"A critical hit!"
—Kenneth Hite, author of *Tour de Lovecraft*



HAMLET'S HIT POINTS

ROBIN D. LAWS

Unlock the Game-Mastering Power of Three Classic Tales



Praise for *Hamlet's Hit Points*

A critical hit! Whether you approach *Hamlet's Hit Points* as a writer, as a critic, as a film buff, or as a gamer, you'll find that Robin Laws is there ahead of you, pointing the way. An unparalleled game designer and best-of-breed game master, Robin reminds us that narrative is worth it: worth creating, worth studying, and worth nurturing in any format, with or without dice.

—Kenneth Hite
Author, *Tour de Lovecraft*

In skilled hands, roleplaying games are powerful lenses through which we can see our world and our lives in fresh ways. Robin Laws applies a lens to the lens, zooming in with Hubble-like intensity to expose the rich relationship between interactive stories and their participants.

—John Scott Tynes
Game Designer, *Puppetland* and *Unknown Armies*

Robin Laws cannot see a game-box without thinking outside it.

—James Wallis

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HAMLET'S HIT POINTS

What Three Classic Narratives Tell Us About Roleplaying Games

ROBIN D. LAWS

with Illustrations by Craig S. Grant



GAMEPLAYWRIGHT PRESS

A NOTE ABOUT THIS PDF'S FORMATTING

This PDF edition of *Hamlet's Hit Points* is formatted—and thus, paginated—differently from the book's print edition. Specifically, in the three story analyses here, beat maps that graphically depict several beats in succession have been eliminated in favor of single icon-and-arrow combinations per beat. We've done this because on many PDF readers viewing an entire two-page spread at once is impractical, but to do so is necessary to make easy sense of the print edition's multi-beat maps. However, because you may want to have it, a separate PDF that is identical to the print version, formatted in spreads rather than single pages in order to preserve the print edition's exact appearance, has been made available in parallel with this version. In addition, a third PDF presents all of each story's beats as single, massive, one-page maps.

If you acquired this PDF from a legitimate source, all three files should have been provided as a bundle. If you did not receive all three PDFs, please contact service@gameplaywright.net or your PDF's vendor.

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The icons that identify the beat types described in *Hamlet's Hit Points* have been released under a Creative Commons license. We hope you'll use them to create beat maps of your own. For more information and to download these graphics, visit gameplaywright.net/hamlets-hit-points.

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HOW TO PRETEND YOU'VE READ THIS BOOK

Hamlet's Hit Points creates a system for analyzing stories tuned to the needs of roleplaying gamers. As such it assumes a basic familiarity with roleplaying terms and techniques.

With its system of beat analysis, you can track a narrative's moment-to-moment shifts in emotional momentum. Beat analysis builds itself around the following very basic fact:

Stories engage our attention by constantly modulating our emotional responses.

As observations go, this one is glaringly obvious, once stated. Yet we in the roleplaying community have paid it surprisingly little heed over the nearly forty years of our form's existence.

The opening essay, "Surprised By Story," finds a historical explanation for our collective neglect of narrative fundamentals.

The "Beat Analysis" section lays out the building blocks of our story breakdown system. It divides stories into a series of separate moments, or beats. Beats fall into nine categories: two primary types and seven less common ones. Each beat resolves in a way that alters or reinforces the audience's responses. Most move us either toward hope or fear, with the odd beat resolving ambiguously.

The bulk of the book is given over to full-length analyses of three classic narratives. It applies the beat analysis system to learn how William Shakespeare, in *Hamlet*, and the filmmakers behind *Dr. No* and *Casablanca* modulate our responses. Notes throughout examine ways to import the techniques found in these works into our GMing and playing.

Finally, we discuss ways to use the beat system to analyze:

- Other existing narratives, with an eye toward internalizing storytelling technique, which strengthens your instincts as an improviser when GMing or playing.
- Your planned adventures and scenarios, to increase player engagement with them.
- Game sessions in retrospect, to look for things to improve next time.
- Your own non-RPG stories, to improve them during the outlining and/or revision phases.

If you walk away from reading this book thinking, "Well, that seemed obvious, now that I think of it," and your gaming subtly improves as a result, it has done its job.

Surprised By Story

When Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax entered into the collaboration that led to *Dungeons & Dragons*, and hence what we now call the tabletop roleplaying game, they weren't trying to invent a new story form. They set out to create a new variant of the war games they both loved, in which the basic unit of play would not be a military platoon, vehicle, or squadron, but an imaginary individual. Precursors of their experiment included Dave Megarry's board game *Dungeon* and an unpublished game by Arneson in which police officers pursued fleeing criminals across the highway system of a conveniently squarish-shaped state. Both of these featured identification with a solitary fictional character, but neither had quite evolved into the RPG as we know it.

The missing ingredient was **persistence**—the idea that the single character you played and identified with during the game retained a history from one scenario to the next. Dave and Gary didn't call this persistence; they called it the experience point. By allowing players to follow a character through a series of incidents, in which he gained capabilities—not to mention useful gear—along the way, they let a mysterious element sneak into their creation through a back door. (Doubtless this was a secret door, which elves had a better chance of spotting.)

Certainly, this infiltrating narrative seemed rudimentary at first: a chronicle of rooms explored, creatures slain, and treasures looted. But a simple story is still a story, and soon the other telltale techniques of narrative began to creep in as well. These ranged from supporting characters the heroes interacted with and didn't necessarily fight, to details of setting and culture, to hints of an overall shape, or structure. The game concept of levels, in which the heroes would over time fight progressively tougher threats, paralleled the rising stakes of Western dramatic narrative. Some players found it appealing to develop the inner lives of their characters. This in turn led to the idea that PCs might sometimes disregard their most advantageous choices in straight-up game terms in accordance with their emotional impulses. This innova-

tion led to the first of many aesthetic splits within the suddenly burgeoning RPG community, between the efficient strategists and those more interested in exploring their characters. It caused some discomfort even to Gary, who, in one of his occasional excursions into controversy, used his *Dragon* magazine column to decry the growing influence of play-acting on the game he had co-created and popularized.

As story continued to seep in unbidden through the edifice of armor classes and magic item tables, dissatisfied tinkerers responded to *D&D* with rules sets of their own. An early wave of designs sought, in keeping with the hobby's wargaming roots, to simulate reality less abstractly, by considering more of the factors influencing combat outcomes. Designers tackled new genres, from space opera to superheroes. Later waves confronted the rigid limits of early class-based character creation by creating discrete skills and, later, build point systems. As they did so, they added to the arsenal of tools GMs could use to evoke narrative forms. *RuneQuest*, to name one of many examples, introduced a system of cults that made your character class your ideology, providing you with a personality stereotype and hooking you into the myths of its setting, the world of Glorantha. *Champions* encouraged players to create secondary characters around a player character, from enemies to dependents, by treating them as disadvantages that would earn additional build points. *Call Of Cthulhu*, by evoking the structure of the horror mystery, created an explicitly narrative framework for its characters to navigate through. It also measured its characters' emotional states by assigning a Sanity statistic, which was then placed in constant jeopardy. The *James Bond* game likewise attempted to emulate the tropes and tricks of Ian Fleming's novels and the long-running movie series they spawned.

Since then, the constituency of players, designers and GMs focused on the game's narrative values has continued to grow. A move in the mid-90s toward radically simpler rules sets, typified by Jonathan Tweet's *Over the Edge*[1], helped story-focused GMs and players situationally seize control of the narrative from the dictates of tightly deterministic rules resolution. Story concerns dominate the designs of today's now firmly-established indie scene, as inspired by seminal games such as *My Life with Master* and *Dogs in the Vineyard*.

Simultaneously with these later waves of rules development, schools of criticism grew up to define and explain the various divergent strains of RPG

1: Full disclosure: The author contributed material to *Over the Edge* and its product line—another confirmation of the field's blurred lines between the roles of author, designer, participant and critic.

practice. Following the hybrid nature of the form, in which participants serve as both creators and audience, these critics were not outside observers, but participants. These systems most notably included the set of terms defined by members of the USENET newsgroup rec.games.frp.advocacy and Ron Edwards' Gamist-Narrativist-Simulationist trinity. These putatively critical inquiries often served as manifestos, subtly or otherwise arguing for the superiority of their promulgators' preferred play styles. More importantly for the purposes of this discussion, they tended to develop their approaches from scratch, without reference to other story forms and the array of techniques associated with them. The same can be said of many indie-style designs, whose attempts to foster narrative play sometimes seem abstrusely detached from the principles of story creation as used by practitioners in the fields they're seeking to emulate.

