

INTERACTIVE MOVIE STORYTELLING WITH NINE ACT STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

Digital Platform nowadays, especially interactive movies has rise again fulfilling the challenges and needs from modern generation of consumers. One of the basic aspect to build the premises, is to create compelling storyline with the interference of viewer's interactions. The Analysis involves the breakdowns of Siegel's Nine Act Structure for films, combined with the possibility of non-linear storytelling and narrative story branching categories from Chris Bateman.

Keywords: Interactive, Storytelling, Structure

INTRODUCTION

As we may all know, Narrative is a core part in story-based today's media such industrial entertainments includes gaming, movies, graphic novels, also even in marketing strategy. Narrative becomes the art and tools of storytelling that delivers good story to the audience, this tool also called as Narratology which study the structures it self. Many methods has been developed and innovated from time to times to tell a different way of storytelling through solid and systematic structures, let say Gustav Freytag's Pyramid Story Mountain, Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, Voggler's Monomyth, Todorov's Five Narrative Stages, Hauge's Six Stage Plot Structure, even the philosophical KiShoTenKetsu are applicable for narrative structure. But, when we look back at the past, it all come from the traditional core of three act structure from Aristotles, which consist the Exposition, The Confrontation, and the Resolution, in other words the Beginning, The Middle, and The End. All of the three main part will never get detached from any modern narrative structure. The first act will introduce the characters in the story, who is the main protagonist, what is

his/her dreams, needs, goal, flaws, what is the present condition and situation that the character lived in the beginning, or the usual ordinary life based on the Campbell's Hero's Journey. While the Second act always reveal the main character's first conflict caused by other characters or forces, the inciting incidents, the rising actions, the trouble begins, and so on. Finally the third act shows how the character solve his/her problems with or without the help from other characters, doing the decisive action that put climax on the story, the good cause and result (usually) that ends the story with a rewarding conclusion for the character or his/her surrounding world. This process of good storytelling gives compelling experiences that connects with the viewers. To add more interesting perspectives, as we catching up with today's era of digital technology, even stories in medias now have additional value of interactive aspects that involves the audience to take action and decide where the story goes. There are many platforms that already existed to represent this kind of interactive storytelling, not just in video games and electronic books, but also music video clip "*Ink*" by Coldplay, (2014), Documentary Web Video *Journey to the End of Coal* (2008), YouTube Interactive movies *Choices* (2015) , Netflix Interactive Movies *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), and many more. The narrative structures are ways possible to be applied to this kind of interactive stories, since they also still have a three act story progression in it. On this topic, One of the newest linear narrative structures created by David Siegel will be analyzed and combined with branching narratives from Chris Bateman to creates an additional archives for various possible methods of interactive storytelling for any kind of media. David Siegel himself is an entrepreneur, writer, investor, blockchain expert, start-up coach, and founder of Pillar Project, Pillar Labs, and 2030. Graduated from University of Colorado at Boulder School of Engineering in 1982, Stanford Computer Science in 1985, and Harvard Business School in 2000. Many Major Essays has been written are *The Token Handbook*, *The Culture Deck*, *People Don't Click*, and *The Nine Act Structure* for the Screenwriters guide. And about Dr. Chris Bateman, is a philosopher and game designer who has great experiences in nearly fifty published projects, a researcher in game aesthetics with his books *Imaginary Games* (2011), *Mythology of Evolution* (2012), *Chaos Ethics* (2014), *Game Writing : Narrative Skills for Videogames* (2006) as Editor. Also best known for his games *Discworld Noir* (1999) and *Ghost Master* (2003). He also teaches at the University of Bolton and Lguna College of Art and Design.

NINE ACT STRUCTURES FOR FEATURED FILM

The Nine Act Structures originally created by David Siegel (2018) for screenwriter's guide in film industry. It includes film timing, so we can actually understand the paradigm of how it works in the featured film. Siegel defines the structure as a tool with the analogy comparing with the three act structures. If the three act structure is a magnifying

glass, the nine act is a microscope. Just like the Hero's Journey, the story focusing on the protagonist goal, not on the story direction of action. The nine act also have two-goal structure. In single-goal story, we have a clear linear plot where the character must put the world back the way it was with additional rewards. For example, Nemo (*from Finding Nemo*) as the protagonist have one goal that is returning home, so even there's so many obstacles on his way, the plot is clear that his goal is to find his dad and returning home. Also most of James Bond's movies. In two-goal story, the character believes the previous goal will solve the problem, which actually will end up in a twist, Siegel referred this as the *false goal*. So as the story progress, the character will notice, learns the situation and acquire a new goal to solve the main problem. For example *Braveheart* go for the second goal and dies in the effort. Most of it, the second goal have wider scope and higher risk than the false / first goal. Let's take a look at *Rocky Balboa* story where he train so hard to beat *Apollo Creed* in the first place, but in the arena ' he just realized that he has been in a set up, knowing that he can't beat Creed, he change his goal to stay stand for twelve rounds to prove his dignity. The new plan changes the characteristic which achieve a new goal. In *E.T the Extraterrestrial*, Elliot's goal is keeping friend with the E.T while the second goal changes him to help the E.T return to its home. In *Jurassic Park*, Grant's goal is to make sure the park is safe to operates while the second goal is changed to getting out of the park safely with Ellie and the kids. There's so many other examples of two-goal story such in *Jurassic World Fallen Kingdom*, *The Fugitive*, *Monster's Inc* where the first goal is changed to the second goal. This pattern is the core of the nine-act structure known as the strong reversal. The detail of the Act will be described as follows :

