away.

- ● The Bad Guys

  - o Akmenos Therai, Male Tiefling Warlock (evil)

    - ■ Wants

      To bring the world under his control

    - ■ Needs

To learn to chill (he won't).

- ■ In a Tavern Brawl

  Kills everyone.

- o Melech, Tiefling Female Cleric (evil)

  - ■ Wants

    To serve her evil lords.

  - ■ Needs

    To be good (she won't).

  - ■ In a Tavern Brawl

    Summons demons to fight for her.

That's all we need to move forward with the movie part. When we turn to television and video games, we may revise these profiles a bit. These descriptions are a bit thin, but they give me (the writer) enough of an idea of how to writer these characters. In the end, that's all that matters.

8.1.4 Beat Sheet

Here is a reminder of Blake Snyder's beat sheet with page numbers in brackets. Remember, one page roughly equals one minute of screen time:

- ● Opening Image (1)

  The very impression of what a movie is – its tone, its mood, the type and scope of the film – are all found in the opening image.

- ● Theme Stated (5)

  Somewhere in the first five minutes of a well-structured screenplay, someone will pose a question or make a statement that is the theme of a movie.

- ● Set-up(1-10)

  This is the make or break section of the script. Every character must be introduced or at least hinted at. The main character's flaws must be shown. This is also where the Six Things That Need Fixing are shown.

- ● Catalyst (12)

  In the set-up the screenwriter, have told us what the world is like and now in the catalyst moment they knock it all down. This sets the main story in motion.

- ● Debate (12-25)

  This is where the main character debates whether to purse the story or not.

- ● Break into Two (25)

  This is the act break where we leave the old world.

- ● B Story (30)

The B story is generally the "love story." It is also the story that carries the theme of the movie.

- Fun and Games (30-55)

  This is the promise of the premise. This is the section of the movie where most of the trailer moments come from. In this section we see the log line actualized.

- Midpoint (55)

  The main character has either a false victory or false defeat that is mirrored in the All is Lost Section, although generally a false victory.

- Bad Guys Close In (55-75)

  After a false victory this becomes where the antagonist regroups. If the midpoint was a false defeat this becomes where the protagonist begins to regroup.

- All Is Lost (75)

  This section is the opposite of the midpoint. Often includes a death or something death related.

- Dark Night of the Soul (75-85)

  This is the "darkness before dawn" moment for the protagonist.

- Break into Three (85)

  Both in the external story (the A story) and internal story (the B story), which now meet and intertwine, the hero has prevailed, passed every test, and dug deep to find the solution. Now all they need to do is apply it.

- Finale (85-110)

  This is where the lessons learned are applied and the antagonists are overcome.

- Final Image (110)

  This is the opposite of the opening image. It is the proof that change has occurred.

Here's how *Lasting Glory* breaks down:

- Opening Image (1)

  Lucann patrols alone in the woods. Thom skulks alone in a dungeon. Vistra prays alone in a temple. Hadronis studies alone in a library. The Kat sneaks alone in someone's house.

- Theme Stated (5)

  Lucann returns to his village and is mocked by the villagers for protecting the woods on his own. "Do you think you can be everywhere at once?", our theme.

- Set-up(1-10)

  We've seen everyone on their own. We've had a bit of a scene with each character (well, in the final script there will be) and seen their world. We'll also introduce the prophecy/cult in those opening scenes (this is a pretty heavy demand on the first ten minutes, but doable). Ideally, the team has met each other in time for...

- Catalyst (12)

  ... learning that Akmenos and his cult is planing on fulfilling the prophecy. We also learn that

Akmenos needs some ritual items and then to perform some ritual (how many items? In the movie, probably three. For the television/video game? At least a dozen).

- Debate (12-25)

  The idea here is "Can these five people work together?" and I'd like to do that with some kind of combat encounter here that will have all five together, with either Akmenos or Melech, that leads into the Debate section. That will start things off, then we can have some "fall out."

- Break into Two (25)

  The group sets out to find the items needed for the final ritual.

- B Story (30)

  The elf Lucann starts to fancy the half-elf Kat. Here's where Lucann will learn some key lessons about trust.

- Fun and Games (30-55)

  The group on the road, tracking down the ritual items, and having a jolly ol' time (for the television series, this part will cover most of the episodes. For the video game, most of the game will occur here).

- Midpoint (55)

  This is the last item, however many there are. The group defeats an "army" commanded by Melech, though she escapes.

- Bad Guys Close In (55-75)

  The group has all the items and are feeling pretty good. The bad guys, not so much. Here the bad guys strike back, I'm thinking with their own group of thieves. This will cast some suspicion on Kat and help break up everyone's faith in each other.

- All Is Lost (75)

  The team is attacked and thanks to the forming cracks the group loses. Everyone is captured except for Lucann, who's knocked out, and The Kat, who drags him away before the battle is won. Now the bad guys have all the need to fulfil the prophecy.

- Dark Night of the Soul (75-85)

  The Kat wants to run away, Lucann wants to continue with the mission. They argue, ultimately going there own separate ways.

- Break into Three (85)

  Lucann arrives at Akmenos' hideout to stop the ritual.