This makes historical sense, given narrative's secret door approach into our form. Collectively, we designers, players, and GMs have yet to step back and study the fundamentals of western story technique as developed since prehistory (myth and the epic poem), Greek antiquity (theater as we know it), the 1700s (modern fiction), or the 20th century (film, comics, radio, television).

This book, then, is an initial step toward developing a grounding in story techniques of relevance to roleplayers. It breaks down three classic narratives according to their story beats, in search of principles and examples we can apply to our storymaking process at the gaming table[2].

It would be mightily convenient for this purpose if there existed a ready-made mode of narrative analysis we could take off the shelf, sprinkle a few RPG observations onto, and call it a day. Instead, we'll have to descend to the lab to create a hybrid entity, like Gygaxian wizards taking a deer and an eagle and turning it into a peryton.

From the elementary literary analysis you probably learned in secondary school, we can take certain fundamental terms. Of greatest use are those concerning the roles characters play in the story, such as protagonist, antagonist, foil, and so on. Also of some use are terms for the components of story structure: introduction, rising action, climax, and denouement.

Higher-level literary criticism is of less direct use here. It tends to focus

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2: At the risk of committing a vile act of neologism, I use the term *storymaking* to emphasize the collaborative nature of the process. Storytelling sounds nicer but carries the connotation of a one-way flow of creativity from a privileged, active GM to a subordinate, passive group of players. It has also been hijacked by writers who prefer to shirk the requirements of coherence and thematic unity by saying "I'm just a storyteller, man." These people are why I stopped wearing a fedora.

on prose style, and also on theme, including political content, historical context, and gender roles. This is not to say that these components of fiction are unworthy of study, just that they have little to tell us about the nitty-gritty of roleplaying technique.

Theater and film, including off-shoots like radio and TV drama, serve as our strongest models for the RPG experience. Their emphasis on dialogue and external action makes their techniques ripest for our looting purposes. However, texts for playwrights and screenwriters don't necessarily focus on our issues. Screenwriting manuals tend to focus on structure, following the granddaddy of the form, Syd Field's *Screenplay*.

The improvised, collaborative nature of the experience frees us from the tyranny of structure. We not only forgive messiness, we expect and demand it. Without it, players fear a loss of control to an overbearing uber-narrator. If, as GM, you can occasionally build on a previous moment in an unexpected way, cut out a few boring bits, and have something big and exciting happen near the end of a session, you seem like a genius of structure.

With loose structure being the norm, we can instead turn our attention to the moment-to-moment transitions inside a play, film, or television episode. One tends to find it codified not from the writer's point of view, but from the actor's. As interpreters of dramatic material, actors learn to break scenes down into beats, marking shifts in tactic and reaction. Actorly beats may shift on a per-sentence basis, or even by sentence clause or fragment. Fortunately, we can zoom out further than that, or it would take the entire book just to analyze the bedroom scene between Hamlet and Gertrude. Nonetheless, we can adapt this method of analysis to find the basic direction of interaction scenes, including shifts that mark changes of beat within the same scene. These are drawn in part from the Michael Shurtleff acting text *Audition*.

If screenwriters are supposed to wrack their brains over structure, film editing requires a focus on the internal rhythm of each scene, in addition to the broad strokes of overall pacing. The terms petitioner and granter are borrowed from legendary film editor Walter Murch, as they appear in the Michael Ondaatje interview book, *The Conversations*.

EXCEPTIONS THAT TEST THE RULE

In any art, including the narrative forms, rules are made to be broken. Story construction is alchemy, not science. The techniques identified here aren't rules to be obeyed so much as tricks that have been proven to work over time. They've reliably delivered, from Shakespeare's day to ours. We can use them to our benefit if we learn to internalize them and deploy them instinctively. That said, some of the most memorable and resonant moments of fiction, theater, or film come when the creators violate, or seem to temporarily suspend, the so-called "rules."

The more conventional or classical a narrative, the more readily beat analysis can be used to understand it. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* gains its power from its refusal to resolve or develop. Non-narrative novels, like William S. Burroughs' works from his cut-ups period, or the surrealist reverie of Giorgio de Chirico's *Hebdomeros,* may convey emotional ups and downs without recognizable beats.

Poorly constructed works break the model by failing to satisfy the audience. A work that continually rings the same emotional note wears on all but the most tolerant viewer. However, it must be acknowledged that some works employing extremely flat and/or repetitive rhythms wring reliable praise from a small but devoted band of critics and viewers. However, as few of you are planning to run roleplaying campaigns based on the films of Bela Tarr or Zhang Ke-Jia, we can make intellectual acknowledgment of the exception and move on.

Beat Analysis

What follows is not the only or ultimate way to analyze narrative[3]. It does, however, provide us a basic series of reference points we can use when looking at particular stories and how their scenes are constructed and connected.

We're going to look at beats as consisting of two components: types and resolutions.

The **type** tells you what purpose the beat performs in the narrative. Beats may perform multiple functions, particularly during key moments.

The **resolution** marks the emotional state engendered in the audience by the beat as it closes. It may occasionally be ambiguous—we might register a mix of elation and fear over an action beat, or contradictory feelings toward our hero after a dramatic beat.

Beat Types

Procedural



A procedural beat brings into play a protagonist's external or practical goal. It either moves him closer to that goal, fulfilling our hopes, or moves him further away from it, realizing our fears. During a procedural beat the hero, or others under his protection, are often in jeopardy, directly or indirectly. If not, the hero is at some risk of a setback that would take him further from his goal. For this reason procedural beats generally evoke a feeling of suspense, which may be intense or subtle, depending on the stakes in play.

In a procedural beat, verbal conflicts are resolved through negotiation, threats, or by reference to other external or tactical considerations. One par-

3: Nor does an exploration of narrative technique constitute the only avenue worth exploring as we look for ways to make our games more fun and engaging.

ty, the petitioner, seeks a practical consideration from the other, the granter. Once gained, the petitioner is able to move forward in the narrative in pursuit of a goal, usually the procedural goal. The petitioner often gains information but might also get money, a needed piece of equipment, access to a location, or a promise of non-interference from the granter.

- Obi-Wan Kenobi uses the Force to convince the stormtroopers that these aren't the droids they're looking for. (*Star Wars.*)
- Dr. Willett intones the spell that reduces the possessed body of Charles Dexter Ward to dust. ("The Case of Charles Dexter Ward.")
- Marion Ravenwood drinks the roughneck patrons of her Nepalese bar under the table. (*Raiders of the Lost Ark.*)

Dramatic



A dramatic beat invests us in the protagonist's inner goals. To achieve them he must engage in negotiation with others to whom he maintains some sort of emotional connection. He may petition them for expressions of feeling, or thwart their efforts to gain the same from him. We hope that the beat moves him closer to a positive inner transformation and fear that it might move him toward a negative transformation.

Conflicts in dramatic beats are by definition verbal. One party, the petitioner, seeks an emotional concession from the other, the granter. Common concessions include gestures of affection, reassurance, or submission. Often the petitioner seeks to inflict emotional injury on the granter. In more complex dramatic beats both participants may act as both petitioner and granter, each seeking to wring an emotional concession from the other.

- Spock Prime establishes himself as mentor to his younger, alternate-universe self. (*Star Trek*, 2009.)
- Seeking a connection to the man he believes to be his brother, Daniel Plainview confesses that he has competition in him, and wants no one else to succeed. (*There Will Be Blood.*)
- Roma humiliates Williamson after the latter's blunder costs him a real estate deal. (*Glengarry Glen Ross.*)

Narratives typically exist on a continuum between the procedural and dramatic, rather than being exclusively one or the other. *Hamlet* sits in the

middle of the continuum. *Dr. No* is primarily procedural, introducing a few dramatic beats during one sequence and then folding them back into its procedural narrative. *Casablanca* is primarily dramatic, with a procedural subplot featuring a secondary character. Other pieces of less interest to the gamer tribe are exclusively dramatic: examples include *Death of a Salesman*, *The Graduate*, and *Bright Star*.

Moments of drama in a primarily procedural narrative may be left unresolved. Typically we refer to such sequences as "character development." They intensify our identification with the protagonist, who seems more fully human due to these moments, even if they never really go anywhere.

Together, the procedural and the dramatic beats comprise the elementary building blocks of narrative. Almost all beats in a story will be one or the other. The following special beat types occur less frequently.

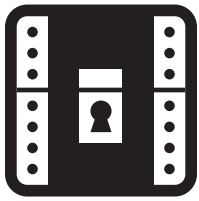
Commentary



A beat in which the protagonist's movement toward or away from his goal is momentarily suspended while the author underlines the story's thematic elements. Commentary sequences often make use of bystander or observer characters who function as a Greek chorus. Shakespeare's clowns may provide commentary on the action. Adroit storytellers use this device sparingly; it stops the action and easily becomes heavy-handed. Ideally, a story's theme is handled through beats which are also accomplishing something else, so that it is seamlessly interwoven with the rest of the narrative.