Act 0 : Someone Toils Deep into The Night

This Act shows all of the happening before the film starts, but usually they won't reveal everything, until the story has unfolded more and entered the Act 6, The Act 0 is being considered as the origins story where it all began, usually the backstory of the main conflict. This act is the cue to the unanswered questions in the next act. To develop the story in act 0 is by creating distinction between backstory and biography, also prehistory which expose the general background of place and time, while biography expose the personal history that add dimension to the protagonist. Last but not least, is the true backstory which is the story of the main conflict itself. Sometimes there's many stories that start with an impactful scene and then fade to "Ten years Later."

Act 1 : Open with an establishing shot

This is more to a world's visual opening in a movie, a building, urban landscape, helicopter, usually involving the crane shot or outside-in shot. Depend on the story itself, whether the setting and the timeline is different with the Act 0, this act is an opener to the main protagonist in his real time. Examples in *American Beauty*, the narration begins in the beginning of this movie along with the helicopter shot to set the movie tone.

Act 2 : Something Bad Happens

Act 2 reveals the enemy's plan. Rarely involves the protagonist, so it's an unfolding event which chained to the next event. For example, in *Jurassic Park*, there is no Act 1, it just the words "*Isla Nublar*" seen on the scene, and then jumps to the Act 2, where a mysterious cage is being transferred in the island, which foreshadowing the danger of the velociraptor in the next act. *Inglorious Basterds* also reveals how dangerous is the enemy in the beginning. Same pattern can be found in *Despicable Me*, *Jumanji*, *Avatar*, *The Dark Knight Rises*. The variation on this act also can use a flashback approach and then returning it into the hero's current life. But usually there's something bad or mysterious happen and then foreshadow what is to come with or without the protagonist. Basically Act 2 consists of action jolts showing the incident that seemingly unrelated to protagonist which requires more investigation.

Act 3 : Meet The Hero

As the title said, this act introduces the protagonist in his/her daily life, the one who will fix the problem. The one with flaws and unfulfilled needs, coincidentally related to the problem. The Audience must learn the hero characteristic through this scene, sometimes the hero is not the right person for the job, sometimes he's the right person but refuses the call. Siegel mentioned that the hero will progress to the *three bumps* of motivation in the story, with each of bumps brings the hero closer to the act 4. Example on this pattern can be found in *the Matrix*. Act 3 has strong connection with the character needs and motivation.

Act 4 : Commitment

This is where the hero commits to the false goal, Just like in *The Lion King*, where Scar tricks the hero to leave his home, in *The Fugitive* where Richard needs to find the murderer of his wife, in *The Incredibles* where Bob working for Mirage, and many more. The Keypoints to this Act is that the hero takes a risk and not going back, so it will require

a strong plot where the commitment is very clear, a good reason where he cannot turn back.

Act 5 : Go For The Wrong Goal

The hero continues to pursue the false goal, but he feels that he is going for the right goal, even the audience sometimes does not have any clue that there will be a plot twist coming. The protagonist still busy uncovering the bits of the backstory (Act 0) that help him learn what is really happening and the hero will always be too late for the next event. Generally the clues will reveal information further back in time, just like taking a breadcrumbs, we will understand more what is related to the act 0. So the hero will be out of his element discovering this new world, setting the pieces together with additional complications but no turning point, even the darkest and deepest downfall point can happen here.

Act 6 : The Reversal

Finally the final puzzle piece which is the oldest element of information getting revealed in this scene, Siegel call it the “*History Lesson*”, usually in the form of flashback or the villain tells the hero every truth behind all of this before he kills the hero, or the hero is being captured and before the final wish, the bad guy reveal everything. For example the Syndrome Motivation in *The Incredibles*, *Truman Show*, *Ender’s Game*, *Ghostbusters*, *The Lego Movie*. When the hero and the audiences finally put all the puzzle together from the villain’s motives, the story will make sense depends on the compactness as the key to a good reversal in the story. By this time the hero will know or may not know what to do next, but the villain is also about to execute the ultimate plan that connects the backstory in act 0. And this act will conclude in a seminal incident where the twist is revealed and the hero learning the history lesson.

Act 7 : Go For the New Goal

With the second goal is clear now, the scene will take the hero’s path on solving this final goal. This act is also called the comeback. This leads to a situation where the hero and the villain comes to an equal condition, this is where the final conflict fight being solved, a friends helping, the hero gaining new strength, or in non-adventure story, the hero learned his lesson have the new information he needs to become different while doing the comeback. The hero must prevent the bad takes and wins.

Act 8 : Resolution

The awards, the mourning, rituals to perform, home to go back to, it's the short and satisfying end of story (or not). Fade out to credit title.