- Finale (85-110)

  The Kat returns, she and Lucann rescue the group, and defeat Melech and Akmenos.

- Final Image (110)

  The group together.

That gives an idea of what's going down in the central story. It's not a great story, and there's a lot of hand waving going on here. Still, we can move on to the next section.

8.1.5 The Board

For the sake of illustration, I'll outline a few scenes; but that's it. Writing an entire movie is beyond the scope of this paper.

- The opening scene

  EXT. FOREST - DAY

  Lucann patrols the forest and gets attacked by a bear.

  +/- Lucann starts protective; ends embarrassed.

  >< Lucann wants to protect the forest; a bear wants to eat him.

- A scene from the Fun & Games beat:

  INT. DUNGEON - DAY

  The group battles a group of orcs.

  +/- The group starts anxious; end triumphant.

  >< The orcs want the group dead; the group wants the orcs dead.

- A scene from the Dark Night of the Soul beat

  EXT. FOREST - DUSK

  Lucann struggles with Kat over their next action.

  +/- Lucann starts uncertain; ends resolute.

  >< Lucann wants to restore the team; Kat wants to run.

8.2 Television

We now have an idea of what's going on and we're going to extend it into a television series.

8.2.1 Template

First step is to design our template so we know what we're going to deliver every week. After we outline the template, we'll flesh out our admittedly skimpy character description.

The template includes a hook, an attractive fantasy, characters we never get tired of, venue, genre, tone, program length, and network and time slot.

- Hook

  This we can take straight from the movie: In a medieval fantasy world, five lone adventurers seeking fame & fortune must put aside their personal quests and band together to stop an evil cult from fulfilling an end of the world prophecy.

  But that's pretty limiting. In order to get to 100 episodes, we'll need to eliminate the end condition, I've highlighted the changes: In a medieval fantasy world, five lone adventurers seeking fame & fortune *have* put aside their personal quests and *banded* together to *protect the kingdom from harm*.

  In television, a weak hook doesn't matter, as long as we make up for it with great characters.

- Attractive fantasy

  Magic. Danger. Glory. Awesome.

- Characters

  o Thom Vankod, Male Human Fighter

  o Vistra Thoradin, Female Dwarf Cleric

  o Lucann Gennal, Male Elf Ranger

  o Hadronis Magnus, Male Human Wizard

  o The Kat, Female Half Elf Rogue

- Venue

  Part of the venue for *Lasting Glory* comes from the *Dungeons & Dragons* core assumptions; that is, the part "stories walk in the door" is covered by the fact that monsters and evil gods are a very real fact of life in the *Lasting Glory* world.

  If this were a television show, I'd give the group some kind of home base to return to after each adventure. Probably an inn of some kind.

- Genre

  The genre is fantasy adventure.

- Tone

  Given that I'm involved in it's creation, the tone will (would) be on the humours side.

- Program length

  Since *Lasting Glory* is not a sitcom, it will be an hour long show.

- Network and time slot

  I'd say that *Lasting Glory* would air on Fox, probably on their Sunday night block at 8pm.

An important decision is to make whether *Lasting Glory* is animated or live action. Television shows have much, much, much smaller budgets than movies. If we're planning on a lot of special effects, whether flying, explosions, or for monsters, we'll be better off with animation. In animation, it costs just as much to have a character jump off the Titanic as it does to have them jump out of bed. There is, however, a stigma of doing animation in North America. It is seen as a children's medium, or at least comedy one. Since our show will have some comedy in it, this may not be a problem, but it may make the show a tough sell. As of this writing, the only show airing animation in prime time is Fox, which why I've mentioned them in the template above (Mike Judge's *The Goode Family* is set to premier on ABC on May 27, 2009). Fox does not air prime time animation outside of its Sunday night block, famous for *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *King of the Hill*, and *American Dad*.

8.2.2 Characters Revisited

For television we need far more fleshed out an interesting characters than movies, or video games for that matter (another problem with them). A television show can function without a hook, but can not function without great characters. For this work, which we're not trying to get on the air, we'll make them more interesting and try to invoke some sympathy for them, but we're not going to make them

perfect television characters.

Our basic goal is to make them interesting and sympathetic. Someone that you'd want to talk to at party. Although physical descriptions are key in novels and video games, they are counter productive in movies and television. Characters are played by actors, who come in wide variety of looks. While a brief description of a the physical looks of a character will help a casting director, specificity is limiting. What will you do if the perfect actor doesn't fit the description? Change the actor or the character? Answer: the character. Characters are easy to change, good actors are hard to find.

8.2.2.1 Lucann Gennal

Elf Ranger

Lucann's defining characteristics, as noted above, are that he's an elvish ranger, so we'll start there. Specifically from the Player's Handbook.

In the *Dungeons & Dragons* world, elves are quick, quiet, and wild. They are slender and athletic. They have deeply felt, but short lived passions, which gives rise to impulsive behaviour. They revere the natural world and are natural explorers. Rangers are watchful warriors who roam past the horizon to safeguard a region, a principle, or a way of life.