- Noting Romeo's lovestruck state, Mercutio goes off on a flight of poetic fancy, comparing him to a man bewitched by fairies. His speech metaphorically reinforces the suggestion, pervasive throughout the play, that the eventual sacrifice of the young lovers has been decreed by destiny. (*Romeo and Juliet.*)
- In his authorial voice, Charles Dickens asserts that the people of 1785 saw their era in contradictory terms—as both the best and worst of times—and were thus not much different than people at any other time. (*A Tale of Two Cities.*)
- The Stranger (Sam Elliott) addresses the camera to take comfort in the fact that the Dude abides. (*The Big Lebowski.*)

Anticipation



Beats of this type create an expectation of coming procedural success, which we look forward to with pleasure. The reverse of a beat of jeopardy or suspense, this foreshadows a success or gratification to come. The beat in which the hero finally suits up and readies himself for a long-delayed battle provides a classic anticipation beat. We are not worrying for the hero, but vicariously reveling in his promised victory.

- Popeye has eaten his spinach. (Any given episode of *Popeye*.)
- Bruce Banner has transformed into the Hulk. (Any given issue of *The Incredible Hulk*.)
- The blast doors whoosh up to reveal Ripley in the power loader. (*Aliens*.)

Gratification



A gratification beat allows us a positive emotional moment that floats free from the main narrative. They often appear as rest breaks between major sequences. A musical interlude often acts as a gratification beat (unless it also advances the story, as it frequently does in the musical genre). In stories drawing on a rich ongoing continuity, a beat that tips the hat to fans with an aside acknowledging their mastery of its trivia works as a gratification. Other in-jokes and winks at the audience work the same way.

- Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) makes a crack about how ridiculous he and the other X-Men would look if they all wore spandex. (*X-Men*.)
- Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) goes to a party to talk to Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall), where he finds her giving an impromptu performance of the song "Her Tears Flowed Like Wine." (*The Big Sleep*.)
- Indulging his love of racing, George Lucas extends a racing sequence featuring young Anakin Skywalker long after it has served its informative purpose by establishing the kid's vehicle-wrangling chops. (*The Phantom Menace*.)

Because they situate themselves outside the story, gratification beats risk breaking the fictional illusion and must be doled out sparingly. When a mov-

ie or TV show is too heavily larded with these moments, you may be looking at the result of interference from producers and executives. They've trained themselves to see stories as connective tissues fusing together various categories of gratification. This is why so many would-be blockbusters play more like hodge-podges of disparate stimuli than satisfyingly integrated narratives.

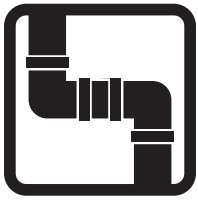
Bringdown



A mood-setting beat in which we experience a negative emotional moment that floats free from the main narrative. This may be a moment of pathetic fallacy, in which the hero's environment reinforces and comments on his unfortunate situation. Stock bringdowns include the moment when the hero gets splashed by a passing truck after being dumped by his girlfriend. Moments of creepy atmosphere in horror stories might also function as bringdowns.

- The Dude's cell phone continues to ring in the bowling alley after his failure to deliver the ransom money. (*The Big Lebowski.*)
- Jerry Lundegaard's car, alone in a desolate parking lot, is completely iced over after his father-in-law bars him from a promising business deal. (*Fargo.*)
- After losing his straight job, Jack Foley's short-lived return to crime ends with his arrest in a car that won't start. (*Out of Sight.*)

Pipe



A beat that surreptitiously provides us with information we'll need later, without tipping the audience to its importance. The twin dangers of pipe-laying beats are complexity and predictability. The teller must avoid providing so much supporting information that the story becomes confusing, and must disguise it so that the audience doesn't spot the associated reveal (see below) ahead of time. The term comes from screenwriting parlance and compares exposition to plumbing: you need it for your house to work properly, but you don't want to see it.

- None of the adults really interact with Dr. Crowe (Bruce Willis). (*The Sixth Sense*.)
- From the first frames of *Shutter Island*, skewed angles and a sound-

track loaded with distressing 20th century classical music subliminally hint to us that something's not right here.
- Danny Ocean and crew build a duplicate of the vault they're planning to rob. (*Ocean's Eleven*, 2001.)

Question



A question beat introduces a point of curiosity we want to see satisfied. Often it occurs as a protagonist seeks information in pursuit of a procedural goal. Question beats are the basic narrative currency of the mystery genre and its various offshoots. While standard procedural beats make us wonder what is going to happen next, question beats tend to engage our curiosity about what has already happened, but has not been made clear to us. A question generally resolves as a down beat (see "Resolutions: The Hope/Fear Cycle"); the lack of information poses an obstacle to the hero and tantalizes the audience.

- The crew of the *Nostromo* receives a distress call. (*Alien*.)
- A client, Miss Morstan, presents Holmes with a curious letter she received, promising her the vengeance she deserves as a wronged woman, if she keeps an appointment with the unknown writer later that night. ("The Sign of Four.")
- J.J. Gittes finds Mulwray, drowned during a drought. (*Chinatown*.)

Reveal



A reveal provides the information we were made to desire in a previous question beat, or surprises us with new information. In the latter case it might come out of the blue, or have been set up with one or more pipe beats laying the groundwork for the surprise. We tend to be more engaged by exposition when it has been teased to us by a prior question, or can clearly see its impact on our hopes and fears. Reveals are likely to resolve as upward beats, especially where they satisfy a prior question that has been nagging at the audience since it was posed. The information provided, however, might indicate greater jeopardy or challenge for the hero, in which case it resolves as a down beat.

- Dr. Crowe is a ghost, perceived only by the kid who sees dead people. (*The Sixth Sense.*)

- Ocean's gang built the vault to create a false video feed to the casino security system. (*Ocean's Eleven*, 2001.)
- Norman's mother is a mummified corpse in the basement. (*Psycho*.)

Pipe, questions and reveals interrelate; we can collectively refer to them as informational beats.

Most narratives resolve from disorder to order.

Their first acts may present an orderly status quo which is then disrupted. *Casablanca* does this, as we'll see: our protagonist is imperturbable until his personal order is disrupted by the return of his former lover.

Alternately, stories may start as the eruption of disorder occurs, as *Hamlet* and *Dr. No* do.

Stories typically add complications, increasing disorder until a very disorderly climactic event occurs. It introduces a conclusive change and a new equilibrium.

In drama as in life, a question disrupts order, and its answer restores it.

QUESTION/REVEAL: LITFIC'S SECRET WEAPON

Many contemporary literary novels rely heavily on the question/reveal duality as a source of narrative suspense. Often fracturing their narratives chronologically, they keep the reader engaged by repeatedly hinting at major plot points before revealing them in their entirety. This device allows writers working in the literary tradition to downplay or ignore physical jeopardy, and to present character interactions without constantly resorting to the high-pressure stakes of dramatic scene construction. For examples of this technique in action, see Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business*, or John Irving's *A Prayer For Owen Meany*.

Resolutions: The Hope/Fear Cycle

We like to think of ourselves as having a wide range of emotions—well, except for those of us who would rather be Mr. Spock—but when it comes to stories,

two emotions rule and contain all the others. At any given point in a story, we **hope** that the situation at hand will resolve favorably for the character we identify with, and **fear** that it won't. The manipulation of these opposed impulses is the key to narrative engagement. If we don't either hope or fear for the characters, we don't care what's going on, and the game is lost. Both responses are easily exhaustible—too much hope and we become complacent and bored. Too much fear and we surrender to despair and disengage. The rapid yet unpredictable alternation of hope and fear keeps us on the edge of our seats.

When the gaming stories we make together are unsatisfactory, it may be because we aren't ringing the emotional changes often enough.

As we analyze our three narratives, we'll be constructing maps showing their oscillations between hope and fear. All beats resolve forward in experiential time, toward the next moment in the story. Chronologically, a beat in the present may connect to a moment during a flashback (as it does in beat 63 of *Casablanca*), but it always moves us forward into our engagement with the narrative. (We're not concerning ourselves here with the possible branch points you get in a roleplaying story before it unfolds, just with what we see before us on the page or the screen, or what is described as happening at the gaming table.)

In other words, we represent resolutions with arrows, which can only point to the right.