BRANCHING NARRATIVE

Taken from the brief overview of the different kinds and types of story structures in video games (Diversity in Game Narrative by Chris Bateman). The kind of story can be defined by its graphic structures. The linear storyline which are the traditional narratives have only one major decision and cannot be considered as a game types of storyline. Meanwhile Branching story have the advantage of being interactive by including a large number of choices which also determine the next different result of story event. From this perspectives, there are some possibilities of branching story based on the Bateman's word :

1. Branching A Branching Narrative that obviously a basic thing to do to a linear story, adding decision and path that will lead to a different cause and effect in a event of a storyline includes the ending.

"Branching" Graphic Source : Game Design Concepts, 2009

2. Parallel Paths A Branching Narrative that collapses in on itself, allowing audience to choose and then collapsing all of them eventually into several main events. Just like in Silent Hill, that the player's choices will impact the some events. This path keep the decisions in some amount of manageable story, so wether the player is forced to choose a path, the entire plot arc still in essential linear storyline.

"Parralel Paths" Graphic Source : Game Design Concepts, 2009

3. Threaded The term from Bateman describes that the story are divided into small pieces, several plot arcs going at the same time that may impact or intersect the next plot. The story may have multiple beginnings and middles. But requires more than one character arc and perspectives.

"Threaded" Graphic Source : Game Design Concepts, 2009

4. **Dynamic Object-Oriented Narrative** Another Bateman's term to describes several mini-stories with potential several entry points and exit points on each of them. A single exit point may lead to final ending or another mini-story. The mini-stories can be considered as chapters or acts. So its just like reading a story in a different order. This type of story can become parallel paths but without linear arc. Each arc has it own choice, and the overall collection of mini story itself acts like a larger branching or parallel path story.

"Dynamic Object-Oriented Narrative" Graphic Source : Game Design Concepts, 2009

INTERACTIVE NINE ACT STRUCTURE SAMPLE

The Set up sample for the story : Act 0 - The ultimate plan for child kidnaping and the evil motives Act 1 - A sunny and brightfull festival day in the park Act 2 - A scene of a child got kidnaped leaving the parents screaming in the park. Act 3 - In a small town, Mandy is determined to go to another festival day in the park with her parents that day, since she knows that day the sugarcandy seller will also came, it is the main reason why Mandy is so eager to come, since the small hometown of hers don't have any candy shop. But bump happen when her parents change the plan into an out-town trip. Act 4 - She committed to go to the park alone for the candy call without her parent's consent (first goal) Act 5 - at the park, the sugarcandy guy tricks Mandy and finaly kidnaps her Act 6 - At the secret hideout, The seller reveal his identity and evil motives to the captured & tied-up Mandy, and then leaving to the second floor to make a ransom phone call to the parents. Act 7 - The brave Mandy trying and manage to free herself, even encounter the seller and beat his own game (second goal) Act 8 – The bad guy's plan being ruined revealing his hidden crime tracks, called the police seizing the hideout, reunited with her parents, Mandy gain rewarding experiences and learn the moral of the story. From the nine act breakdown, for the sake of the hero's perspective, the exposition of the story can be locked down from act 0 to 2 as the main core of introduction in the story, the interactive part and the branching method can be arranged based on Bateman's terms such:

1. **Branching** The Branching Result means different ending, this will violate the core act of 0 to 2, since the act 6 is related to the backstory unless all the option can be locked to always connects the act 6, 8 and 0. The graphic will not provided for this method
2. **Parallel Paths** The Branching is possible with this method without violating the nine act structure. This method also sticks to the perspective of one main character.

"Parallel Paths Method" Graphic Source : Naldo Yanuar, 2019

3. Threaded This method will use more than one perspective of a character, In this case we can use the point of view from Mandy, the parents, and the Kidnapper himself and make an interactive storytelling that concludes at the end, but that will require major modification for the nine act, since the structure is designed for the hero's point of view only. So to use threaded narrative, it requires a different set story for each path from act 0 as well or doing a multiple nine act structures that combined in a threaded arc, But it is still possible to make alternate interactive choices with this method. The graphic will not be provided for this method alternate interactive choices with this method. The graphic will not be provided for this method

4. Dynamic Object-Oriented Narrative The Method is possible to add interactivity in this study case, the mini-stories plot also works for interactive storytelling, but the story will become more complex which the grouping of the certain act can be many, but giving the result that will end in a different branch, will certainly violate the reversal act unless we can keep all the ending locked to the backstory. Again, multiple nine act structure in a structure is possible, but that will be creating different story for certain core act and that is not the point of the main topic as well.

CONCLUSION

Every term made by Chris Bateman is possible to create a compelling interactive storytelling, but to stay at the core of the nine act structures, the efficient combination method that can be applied is the Parallel Paths method with various modification and plot devices. The other terms are also considered possible, but with the disadvantages of creating a different set of more than one character's arc, multiple ending that strays further from its backstory, therefore creating a violation to the structure itself where it focused on the hero, the strong reversal, and the history lesson. Unless there's a meta- narrative or multiple 'story structure in a structure' involved, and also a matter of perspectives how the alternate choices will be, which of course in a different topic of analysis.

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