That gives a better idea of who Lucann is and even how he's going to act in some of the situations he comes across. But he's neither sympathetic nor very interesting. So how do we achieve either? Well to make the character interesting we're going to put in a little contradiction. This technique was even mocked in an episode of *Family Guy* with a character called Kenneth, the Bad Ass Mail Clerk with a Heart of Gold.

But what kind of contradiction? If this was straight comedy, I'd make him a clumsy ranger. That, however, goes too far against type, so we'll need something of a lighter touch. Since rangers and elves love the outdoors so much, he'll be an architecture enthusiast. Or rather, the *Dungeons & Dragons* equivalent. Not quite a stone mason, but something like that. Say, a carver, a stone craftsman who fashions rocks into art and sculpture.

As for sympathy, we'll use the rule that gives *Save the Cat* it's title: the Save the Cat rule. We'll have him do something noble, like saving a cat. I do want him to be a bit of an outsider in the village, the masonry helps this out, because we can all sympathize with feeling like an outsider.

8.2.2.2 Thom Vankod

Human Fighter

Again we'll start from the Player's Handbook. Humans are versatile and flexible They can be decisive and rash, seeking knowledge and power. They are self reliant and brave. Fighters are determined combat adepts trained to protect the other members of their adventuring groups.

For contradiction, I've always had it in my mind that I'd make a fighter an amateur philosopher. I figure they're really physical so the stereotype is that they're dumb, but I figure they spend so many nights alone under the stars that their mind gets to wandering.

For sympathy, well, fighters are always trying to protect those around them. A good selfless character is always sympathetic.

8.2.2.3 Vistra Thoradin

Dwarf Cleric

Dwarves are tough, gruff, strong and made from the earth. They favour clan ties and seek protection, guidance, and help from the gods. Dwarves have long memories and never forget an enemy. Clerics are divine warriors, battle leaders, and healers.

Well, if we've got is a healer, we've got one who likes to cause damage and violence. She'll be the first one to through the punch, and the first to throw a knife too.

For sympathy, I see her charging through combat to help a downed comrade.

8.2.2.4 Hadronis Magnus

Human Wizard

As we've already talked about humans, we'll just mention that wizards are scions of arcane magic, seekers of knowledge.

There's the image of the old, bearded wizard (Gandolf), so we'll make our wizard young and totally lacking in common sense.

That also gives us a bit of sympathy, as he's somewhat clueless. Still, we need a bit more. Nothing wrong with being social awkward. He spends his time in books, so he'll have trouble relating to people.

8.2.2.5 The Kat

Half Elf Rogue

Half elves combine their two parts of heritage. They like to be around lots of people, whether it be large groups, or large cities. They maintain large networks with many contacts. Rogues are thieves and assassins, who would rather not be seen until after their opponent is dead.

Since thieves and assassins are generally bad guys we're actually combining contradiction and sympathy. She's a bit of a Robin Hood. Yeah, she takes stuff, but she helps those around her. If she didn't, we couldn't really include her in the main character roster. Just to further the matter, we'll make her something of an art expert. Can't be stealing stuff without generate knowledge about it!

8.2.3 Relationships

In the movie, Lucann is the main character plain and simple. The others are simply there to round out the action and fulfil the the theme of team work. If we only had one character, we couldn't show the benefits of working together.

In television, we're going to rely on the relationships to help generate stories (well, past the first season). This places a greater importance on getting them right. It will also help define them, as we often define ourselves in relation to others.

Since we have five main characters we have ten different relationships to define and maintain.

	Thom	Lucann	Vistra	Hardonis	Kat

Thom	X	Daffy	Competitive	Learned	Guarded
Lucann	Daffy	X	Benevolent	Friendly	Yearning
Vistra	Competitive	Benevolent	X	Bawdy	Suspicious
Hardonis	Learned	Bawdy	Friendly	X	Sardonic
Kat	Guarded	Yearning	Suspicious	Sardonic	X

This chart will also help in writing dialogue between these characters. Now we have an idea of what they'll say to each other.

Now we have a better description and understanding of our characters from a television perspective. Does it matter? Not unless they shine through the script and the actor's performance. That is to say that description is all well and good, but what matters is what ends up on screen.

8.2.4 Springboards

Springboards are ideas for a television in a nutshell. They use the E5 for their creation. As a reminder:

1. A compelling central character

2. with a goal, a problem, or an opportunity

3. who faces obstacles and/or an antagonist.

4. If they succeed, they and/or the world wins something he didn't have before (stakes), and/or

5. if they fail, they and/or the world is worse off than if he hadn't tried (jeopardy).

Here the compelling central character is the group themselves. Though we will leave ourselves open for focusing on each member on their own, for the first season we'll stick with the group.

Note: this is television. The jeopardy will never be death. Joss Wheadon called threatening character deaths or fundamental changes to the template "schmuck bait." Ain't never going to happen. We'll stick with the needs, wants, and relationships of our characters to generate our stories. Well, normally we would, but we're illustrating how to turn a movie into television, so we're translating the plot.

1. Pilot

   Each member of the group is approached by a mysterious stranger and told of an item that helps fulfil their personal quests – Thom a bad ass sword; Lucann a forest protection amulet; Vistra an icon of Mordain; Hardonis a lost magic scroll; The Kat oh just a big pile of treasure. The item turns out to be the same: a wand that is part of the ritual. As they go on the quest, they meet each other. Once they are together in the "final room" they are attacked by Melech and learn of the prophecy and Akmenos.