The top of the map represents hope. The bottom represents fear. Resolutions that tend toward hope point up. Those that tend toward fear point down. Beats that don't engage us either way warrant lateral arrows, pointing straight to the right. In a compelling story, lateral moves occur infrequently.

For added detail, the arrows indicate which of the beat categories they belong to. They are either procedural, dramatic, or free-floating. In the latter case, they show no evident connection to either of the main types. For obvious reasons, free-floating arrows are rare. These allow you to tell what kind of story you're analyzing—a procedural (which includes most genres appearing in RPGs) or a drama, and what mix of each you're dealing with.



Procedural, dramatic, and free-floating (upward) arrows.

Procedural and dramatic beats may move us toward hope or fear. Some secondary beats typically resolve in particular ways. Gratifications always point up; bringdowns, as the name suggests, move us down. Questions tend to point down, because lack of information irritates us, whereas reveals often point up, because having information satisfies us. This isn't an ironclad rule, though: sometimes we're afraid to get information, or lose hope when we learn something negative.

The movement between hope and fear is less a cycle that moves back upon itself than a wave of upward and downward movement. The term is used to invoke the pass/fail cycle, a classic way of analyzing adventure fiction, in which the hero meets a series of obstacles, overcoming some of them and being overcome by others[4].

FINDING THE BEAT

Given the sheer number of beats analyzed, you will probably find moments in the following three narratives that you'd call differently. Narrative values aren't mathematical; they depend on assuming an audience response, which is subjective. The urge to quibble with choices made within the system is the first sign you've taken it on board. Like any rules sub-system in a game, you not only can but ought to modify it to suit your own needs. You may find it useful to subdivide the gratification category into a variety of gratuitous pleasures, or to treat happy and unhappy reveals as separate entities. Even using the system exactly as laid out here, no two of us will assign the exact same values to every beat.

The most obvious point of divergence lies in what to consider a beat, and what to treat as one moment within a larger beat. An actor or director would likely find many more beats in dialogue sequences than I recognize here. To keep the beat list to a manageable length, I mark separate beats only on a major shift of tactics on the part of either petitioner or granter, or a change in objective.

In action scenes, I tend to treat a single move or countermove on the part of a protagonist or opponent as a single beat. This fits our responses to the easily read back-and-forth of an action scene. In dialogue exchanges, one typically has to follow both the petitioner's pitch and the granter's reply before deciding whether something good or bad is occurring.

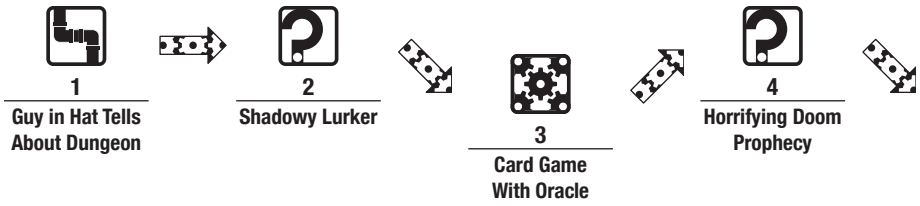
4: The original analysis of *Hamlet* appeared as a series of entries on my blog, which you can find by Googling my name. On my first pass through the work I characterized my analysis as a pass/fail cycle, concentrating at first only on the protagonists' successful or unsuccessful confrontations with plot obstacles. It was while looking at the play on this level that it gradually became evident that the tracking of emotional up and down moments yielded much more useful information on the nuts and bolts of narrative construction. The version of *Hamlet* seen here has been revised to incorporate that insight from the outset.

Example: The Guy With the Hat in the Tavern

To take our system for a preliminary spin, let's describe an archetypal role-playing situation and map it out as a series of beats with resolutions.

What Happens	Beat Type	Resolution
1: The PCs meet up in a tavern, where a guy in a funny hat tells them about a cave complex in the wilderness outside town, which may contain treasure and danger.	Pipe	Lateral
2: They travel toward the site, on the way noticing a shadowy lurking figure watching them from the treeline.	Question	Down
3: Along the way they encounter an oracle, who offers to see the future if one of them can beat her at a game of cards. The rogue wins.	Procedural	Up
4: The oracle goes into a trance and supplies a terrifying prophecy of doom.	Question	Down

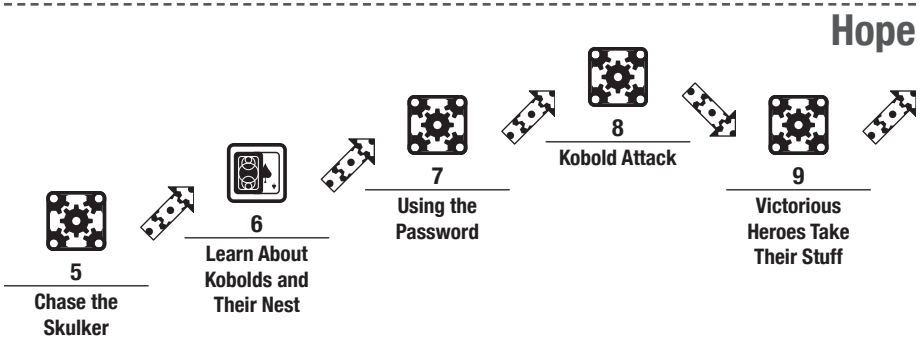
Hope



Fear

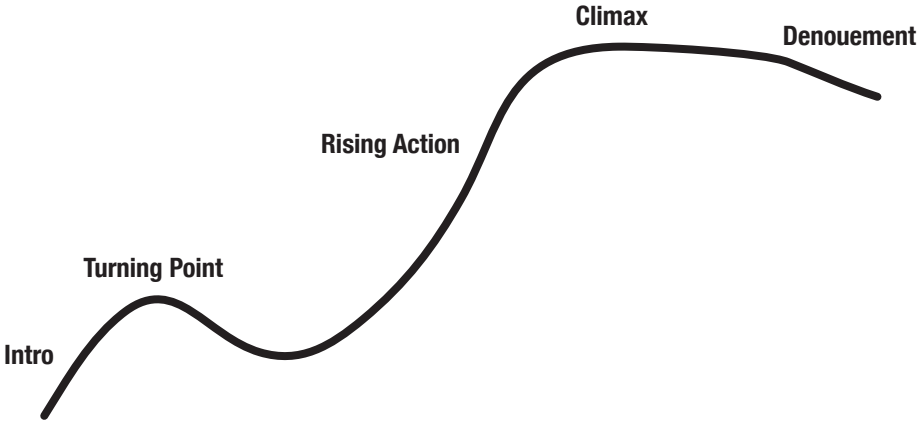
What Happens	Beat Type	Resolution
5: Approaching the dungeon, they apprehend the skulking figure.	Procedural	Up
6: Interrogating him, they learn he's a strange creature called a kobold, and that the cave complex is a nest of his kinfolk.	Reveal	Up
7: Reaching the cave complex, they use the password they learned from the skulker and gain admittance.	Procedural	Up
8: The angry kobolds on the other side attack them.	Procedural	Down
9: The adventurers defeat the kobolds and take their stuff.	Procedural	Up

If our assignment of types and resolutions to these beats seems unclear to you, make a note to come back to this section after reading the three analyses to come. If this book has adequately performed its labors, you'll be able to explain them, having absorbed the examples to come.



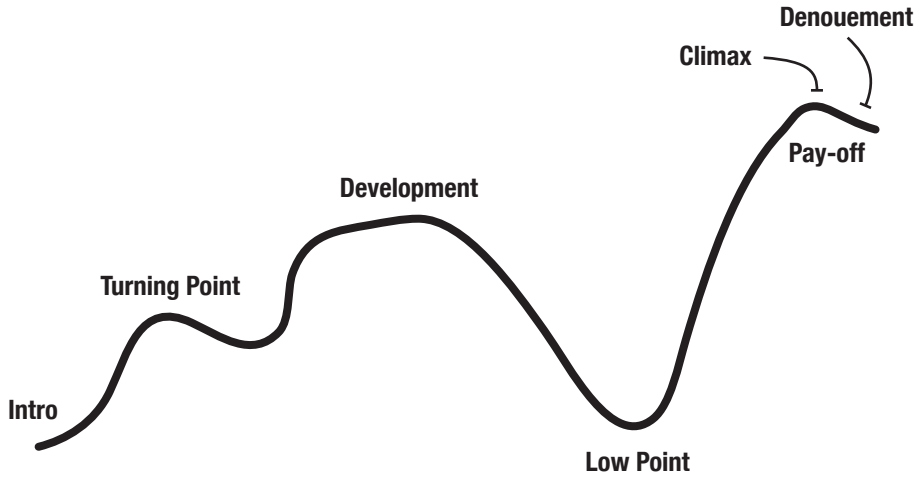
Beat Analysis and Other Narrative Curves

The overall narrative line you get when you connect all of the beats looks different from other story diagrams you may have seen. The classic chart you may recall from secondary school literature classes looks like this:

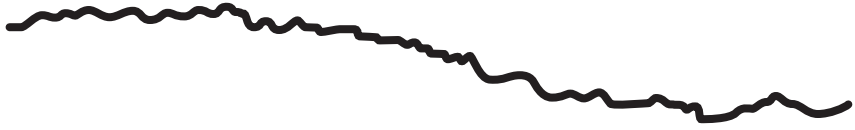


That chart measures the escalating stakes of the narrative. Like most diagrammed narrative maps it is more concerned with conveying the sense of an overall structure than in breaking down moment-to-moment emotional shifts. Although useful to us as a structure to shoot for, the roleplaying form's already-mentioned forgiveness of a messy or wandering narrative line makes it only tangentially useful to us as gaming improvisers.