2. Togetherness (Pilot pt 2)

   The newly formed group decides to try and verify the threat of Akmenos. After speaking with a knowledgable scholar, they are attacked by Melech. Tracking down Melech, they discover a village ravished by Melech and her troops. Seeing the impact of this evil, they decide to work together to stop Melech and Akmenos.

3. Item 1 – Ring 1

   The group learns of an old castle where the a part of the ritual gear is supposed to be. They first have to defeat some goblins who have made the castle their new home.

4. Item 2 – Ring 2

   The group is offered one of The Rings as payment for protecting a caravan through orc territory.

5. Item 3 – Amulet

   The group is told by a surviving guard that a count's treasure had The Amulet. Unfortunately, the count's home was just overrun by Kobolds.

6. Item 4 – Sword

   The family of a wealthy merchant is kidnapped by rakshasa and puts out an offer to give The Sword to whomever rescues him.

7. Item 5 – Spear

   The group learns of a cave where The Spear is supposedly stashed.

8. Filler 1

   Lucann needs to go through a trap filled dungeon underneath a forest, which contains some special seeds. Kat comes along to help and they end up falling for each other.

9. Item 6 – Shield

   The group must protect a boat carrying The Shield and it is attacked by pirates.

10. Item 7 – Bow

    A group is called in to help a village deal with a famine. Since The Bow is rumored to be near by, they agree to help.

11. Item 8 – Arrows

    A baron's daughter is kidnapped by bandits and the group goes after them; after all, they have the Arrows.

12. Item 9 – Orb

    The group have to hide a mage from being found by antimagic zealots. For their reward they get The Orb.

13. Item 10 – Obelisk 1

    Lucann must win an archery contest to win an the first Obelisk.

14. Filler 2

    A costal village is flooded out and the group must protect their migration into a new land.

15. Item 11 – Obelisk 2

    Must return a young dragon to its protector before it is hunted and killed. They are rewarded with the second Obelisk.

16. Item 12 – Obelisk 3

The group heads to the big city to traipse through the city sewers to find the last Obelisk.

17. Item 13 – Altar

    The group infiltrates a dungeon to get the last Ritual pice.

18. The Crown

    The group goes up against an ancient dragon for The Crown.

19. The Capture

    The group is attacked by Melech and is captured, but Lucann and Kat escape.

20. Rescue

    Lucann rescues the team.

21. Finale, pt 1

    The reunited group makes it to the final ritual.

22. Finale, pt 2

    The group defeats Melech and Akmenos.

8.2.5 Broken Stories

In this section we'll break the stories to show how the episodes would play out. I'll be using a four act plus teaser structure. Most shows have moved to either a five or six act structure. So why the old structure? Simply to make things easier for me. Plus this illustrates the process just as well.

8.2.5.1 Episode 1: Pilot

Teaser	Lucann is told by a mysterious stranger that he can have exactly what he is looking for.
Act One	The group members are standing in an empty room, staring at each other.
Act Two	The group members try to track down the stranger, only to discover that he's a powerful magician and has been attacked, dying he gives them a special wand.
Act Three	After trying to figure out the mystery/secret behind the wand, they are attacked by Melech.
Act Four	They learn the truth about Melech, Akmenos, and the prophecy.

8.2.5.2 Episode 2: Togetherness

Teaser	Akmenos and Melech discuss the prophecy.

Act One	The group finds a scholar who tells them the impact of the prophecy.
Act Two	Trying to track down more leads, the group argues and ends up going their own separate ways.
Act Three	Melech and her troops again attack the group.
Act Four	They end up in a village that has been ravaged by Akmenos. Seeing the possible impact of the Cult, they decide to stop Akmenos at any cost.

8.2.5.3 Episode 3: Item 1 – Ring 1

Teaser	The group learns of a castle with The Ring and some goblins.
Act One	The group is attacked while journeying to the castle.
Act Two	The group is attacked as they enter the castle.
Act Three	The group is caught in a trap.
Act Four	The group defeats the goblin leader and finds The Ring.

8.2.5.4 Episode 4: Item 2 – Ring 2

Teaser	The group is hired by a caravan captain to act as guards.
Act One	The caravan is ambushed and the captain is captured.
Act Two	The group tracks the Orcs and discover they're being employed by Melech.
Act Three	The group raids the camp and discovers an Orc caravan has left with the captain and the ring.
Act Four	Having defeated the Orcs, the group gets The Ring2.

8.2.5.5 Episode 5: Item 3 – Amulet

Teaser	A near death guard shows up at an inn and tells the group that a count is under siege.

Act One	Arriving at the count's palace, they see the mansion is over run with Kobolds.
Act Two	The group discovers that the count has been carted off.
Act Three	The group bursts into the Kobold "headquarters".
Act Four	The count rewards the group with The Amulet.

8.2.5.6 Episode 6: Item 4 – Sword

Teaser	The group learns that the merchants family has been kidnapped by rakshasa.
Act One	The group tracks the rakshasa group to an old fort, but the rakshasa have all been killed.
Act Two	The group is attacked by bandits while searching for clues.
Act Three	The group manages to track a group of bandits to a camp where the see Melech.
Act Four	The group and families return to the merchant who gives the group The Sword.

8.2.5.7 Episode 7: Item 5 – Spear

Teaser	The group is told by a old man the rumours of the Cave of Despair, where The Spear is supposedly kept.
Act One	The group finds a map to the Cave of Despair, but the map is guarded by a magic spell.
Act Two	The group arrives at the Cave of Despair
Act Three	After entering the final chamber a Mind Flayer is summoned.
Act Four	Having defeated the mind flayer, the group gets The Spear.

8.2.5.8 Episode 8: Filler 1

Teaser	A villager from Lucann's home town tells Lucann that the forest is dying.

Act One	Lucann finds where to find seeds to save the village, but they're deep in cave filled with traps.
Act Two	Kat and Lucann make their way through the cave, but half way through they encounter a troop of goblins.
Act Three	Lucann and Kat return to the village with the seeds, but they don't work.
Act Four	Lucann and Kat save the day, and find themselves more involved with each other.

8.2.5.9 Episode 9: Item 6 – Shield

Teaser	A sailor tells the group that the ship he's working on is carrying The Shield, but they're planing on sailing through pirate infested waters.
Act One	The group stops the pirates from sinking the ship, but they lose the treasure anyway.
Act Two	The group is able to find the pirate hideout but are captured.
Act Three	The group defeats the pirates but The Shield is gone, taken by agents of Melech.
Act Four	The group tracks down the agents and get The Shield back.

8.2.5.10 Episode 10: Item 7 – Bow

Teaser	The group hears about a location for The Bow but the near by village is undergoing a famine.
Act One	The group learns that someone in the village knows the location of the bow, but they won't help the group until the famine is lifted.
Act Two	The group learns that the famine has a magical cause, but the a powerful wizard is behind the famine.
Act Three	The group defeats the wizard, but the famine isn't lifted.
Act Four	The group finds the real source of the famine and

	is given The Bow as a reward.

8.2.5.11 Episode 11: Item 8 – Arrows

Teaser	The group approaches a baron to get The Arrows but their told they've been stolen and the baron's daughter has been kidnapped.
Act One	The group tracks the bandits but walk into an ambush.
Act Two	The group reaches the bandit camp but the bandits are supported by warforged.
Act Three	The group gets The Arrows but the bandits escape with the daughter.
Act Four	The group rescues the daughter and escorts her back to the baron.

8.2.5.12 Episode 12: Item 9 – Orb

Teaser	To get The Orb, the group is asked to protect a mage, but he's being hunted by anitmagic zealots.
Act One	The group is attacked, but the zealots get the upper hand.
Act Two	The group manages to defend themselves in a fort, but they kidnap Hardonis.
Act Three	The group rescues Hardonis, but the mage is captured.
Act Four	The group save the mage and get The Orb as a reward.

8.2.5.13 Episode 13: Item 10 – Obelisk 1

Teaser	The group finds The First Obelisk, but it's a prize in archery contest.
Act One	Lucann does well in the first round, but one of Melech's archers does even better.
Act Two	Lucann wins The First Obelisk, but one of Melech's thieves steals it.

| Act Three | The group gets The First Obelisk back, but are chased by Melech's henchmen. |
| Act Four | The group defeats the henchmen and keep The First Obelisk. |

8.2.5.14 Episode 14: Filler 2

Teaser	The group tries for a "vacation" on the coast, but the coastal waters swell, threatening to drown a village.
Act One	The group is able to build a damn, but the waters rise over it.
Act Two	The group builds drainage trenches, but they fill up.
Act Three	The waters start to recede, but then sahuagin attack.
Act Four	The group defeats the sahuagin and rebuild the town.

8.2.5.15 Episode 15: Item 11 – Obelisk 2

Teaser	The group is offered The Second Obelisk, but must track down and rescue a lost dragon.
Act One	They track the dragon to a fort, but the fort is full of bandits.
Act Two	They track the dragon to a forest, but they are attacked by goblins.
Act Three	They track the dragon to a mountain, but they are attack by giants.
Act Four	They manage to trap the dragon, and return it for their reward: The Second Obelisk.

8.2.5.16 Episode 16: Item 12 – Obelisk 3

| Teaser | The group arrives in the city, but learn that The Third Obelisk is located in the sewer. |
| Act One | The group finds the entrance to the sewer but it's |

	guarded by Melech's troops.
Act Two	The group finds a large chamber, but are attacked by mummies.
Act Three	The group find another chamber, but are attacked by skeletons.
Act Four	The group finds The Third Obelisk.

8.2.5.17 Episode 17: Item 13 – Altar

Teaser	The group learns of the location of The Altar, but it's deep in a dungeon.
Act One	The group is going through the dungeon, but they are trapped in a room with the walls closing in.
Act Two	The group finds the last chamber, but there's a magical lock on the door.
Act Three	The group finds The Altar, but it's guarded by a demon.
Act Four	The group gets The Altar.