Devourers of screenwriting manuals may also recognize the narrative curve of the contemporary three-act screenplay, with its notoriously overworked end of act two low point:



As we're about to see, the line we get from performing a beat analysis is much flatter overall. It tends to resemble a stock tracker measuring the progress over time of a slowly deflating security. The overall movement is downward, but there are continual ticks up and down along the way. Here's what *Hamlet* will look like at the end of our analysis:



Even stories that end happily, like *Dr. No* and *Casablanca*, tend to move downward over time.

Dr. No looks like this:



Its downward run is less steep than *Hamlet*'s, but its last beat still winds up lower than its beginning.

Here's *Casablanca*:



If anything, its downward slope is more inexorable than *Hamlet*'s—which adds all the more punch at the end when the Humphrey Bogart character achieves his moving redemption.

When you think about compelling narratives, the downward slope of emotion makes sense. They spend much of their time increasing your sense of tension and anxiety, especially at the end, before relieving it in a sudden upward sweep at the end.

You might correct for the flat slope of beat analysis maps by assigning relative values to all of the beats. While this might prove useful in an academic context, for roleplaying purposes the practical benefit of this added complexity seems elusive.

What with its sword fights and appeal to the Ren fair crowd, we know that gamers find *Hamlet* one of the more approachable pillars of the western literary canon. However, if you're still scarred by studying it in high school or are put off by the tights and the iambic pentameter, get your feet wet by skipping ahead to *Dr. No* and *Casablanca*, and then come back here.

Hamlet

Written at the turn of the 17th century, *Hamlet* remains the master narrative of English literature. Every major leading actor takes a crack at it, or wishes he had. More has been written on it than any other work in the dramatic canon. Though no real scholar has, I bet, included as many arrows and icons in his or her diagram of it. With its tale of murder and retribution within a royal family, it mixes elements of the procedural and the dramatic. Its revenge plotline requires a spate of investigation that makes *Hamlet*, along with his tragic predecessor *Oedipus*, a precursor of the modern detective archetype. Although considered a tragedy for its cathartically violent conclusion, our beat analysis will reveal that it's really more the tale of a doomed hero.

Beats for *Hamlet* are numbered by using Shakespeare's act and scene numbers, followed by a letter within each scene. To aid immediate recognition, beat numbers are presented as Arabic numerals and not the traditional Roman numerals. The third beat in Act II, Scene I would, for example, be labeled 2.1.C. To help you keep your Shakespearean bearings, the traditional Roman numbers appear in headers for each scene.

Act I, Scene I



1.1.A
Guards Take Horatio to See Ghost

1.1.A *A changing of the guard takes place at midnight. Marcellus, an officer at the Danish court, takes Horatio, friend to Prince Hamlet, to witness the appearance of an apparition. They identify it as the ghost of the recently deceased king, Hamlet's father.*

Using one of his standard devices, Shakespeare increases the status of his main character by having him spoken about by others in advance of his eventual appearance. Here his narrative role is taken by a surrogate, his friend Horatio.

This beat establishes the external problem that will drive Hamlet—even

though we haven't seen him yet—for the remainder of the story. His procedural goal is to bring about the vengeance demanded by his father's ghost. It is no less the story's driving goal because he accepts only with doubt and reluctance. Once the story gets rolling, we will hope that Hamlet achieves this vengeance, and fear that he might not. Not that we know this quite yet, as we allow the author the space to orient us in his story.

As we experience it, this might seem to be a procedural beat—the mere presence of a ghost suggests that the characters might be placed in terrifying jeopardy. Horatio, Marcellus and the guardsmen Bernardo and Francisco are certainly frightened of it. As it turns out, the ghost, unlike its counterpart in a horror story, has no power to jeopardize anyone, and no intention of acting against our protagonists.

Although it might also evoke a touch of dread, the beat's main purpose is to engage our curiosity, making us wonder if the ghost is really that of the dead king, and what its appearance portends. That makes it a **question** beat.



1.1.B
Horatio Interrogates Ghost

1.1.B *Horatio seeks words with the spirit but can't get it to speak to them. It vanishes with the dawn. Horatio and Marcellus resolve to tell Hamlet about it.*

The ghost is the petitioner. Its silent presence demands that Horatio bring Hamlet to it. Its goal is practical; it doesn't seek an emotional concession from Horatio, who acts as granter. That confirms this as a **procedural** beat. The outcome seems to promise that the question of the previous beat will soon be answered, moving us closer to the only hope for the story we've yet had time to develop. The procedural arrow points upward.

If *Hamlet* were played as a solo game, this scene would occur offstage—Horatio would appear to him and narrate the incident through expository dialogue, giving him his mission for the game. Let's assume for the sake of this exercise that certain major supporting characters, including Horatio, are also PCs. As the confidant character, he'd be an ideal choice for a kibitzer or a player who attends sporadically.

During his interrogation of the ghost, Horatio charges it to speak, but gets no response. The standard GM move here, would be to have Horatio roll his Religion or Occult or whatever to see if the ghost talks. Neither result would branch the story: a success might lead to the ghost saying that he will only reveal his secret to Hamlet. If so, it would be an example of something that happens all the time in RPGs—the non-branching obstacle. A skill gets used, and the player either feels like a winner or a loser. The emotional tone

changes unpredictably, but the narrative remains on its present course. In gaming, you often get these non-branching obstacles as the PCs explore an environment, seeking information or interactions which wind up being incidental to the action. You haggle down a vendor, learn a bit of tangential lore, or successfully take an unnecessary precaution.

Act I, Scene II



1.2.A
The King's Authority Established

1.2.A *Claudius addresses the court, establishing his authority as king. He grants Laertes leave to return to France.*

These story beats are basically expository, with no real conflict in play, and no signals telling us what to hope or fear. Shakespeare is laying the basic **pipe** we need to orient ourselves in the story. Among other facts, we're introduced to Fortinbras. Shakespeare will continue to drop references to him so we remember who he is when he shows up to provide closure at the end of the play. The beat establishes the status quo that the ghost's demand for vengeance is about to disrupt; as such it warrants a lateral procedural arrow.

In a game, the exposition given here would be handled as GM narration.



1.2.B
Gertrude and Claudius Entreat Hamlet

1.2.B *Claudius and Gertrude attempt to mollify a clearly discontented Hamlet. Each employs different tactics. Hamlet's mother makes an emotional appeal; his uncle lectures him on acceptance and questions his masculinity. Claudius commands Hamlet not to return to school in Wittenburg, but to remain at court.*

Hamlet, obviously, is a player character. This is a **dramatic** beat. Hamlet's objective in this scene is to punish Claudius and Gertrude by withholding his approval from them. They're petitioning him; he's the granter—albeit one with no intention of granting anything. His goal is emotional, not pragmatic—he wants them to feel his displeasure for its own sake, not to achieve any external objective. We see, for example, no indication that he's scheming to take Claudius' place as king.

Gertrude's objective is also emotional. She wants Hamlet to show her that he still loves her. (You could play her as calculating here, but it would be an unconventional interpretation.)

Claudius is a tougher call; depending on how you want to play him, he could be primarily concerned with maintaining his power (a pragmatic goal) or seeking Hamlet's unknowing forgiveness as expiation for his guilt (an

emotional objective.) In performance, a goal with an emotional element is always stronger than a purely calculating one. Whether this is also the case in roleplaying remains unclear. For the sake of this example, let's go with the theatrical choice. It's compatible with the play's portrayal of Claudius as an ambiguous figure, driven by selfishness but capable of remorse.

Gertrude and Claudius fail to extract their desired emotional concessions from Hamlet. They're the petitioners, he's the granter. He has the power in the scene, and emerges as its winner.