8.2.5.18 Episode 18: The Crown

Teaser	The group learns that they have to get The Crown, but it's located deep inside an ancient ruin.
Act One	The group locates the ruins, but is attacked by kobolds.
Act Two	The group finds an entrance to the underground tunnels, but it's guarded by a homunculus.
Act Three	The group finds The Crown, but it's guarded by a dragon.
Act Four	The group defeats the dragon and gets The Crown.

8.2.5.19 Episode 19: The Capture

Teaser	The group is returning with The Crown, but Melech is seen in the shadows.
Act One	The group spends the night in an inn, but Melech's

	assassins creep in through the windows.
Act Two	The group ask for help from a local noble, but the noble is killed.
Act Three	The group is within sight of the city, but Melech attacks.
Act Four	The group is captured, but Lucann and Kat escape.

8.2.5.20 Episode 20: Rescue

Teaser	Kat and Lucann are safe in the forest, but Kat tells Lucann that's she going to run away.
Act One	Lucann hires some mercenaries, but they turn on him.
Act Two	Kat gets far away, but sees Melech's troops ravaging a village.
Act Three	Kat returns to help Lucann with the rescue, but they're both captured.
Act Four	Lucann and Kat rescue the team.

8.2.5.21 Episode 21: Finale, pt 1

Teaser	The group learns of a scholar who knows the ritual, but when they arrive at his house, he's gone.
Act One	The group searches the town, but the are attacked by Melech's troops.
Act Two	The group rescues the scholar, but Melech is long gone.
Act Three	The group starts the expedition to the ritual site, but Melech attacks.
Act Four	The group defeats Melech, but Akmenos continues with the ritual.

8.2.5.22 Episode 22: Finale, pt 2

Teaser	The group arrives at the ritual site, but it's in a deep dungeon.

Act One	The group is going through the dungeon, but they fall into a pit.
Act Two	The group finds a chamber, but are attacked by a dragon.
Act Three	The group makes it to the final ritual site, but is captured.
Act Four	The group defeats Akmenos.

There is a full season of television broken.

The reasons why a room full of experienced writers do this task became quickly apparent. Once you get going, it is very easy to loose perspective. You're no longer able to tell if your idea is any good; let alone, possible, or coherent. Plus the more writers, the more perspectives, the more variety of stories.

8.3 Video Games

For video games what we're going to look at is *Dungeons & Dragons*, which is not a video game. The reason we're using *Dungeons & Dragons* is that the game mechanic is already taken care of. This paper is not about design or game mechanics, it is about writing stories. Thus, we're going to use *Dungeons & Dragons*, which already has the game mechanics designed, to focus on the way games tell stories.

As discussed previously, the big key to writing video games is the world in which they take place. We've created the core story that makes the movie and broken that into television episodes. When the episodes were broken, that took care of most of the quest design. Each already includes a hook and the major twist/turns and infers as to what occurs between them. Thus, in this section, we'll mainly be looking at other possible side quests in addition to how to tie the television quests into the story world.

One of the biggest problems is with games is how to structure the story. There is no standard method that has developed like that of movies and television, so we'll have to invent our own. I'm leaning heavily towards adapting that of television.

Let's look at the world and the side quests that could be contained within.

8.3.1 The Veiled Land of the Misty Lion

A coastal region, once a primary trading and economic centre of the Trivici Empire, only the city of Havelon remains an image of what it once was. The rest of the region has regressed to mostly farming communities, governed by a self appointed noble; really nothing more than a despot.

8.3.1.1 The Outrageous Courier Inn

The Inn lies on the road from Havelon to Haythorne. The players can meet any number of travellers with various quests. The inn keeper, Malfin Elegor, has ties to the bandits in Fort Karest.

8.3.1.2 Krespaga Abbey

The Krespay Downs take their name from this ruined abby, once the centre for the Murazol order of

paladins. The paladins were once very powerful, quickly gaining many converts. Rumours say the paladins benefited from the power of an ancient artifact. Could it still it exist?

8.3.1.3 Barrow of Thorns

An area of pre-empire human settlement, the barrows are surrounded by thick bushes of thorns. The local wildlife seem to avoid the centre of the barrows, why is that?

8.3.1.4 Haythorne

A medium sized town that guards the Gwervia pass through the Cabrices mountains.

8.3.1.5 Neadron Forest

A large wooded area that separates the Veiled Land from the regions of the south. Travellers have been disappearing as the travel to the lands to the south. What is causing them to vanish?

8.3.1.6 Neadronwold

A village, and a collection of farmsteads & hamlets, on the edge of the Neadron Forest.

8.3.1.7 Kurtwyn Manor

Centuries ago, a noble tried to established a Manor, but was only able to build the keep before being driven off the land by monsters from the Senog Fens. If the Fens are emptied, could the players have themselves a new home?

8.3.1.8 Tetah Circle and Ipetrare Castle

Tetah Circle is beyond ancient. It sits over an area of intense and primal magic. Ipetrare Castle was built up around the Circle to protect and contain it. With the fall of the last empire, the Castle has been abandoned and fallen into disrepair. Why was the Circle built? What was the Castle needed to protect? Who, if anyone, is occupying it now? (NB: this is where I imagine the Akmenos and Melech would perform the final ritual)

8.3.1.9 Bailers Hall

Like Kurtwyn Manor, this is another failed estate. It has been abandoned for over a century and is now over run with monsters. Is there are any treasure left here? Would this make a better home for the players? Could they sell it to a local noble?

8.3.1.10 Androvel

A tiny fishing village on the edge of Lake Ares. They trade mainly with the people of Haythorne and the tribes of the Lynar Forest.

8.3.1.11 Fort Karest

An old hill fort that has now been taken over by bandits. Bandits are trouble, but they frequently have treasure.

8.3.1.12 Ruins of Andret

Once a prosperous village, it was attacked, overrun by orcs, and never resettled. Andret was ruled over by a powerful mage. The wizard's tower still stands. Why is the tower still there? What's inside?

8.3.1.13 The Aeduii Mountains

A barren wasteland with roving tribes of orcs, giants, and dangerous humanoids. Fortunately, they seem to never cross the Hecabini Peaks. If the monsters were gone, could this area be settled by the civilized world?

8.3.1.14 Temple of Aulania

An evil cult used to summon demons at this temple. What power remains at this site? Is there any treasure left?

8.3.1.15 Bamornspire

The largest of the old hills, there are rumors of what lies underneath. So what is under there?

8.3.1.16 Hencklam

Another village, not far from Ipetrare Castle.

8.3.1.17 Urban Adventures

Havelon, Haythorne, Neadronwold, and Androvel are all settlements of various sizes. They are filled with potential hooks. Crime syndicates, merchant's guilds, magic colleges, temples, and nobility are all involved in the running of these cities. These settlements are a near infinite source of quests.

8.3.2 The Quests Revisited

Not all of the quests will be side quests. For the game, the central quests will have to be adapted as well. Here are two examples of how an episode gets turned into a quest.

8.3.2.1 Quest 3: Item 1 – Ring 1

The quest, as opposed to the television show, only needs a hook because the players will fill in all the story themselves. The act breaks can be used to help add some twists, but they are generally not needed; not at a quest level. Since the players are actively involved, they generally don't need any more techniques to keep them interested.

Hook: While resting at Neadronwold, the group learns that The Ring may be in Kurtwyn Manor.

Area One – Entrance

The walls in this confined room are brick. A chilly draft comes through an open window, stirring the pea green curtains.

Monsters (Level 3 Encounter):

- 2 goblin sharpshooters (level 2 artillery)

- 4 goblin warriors (level 1 skirmisher)
- 4 goblin cutters (level 1 minion)

Area Two – Dining Hall

It's a simple room, with walls splashed in a drab white and a floor that's plain unfinished wood. It is surprisingly sunny, though rather colossal.

Monsters (Level 5 Encounter):

- 1 goblin hexer (level 3 controller)
- 2 goblin skullcleavers (level 3 brute)
- 2 goblin sharpshooters (level 2 artillery)
- 12 goblin cutters (level 1 minion)

Area Three – Central Hall

It's a humble room, but quite dreary. The walls are brick, broken up by lacy, deep amethyst wall coverings.

Monsters (Level 5 Encounter):

- 1 bugbear warrior (level 5 brute)
- 2 hobgoblin archers (level 3 artillery)
- 3 goblin warriors (level 1 skirmisher)
- 2 goblin blackblades (level 1 lurker)

Area Four – Kitchen

This colossal room is badly lit. The walls are haphazardly painted. A sweet fragrance reminiscent of incense wafts through the air. The floor is a dizzying pattern of tiling.

Trap (Level 6 Blaster):

- Name

  Poison Dart Wall

- Description

  Each round on its initiative, the trap fires a barrage of poison darts that randomly attack 2d4 targets in range.

- Perception
  - DC 22: The character notices the small holes in the wall.
  - DC 27: The character notices the tripwire trigger.
- Attack
  - Targets: 2d4 targets in range.
  - Attack: +11 to AC
  - Hit: 1d8+2 damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

- Countermeasures
  - Disable tripwire: DC 30 thievery check

Area Five – Wing

The window curtains, basic and dusky blue, blow in the mild draft. The floor is adorned by a simple country rag rug, the walls are obscured entirely by floor to ceiling bookshelves.

Monsters (Level 7 Encounter):

- 4 bugbear warriors (level 5 brute)
- 1 oni night haunter (level 8 elite controller)

Treasure (DM to roll):

- magic item, level 9
- magic item, level 8
- magic item, level 7
- magic item, level 6
- 2,000 gold pieces (mix of gold, gems, and art)

Area Six – Back Hall

It's a simple room, with walls painted in a soft amber and a floor that's adorned by a simple country rag rug. It is dimly lit, though rather insignificant.

Monsters (Level 9 Encounter):

- 1 hobgoblin hand of Bane (level 8 elite solider)
- 12 hobgoblin warriors (level 8 minion)
- 1 macetail behemoth (level 7 soldier)

Treasure:

- The Ring

8.3.2.2 Quest 14: Filler 2

Now we'll take a look at a quest that mainly uses noncombat encounters.