This beat calls for an upward dramatic arrow.

This beat might be split in two, one for Gertrude's approach and the other for Claudius'. Since they're acting on complementary objectives and get the same result, it seems most economical to treat it as one moment.



1.2.C
Hamlet Agonizes Over Father's Death

1.2.C *A grief-stricken Hamlet agonizes over his father's death.*

Shifts in audience mood can occur without outward conflict, as characters reveal their inner states. Hamlet does exactly that in this, the first of his famous soliloquies. Hamlet's inner focus reveals this as a **dramatic** beat; he loses emotional power, which we mark with a downward arrow.

You occasionally see soliloquies in RPG sessions, when a player spontaneously describes a character's thought process out loud. GMs looking to build them into gaming scenes might actively prompt players to share their characters' inner states when:

- They're in a solo scene, with no other characters to interact with.
- Their motivation is opaque to other participants.
- The drama would be heightened by a hint of character emotion.



1.2.D
Hamlet Decides to Investigate Ghost

1.2.D *Horatio and Marcellus tell Hamlet about the apparition of his father; he decides to investigate.*

Horatio and Marcellus convey information we already know. You don't much see this in well-paced contemporary writing, but then Shakespeare's players had restless groundlings to contend with. A little repetition of essential plot points would have been essential at the Globe Theater.

This also arises frequently in roleplaying sessions, where players must be clear on what information they're sharing with each other on the character level. To the extent that *Hamlet* is a detective story, this is the scene where he

accepts his assignment. Except here the client is himself. This moves him toward a pragmatic goal, calling for a **procedural** arrow. It points upward, indicating Hamlet's new resolution. In contrast to the despair of his monologue, he can now see a course of action that might address his grief and shame. In other words, the play's procedural and dramatic streams have now dovetailed—by procedurally investigating the ghost situation and seeing where that leads him, Hamlet stands to repair his shattered emotional state.

Act I, Scene III



1.3.A
Laertes Warns Ophelia Off Hamlet

1.3.A *Laertes warns Ophelia against a liaison with Hamlet.* A **dramatic** beat: Laertes wants reinforcement from Ophelia (his objective), which he hopes to get by projecting his concern for her as a protective brother (his tactic). Unlike Polonius, who makes the same entreaty later in the scene, we see no external ulterior motive at work. As is so often the case, it is the largely silent object of the emotional pitch, Ophelia, who holds the power in the scene. With so little dialogue to go on, her objective remains opaque. She rebuffs her brother by turning the tables on him with an affectionate witticism. It suggests that her goal is to maintain her autonomy against this well-meaning, would-be second father figure.

Ophelia is our third and last PC in our hypothetical roleplayed Hamlet. She's the final major character vaguely aligned with Hamlet—although of course she winds up as a casualty of his quest.

This beat's protagonist figure maintains her emotional power, concluding on an up note.

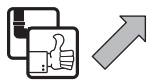
THE PROTAGONIST OF A BEAT

The habit of attaching new meanings to established terms is confusing, deplorable, and one that I'm now going to engage in. The alternative is to create a new term which will be confusing, inelegant, and unmemorable.

Typically we define the protagonist of a story as the character who sets it in motion and makes the choices that determine its direction. We tend to think of it as a solo gig, but stories can be driven by multiple protagonists. Their choices and plot threads might actively collide with one another, or might unfold in parallel, each

thread exerting little pull on the other. The Coen brothers often gravitate to the former approach, for example in their films *Fargo*, *No Country For Old Men*, and *Burn After Reading*. Robert Altman was the master of the latter mode, in such works as *Nashville* and *Short Cuts*.

In beat-by-beat terms, however, I'm going to use the term protagonist to refer to the figure around whom our hopes and fears are focused in any given beat. Occasionally we relate to multiple characters in the course of a single beat, with paradoxical results if they're in conflict with one another. Sometimes a minor character briefly becomes our focus figure. A strange example occurs in beats 67–73 of *Dr. No* when the secondary villain Professor Dent momentarily becomes our protagonist.



1.3.B
Polonius Gives Laertes Platitudes

1.3.B *Polonius bids farewell to Laertes with a string of fatherly platitudes.*

Establishing Polonius' character as a bit of a gasbag and figure of absurd authority, this scene functions as **pipe**, and also as **gratification**. As pipe, it fixes Laertes in our minds so we'll remember him when he comes back into the narrative in beat 4.5.C.

The gratification comes because Polonius is traditionally played for laughs here, as a buffoonish gasbag. If so, it improves the audience's mood, and is marked with a free-floating up arrow.

Occasionally Polonius is played here as a more sinister figure, which increases our sense of worry for Ophelia and, because Polonius is Claudius' henchman, Hamlet. In that case, we'd treat this as a procedural scene and record it as a down beat.

Laertes, as granter, offers no significant opposition to his father, allowing him to feel wise and patriarchal. If we were invested enough in Laertes to regard him as a protagonist, this might be considered a lateral dramatic beat.



1.3.C
Polonius Warns Ophelia Off Hamlet

1.3.C *Echoing Laertes' concerns, Polonius interrogates Ophelia regarding Hamlet's intentions toward her.*

In this **dramatic** beat, our secondary protagonist must defend against the petition of a supporting character. Polonius uses his daughter's sense of filial duty to wring a concession

out of her. She promises to obey him by fending off Hamlet's romantic advances, even though she describes them as honorable. In addition to seeking the sense of power he gets from her obedience, Polonius also furthers the external goal of protecting his position at court. A consummate politician, he sees only trouble in Hamlet's affection for his daughter. If this was the story of how Polonius saves his daughter from a crazy prince, this would also count as a procedural beat in his favor. But of course it isn't, so Ophelia's concession of emotional defeat determines the beat's outcome—a downward dramatic arrow.

Act I, Scene IV



1.4.A
Hamlet vs. Coronation Drunkenness

1.4.A *Hamlet complains to Horatio of the Danish custom of revels attending a coronation.*

This interchange reiterates Hamlet's disdain for Claudius, who he associates with the corrupt behavior he describes. It fills out his character, establishing him as an intelligent nonconformist, criticizing a tradition that gives his people a reputation as drunkards.

Neither a dramatic beat (Hamlet seeks nothing from Horatio) or a procedural one (it gets him no closer to his goal), this beat plays as a throwaway moment. My guess is that it's a topical aside, 1599 style, in which case it counts as an instance of **gratification**. Assuming that the audience agrees, at least momentarily, with Hamlet's editorializing, its outcome is a free-floating up arrow.



1.4.B
Horatio: Don't Meet That Ghost

1.4.B *The ghost appears and beckons Hamlet to a private talk; Horatio tries to talk him out of going.*

This is a **procedural** beat; both participants argue the best solution to a procedural problem they both want to solve. Horatio's fear heightens our sense of the characters' jeopardy. The conflict resolves inconclusively, as indicated by a lateral arrow.

If Horatio and Hamlet are both PCs, this is an intra-PC tactical discussion. The baseline RPG tradition calls for such negotiations to be handled without rules. And indeed, this ends the way most PC disagreements do—with both sides digging in until one of them decides to act on his own.



1.4.C
Hamlet Breaks Free to Confront Ghost

1.4.C *Hamlet breaks free of his friends to confront the ghost.* Hamlet and Horatio take their conflict, which they are unable to resolve verbally, into the physical arena. The prince then goes off to do the risky but interesting thing that moves the story forward. A classic roleplaying moment!

This **procedural** beat increases the scene's sense of urgency. It concludes with a win for Hamlet and a corresponding loss for Horatio. Since this gets our hero closer to the achievement of his procedural goal, it warrants an up arrow. If Horatio's loss had an ongoing consequence in the storyline it might be worth marking with a separate down arrow, but this fleeting moment is never referred to again.

This moment would be problematic in a game context. One choice (Hamlet's) drives the story forward, while the other (Horatio's) prevents or delays an interesting development but leads nowhere in particular. When a PC faces resistance from a character or force controlled by the GM, the GM can alter the resistance so that it's easily overcome, or allows victory inevitable. It's much harder to intervene when two PCs pit their abilities against one another.

Act I, Scene V



1.5.A
Ghost Assigns Hamlet Mission of Vengeance

1.5.A *The ghost commands Hamlet to avenge his murder, naming Claudius as his killer.* This is the big **reveal** we in the audience have been waiting for ever since we heard there's a ghost. Hamlet has now received his mission, just as 007 does in beat 19 of *Dr. No*. Even though it was introduced in the very first beat, our protagonist is now consciously aware of his procedural goal. The rest of the narrative will now flow from this moment. Like most reveals that answer a previously established question, this gratifies the audience and therefore warrants an up arrow.