We need to change the hook a bit as well. In a television show, we can have the main characters show up where every they are needed. In *Dungeons & Dragons*, the players need to choose to go somewhere. If this were a campaign I was running, I'd keep this in my pocket for whenever the players were in a coastal village or town. For this paper, we'll just alter the hook a bit.

Hook: One of the items may belong to a village elder in Androvel (it isn't, and the group will undergo the following encounters).

Encounter 1:

- Setup

    The players try to track down the village elder who supposedly has a ritual item.

- Level

  Easy DC checks.

- Complexity

  Level 1: Four successes before two failures.

- Primary Skills

  o Diplomacy

  The player explains to a villager what they're after.

  o Streetwise

  The player befriends a villager and subtlety tries to get answers from them.

  o Insight

  The player is able to generate sympathy from a villager who helps them.

- Success

  The players learn that the elder's name is Thareon.

- Failure

  The players are deemed suspicious by the villagers who are now quite cold to them.

Encounter 2:

- Setup

  To stop the flood waters, the players must build a damn.

- Level

  Moderate DCs

- Complexity

  Level 1: Four successes before two failures.

- Primary Skills

  o Athletics

  The player is able to move quickly about to build material.

  o Endurance

  The player endures the water and the rain and is able to keep working.

  o Strength

  The player hauls material into place.

- Success

  The players are able to erect damns and save the village.

- Failure

  The village is destroyed and many are killed, including Thareon.

A combat encounter with the sahuagin could still be included, but is largely unnecessary. This is plenty to keep the players busy.

8.4 Conclusion

In this section we've taken a simple hook, turned it into a movie, then a television show, and finally a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign. Along the way, we investigated how the story needs to change to fit whatever medium is being used. A movie is a simple story, told about one character, driven entirely by plot.

When the story switches to television, the characters really need to be fleshed out and interesting. This is accomplished by creating interest and sympathy. Interest uses a little contradiction, and sympathy using the Save The Cat principle. The relationships between the characters must also be established, if for no other reason than to help with dialogue.

Telling the story in *Dungeons & Dragons* required a fuller description of the setting. When we flushed out the environment, some adventures sprang up naturally. This is especially true of urban adventures. There is so much going on in a city, that the adventures were too many to mention. While that covers many side quests, we also saw how to convert the television episodes in quests.

Through all this, did it help support the claim that television is a superior medium for writers? At first glance, it may seem that *Dungeons & Dragons* would be the superior medium and, perhaps, by extension video games. Though the game section was by far the fullest description of the setting, it was supposed to be. That work would also have to the background work for the television series. Additionally, television allows for in depth character writing and plot development that the other do not. Though the characters did not drive the episodes in this example, this is largely due to the limits of this paper. I only took the episodes to the outline stage. If the outlines were taken to full scripts, the relationships and character development would have been front and centre. This was illustrated by the two filler episodes, especially the first one. For simplicity sake, I only included two episodes, but with a full staff, these character moments would be spread out and dominate each episode. Television is more about how the characters react and deal with the plot, rather than the plot itself.

9 Conclusion

We have compared and contrasted movies, television, and video games from the perspective of the writer. This was done in order to decide which of the media that best supports story telling. It was the finding of this paper that television is the superior story telling medium. This is true because of the method of writing, the control of the writers, and the more reasonable regulatory body.

The method of writing was found to be superior because it uses many writers, focuses on characters, and tells succinct stories. A television writer's room uses anymore from five to fifteen different writers. This allows for many different views, opinions, and gives the best chance at a great story. Since a television show is designed to generate at least one hundred episodes, they must rely on the characters and their relationships to generate stories. The stories must be succinct and to the point because an hour of television is only forty-four minutes long. There is not enough time for detours so the story moves along quickly.

The writers have the control due to the showrunner model, which includes a virtual apprenticeship. The showrunner model puts full control of every aspect of production into the hands of a senior writer. This means that all story, casting, and directing decisions all have to be made with the approval of a writer. That means every decision is made by someone who understands the long term story consequences of every aspect of production. Television writers must also advance through and established hierarchy of writers. It is only once they reach the top that writers are allowed to either pitch new shows or running existing ones. This means that shows are only put in the hands of writers with five or more years as a working writer in Hollywood.

Though the Federal Communication Commission has received a bad reputation, they are surprisingly reasonable. After the famous "wardrobe malfunction" at Super Bowl XXXVIII, the FCC has been accused of being less forgiving, but their decision to not fine ABC for their airing of *Saving Private Ryan* on November 11, 2004 was quite practical.

These points were further illustrated by the discover of the relationships and the examples that were created. Despite their differences in how they are created, there is an underlying relationship between the three media. There's a central story where a character undergoes a transition from one state of being to the opposite state. This central story is that of a movie. This central story takes place in a world, which could have many side stories to help the main character complete the central story. This describes a video game. If these particular side stories and main story are put in a particular order, it would describe a television show.

Therefore we are able to declare that television is the superior medium for writers because of the method of writing, the control of the writers, and the more reasonable regulatory body.

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Alex Epstein's website. He wrote for the television show *Charlie Jade,* co-created *Nake Josh*, and was one of the writers for *Bon Cop, Bad Cop.* He is also the author of *Crafty Screenwriting* and *Crafty TV Writing*, two works cited heavily in this paper.

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