In the prototypical RPG experience, this beat is the equivalent of the scene where the GM plays the guy in the funny hat who the adventurers meet in a tavern, and who tells them about the treasure-rich dungeon in the wilderness outside town[5].

5: You may recall that the man in the funny hat delivered a pipe beat in the example on page 24. Like any character who exists to supply exposition, the MIFH can deliver pipe, reveal, or even question beats as circumstances require.



1.5.B
Hamlet Swears Friends to Secrecy

1.5.B *Hamlet swears Horatio and Marcellus to secrecy.*
This beat, complete with the delightfully eerie theatrical effect of the ghostly voice, underscores the gravity and danger of the situation Hamlet now finds himself in. It heightens the suspense surrounding his procedural goal, allowing us to fear for him, meriting a **procedural** down arrow.

Act II, Scene I



2.1.A
Scheme Shows Polonius' Duplicity

2.1.A *In a bizarre scheme to test his son's mettle, Polonius enlists a functionary, Reynaldo, to go to Paris and slander Laertes' name.*
This peculiar and eminently removable scene further establishes Polonius as both dodderer and schemer. It serves as a **procedural** beat, if not an especially strong one, by establishing Polonius as a menacing, if foolish, secondary villain. As an obstacle to Hamlet, Polonius is a figure of fear, not hope, and moves the arrow downward.

This is the first of many scenes over the course of the play where none of our designated protagonists is present. To translate it into game terms, a GM would have to stage it in such a way as to overcome POV limitations (see sidebar).

POV LIMITATIONS

Every narrative form exhibits distinct strengths and weaknesses. Film excels at portraying physical action but struggles when called on to convey complex inner states. Theater thrives on the immediate interplay between performer and audience but can't direct the eye with the precision of a moving camera.

Roleplaying games erase the boundary between audience and performer. By giving players decision-making power over the protagonists, it promotes the strongest vicarious identification of any narrative form. Though this dynamic lies at the heart of the RPG experience, it carries with it a downside: stories can only be told through the eyes of their protagonists.

(Exceptions exist, from the troupe style play of *Ars Magica* to the use of third-person vignettes, as described in the fourth edition *Dun-*

geons & Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide 2, but they're still exceptions to a core assumption.)

Novels, films, plays and comic books can all cut away to scenes featuring antagonists and secondary characters. This facility allows easy manipulation of information flow to the audience. It's the key technique of classic suspense sequences, in which the audience knows more about the jeopardy in play than the character who faces it.

In an RPG version of *Hamlet* you'd have to make the point about Polonius' Machiavellian nature, as seen in beat 1.2.A, in a scene involving a player character. At least one PC would have to listen in on his orders to Reynaldo or somehow hear of them later. Whatever the mechanism, the information would have to reach the player characters in order to be presented at all.

We'll note other scenes that would have to be reconfigured to overcome POV limitations as we come to them. To avoid repetition, we'll let some instances pass without comment.



2.1.B
Ophelia Reports Hamlet's Distress to Her Father

2.1.B *A frightened Ophelia comes to Polonius to report an encounter with an unhinged Hamlet. He concludes that he has gone mad with love for her and takes her to repeat her story to the king.*

In this **dramatic** exchange, Ophelia seeks reassurance from Polonius, and gets a small measure of it. Her father does show regret at not taking Hamlet's interest in her more seriously, though he remains mostly concerned with being a good courtier and getting information to the king. It's a small victory for our protagonist but still merits an up arrow.

This beat also supplies our first example of a mixed outcome: it's also a **procedural** victory (and up arrow) for Hamlet. We've already heard him announce to Horatio and Marcellus his intention of putting on an "antic disposition," so we know he's manipulating Ophelia and Polonius. How this furthers his scheme is not yet clear; making this in some sense also a **question** beat.

In an RPG, the player would likely have explained what he was trying to do, so it wouldn't play out as a question. Protagonists can't conceal information from the audience in a form where the players are the audience.

Also, the encounter with Ophelia described here would have taken place "on stage," between the two PCs. To convince her that he's taking leave of his senses, Hamlet's player would likely have had to overcome her Perception (or an equivalent ability, depending on the game system) with his Deception. Alternately, Ophelia's player could have specified that she'd be predisposed to fall for this—although it's the rare player who agrees to have her character deceived.

Act II, Scene II

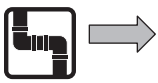


2.2.A
C. and G. Greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

2.2.A *Claudius and Gertrude greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*

This scene introduces a new obstacle to Hamlet's plans—the king and queen have summoned his friends to use against him. Although there's a personal element to the coming betrayal, Claudius' gambit seems more practical than personal. That makes it a **procedural** beat. As it increases our fear of Hamlet's failure, the arrow points down.

In a game, POV limitations would place this scene offstage. It would not register until beat 2.2.E, when Hamlet figures out why Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are here and who they're working for.



2.2.B
No War from Norway

2.2.B *Ambassadors from Norway announce that the threat of invasion from Fortinbras has ended.*

In modern screenplay jargon, you'd say that Shakespeare is keeping the Fortinbras subplot "alive." This way we remember who the heck he is when he shows up at the end. That makes this a **pipe** beat. Evoking neither hope nor fear for our heroes, its effect on our narrative direction is lateral. Its relation to both the practical and emotional goals of our protagonists is unclear, and is noted with the free-floating arrow.

In game you'd handle this with a similar expository throwaway moment, directed instead to Hamlet or another of the PCs.



2.2.C
C. and G. Buy Into Hamlet's Madness Ruse

2.2.C *Polonius recounts, to Claudius and Gertrude, Hamlet's rebuffed entreaties to Ophelia, as well as Hamlet's increasingly erratic response to this rejection.*

Here we fall into the central ambiguity that makes the play so eternally memorable: how crazy, if at all, is Hamlet?

If he's entirely feigning his madness, this is a **procedural** beat. Hamlet tries to seem crazy, to buy himself breathing room as he explores vengeance against Claudius, and to generally throw him off guard. He succeeds in creating a reaction in Ophelia that leads her to tell her father, which in turn guarantees that the story will be conveyed to the king. He has successfully persuaded them that he's slipping into madness—giving us an upward outcome.

If Hamlet is already going crazy, he's desperately trying to save himself by winning a declaration of love from Ophelia. That would make this a dramatic scene, one in which he loses emotional power, marked by a down arrow.

Although you can read it either way, I say that it's too early to start Hamlet on a path to madness. We in the audience know he plans to act crazy, and are most likely to respond to this happily, watching the villains take a step into the heroes' trap.

(As we go forward, studying his intentions in each beat and seeing how they further his procedural ends, we'll find surprisingly little support for the idea that he ever succumbs to madness.)

In a game, POV limitations would require the GM to reconfigure the scene around the PCs.



2.2.D
Hamlet Plays the Madman for Polonius

2.2.D *Hamlet plays the madman for Polonius.*
Although you could argue that Hamlet's emotional goal is to enjoy toying with Polonius, the scheming courtier is clearly a means to an end for him. Hamlet scores a **procedural** up arrow by convincing Polonius he's gone mad. He does this by playing on Polonius' vanity and concern for his daughter, hinting that Ophelia is somehow central to his disordered mental state.



2.2.E
Hamlet Seeks Empathy from R. and G.

2.2.E *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet up with Hamlet and seek to ingratiate themselves with him.*
The exchange between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern breaks into two beats. In the first of these, the pair pursue a procedural goal: to cozy up to Hamlet in order to inform on him to Claudius. However, we're interested in what our protagonist seeks, and here his goal seems to be **dramatic**. He's happy to see his old friends and seeks sympathy from them, by honestly confiding his distress. (You could play it the other way, that he's already suspicious of them and acting the madman. But emotional goals are usually stronger and more interesting than purely procedural ones.) Rather than truly empathize with him, Hamlet's college buddies pooh-pooh his concerns and try to jolly him

up. The beat ends on an emotional down point for Hamlet—he reaches out for comradeship and gets something else.



2.2.F
Hamlet Seeks Remorse from R. and G.

2.2.F *Becoming suspicious, Hamlet turns on his old friends, asking them if they came on their own, or were sent for. They look stricken, revealing the sickly truth—they're here at the bidding of the king to exploit their friendship for advantage.*
Hamlet wants his friends to feel the sting of their betrayal. He's the angry petitioner, seeking emotional pain from them. After a bland denial, Rosencrantz weasels out of the confrontation by distracting him with news of the traveling players' arrival at Elsinore. His evasion carries the day, lodging a **dramatic** defeat for Hamlet.



2.2.G
Child Actors Decried

2.2.G *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fill Hamlet in on the deplorable degradation of the theater scene back in Wittenberg.*
Shakespeare allows himself a digression to slyly decry the faddish popularity of companies staffed by child actors. As an Elizabethan theater in-joke, this beat reinforces the play's appearances versus reality theme but primarily operates as a **gratification**. Like any gratification, it gives the audience an upbeat that floats free of the overall narrative.

In a game, this might be an example of the GM providing tangential but colorful world detail to the players, creating a sense of verisimilitude and pleasing players who enjoy setting exploration.



2.2.H
Hamlet Reprises Death of Priam

2.2.H *Hamlet warmly greets the players, performs a speech from the Death Of Priam, and encourages the First Player to do the same.*
This is a veiled soliloquy, in which Hamlet's mourning for his father is reiterated through his fixation on a play about the death of a noble king. It reminds us both of Hamlet's procedural goal and of his emotional connection to it. The beat doesn't move us toward fear or hope for his procedural goal, but it does make us feel pity for him, making it a **dramatic** down beat.



2.2.I
Hamlet Seeks Submission from Polonius

2.2.I *Hamlet asks Polonius to treat the players well, and he threatens to treat them only as well as they deserve. Hamlet upbraids him.*

This minor **dramatic** beat reminds us that Hamlet is a sympathetic figure and Polonius, a nattering figure of blind authority. Hamlet seeks an emotional concession, submission, from Polonius, which he gets. The beat ends on an up note; Hamlet is getting his emotional footing back after a couple of dramatic losses to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.



2.2.J
Hamlet Enlists Aid of First Player

2.2.J *Hamlet asks the players to prepare* The Murder of Gonzago*, and to be ready to add a few lines he has written.*

This beat sets up Hamlet's central **procedural** gambit, in which he will test Claudius for signs of guilt. With Hamlet's taking the initiative and putting a plan into motion, the audience has reason to hope. The beat ends on an up note. It also sets up a **question**: exactly what is he planning?



2.2.K
"Rogue and Peasant Slave"

2.2.K *In a soliloquy, Hamlet curses his inability to express his true grief over his father's murder, in contrast to the Player summoning affecting tears over the mythical Hecuba.*

Here Hamlet is in **dramatic** conflict with himself, unable to fend off an attack of self-reproach. The fit of weakness leads us to fear that he might fail, supplying a down note.



2.2.L
Hamlet's Plan Explained

2.2.L *Still soliloquizing, Hamlet reveals to the audience his scheme to force the truth into the open by presenting Claudius with a fictional portrayal of his own crimes.*

This **reveal** of the previous question gives us reason for hope, as we can now envision the plan, and see how it removes the primary roadblock between Hamlet and his goal—his need to confirm the ghost's accusation.

Again, you'd get this question-reveal pattern regarding a PC's plans only if the player made a special effort to conceal his actions from other players. Though players keeping secrets from one another can lead to mistrust and confusion, this sequence suggests that the occasional well-planned and executed protagonist reveal can add excitement and rhythmic variety to a game session.

Act III, Scene I



3.1.A
Claudius Happy to Learn of Play

3.1.A *Claudius questions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in an attempt to divine Hamlet's mental state. They tell the king about the play; he seems encouraged by Hamlet's interest in it.*
Here Hamlet, though offstage, scores a **procedural** up arrow when Claudius seems to be falling into his trap. In a game, POV limitations would mean that players would learn of their victory only when someone—perhaps Rosencrantz and/or Guildenstern—came back to report that the king has chosen to attend.



3.1.B
Ophelia Agrees to Take Part in C. and P.'s Scheme

3.1.B *Claudius and Polonius lay a trap of their own for Hamlet, plotting to spy on him when he runs into Ophelia.*
This **procedural** beat is initiated by the antagonists. Ophelia, who we're treating as a PC, agrees to cooperate, unaware of their perfidy. The beat ends on a down arrow, as her cooperation makes the situation more dangerous for our protagonists.



3.1.C
"To Be or Not To Be"

3.1.C *In literature's most famous soliloquy, Hamlet contemplates suicide and agonizes over his inability to put action over thought.*
This speech reminds us of the real Hamlet, a necessary point for Shakespeare to make, as the one we see in action is pretending to be a madman. It shows him in a state of paralysis, unable to move forward. He might prefer suicide to his present situation, but is unable to take that course of action, either. In this **dramatic** beat, he is both the petitioner and granter, looking for calm or relief and refusing to grant it to himself. This registers as an emotional defeat for our focus PC, marked with a down arrow.



3.1.D
"Get Thee to a Nunnery"

3.1.D *Encountering Ophelia, Hamlet verbally assaults her, giving voice to his despair and urging her to withdraw to a nunnery.*
Here Hamlet's emotional and procedural needs reinforce one another. Emotionally, he wants Ophelia to share the despair he voices in his soliloquy. Procedurally, he wants her to report his distress back to Polonius, reinforcing the madness he feigns as he tries to prove the ghost's accusation against Claudius. Accordingly, the

scene delivers both **dramatic** and **procedural** elements. Hamlet scores victories on each level.

Does Hamlet really expect Ophelia to go to a nunnery? If so, he's making a second procedural gambit, trying to safely remove her from Elsinore and the dangers posed by his quest for vengeance. An argument can be made for this, but it seems that if this were Hamlet's primary goal he'd select a tactic more likely to succeed—like confiding in Ophelia and issuing a clear, rational warning. Instead his approach seems calibrated for its effect on Claudius, with little thought to the devastating impact it will have on her.

As audience members, however, our perception of those victories undergoes an ambiguous shift. From Ophelia's perspective, it's a dramatic beat ending on a down note. She wants Hamlet to return to his previous, loving self, and is cruelly rejected. This scene shows us that dramatic scenes between PCs work in both directions, offering victory for one player and defeat for another. We'll note this by giving Ophelia a dramatic down arrow of her own.

Watching the play, we tend to respond to this particular collision of focus characters as an emotional down note. Hamlet gets what he wants, but, for the first time in the play, our sympathy departs from him. We feel for Ophelia as he treats her cruelly. She suddenly becomes our viewpoint character. In other scenes of conflict between focus characters, our sympathies might be more evenly divided—as they tend to be in the many ambiguous dramatic beats rung between Rick and Ilsa in *Casablanca*.

Ambiguously scored scenes, rife with internal contradiction, tend to land more memorably than their simpler counterparts. The fact that this scene works on at least three levels accounts at least in part for its lasting power. Like the monologue that precedes it, it's one of the high points of dramatic literature and still plays like a house on fire four centuries after it was written.



3.1.E
Claudius Convinced of Hamlet's Madness

3.1.E *Witnessing Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia, Claudius concludes that his nephew has gone dangerously mad.*
Hamlet doesn't know it (due to the POV limitation) but has achieved the first part of his objective: Claudius has swallowed his madman act. He has therefore scored a **procedural** victory.



3.1.F
Claudius Plans to Send Hamlet to England

3.1.F *Accordingly, Claudius decides to send Hamlet to England.*

Immediately afterwards, Shakespeare hits us with a reversal: Hamlet has been a little *too* successful at playing the madman. Claudius resolves to get rid of him. Although we don't yet realize just how thoroughly Claudius intends to dispose of him, we still see this as trouble for Hamlet—he can't solve the mystery of his father's death and take due vengeance once he's been packed off to the British Isles. This threat to Hamlet's plans ratchets up the suspense and ends on a **procedural** down arrow.

Act III, Scene II



3.2.A
Hamlet's Acting Advice

3.2.A *Hamlet dispenses some suspiciously writerly acting tips to the First Player.*

Here we indulge Mr. Shakespeare in an extended inside joke-slash-rant. Clearly Hamlet's player is pausing for a comic riff and/or historical tangent: a **gratification** beat, in other words. By definition, this ends on a free-floating up arrow.

In a game, this is the bit where the players break character to talk about last week's episode of *Lost,* and the GM struggles to decide whether to herd them back on track, or make that *mot juste* he's been saving up about the Smoke Monster.



3.2.B
Hamlet Seeks Assurance From Horatio

3.2.B *Horatio deflects a kind word from Hamlet, prompting a desperate profession of gratitude and friendship.*

In this brief **dramatic** beat, Hamlet seeks reassurance from the only true friend he has left. He's nervous as the moment of truth approaches for his theatrical trap. Hamlet wants Horatio to accept his professions of friendship and loyalty. As petitioner, his tactics are two-fold: to argue that character is more important than rank, and to express himself in a somewhat desperate manner, encouraging Horatio to go along with him. After an immediately interrupted expostulation, Horatio wordlessly acquiesces to his royal friend. Both protagonists get what they want, emotionally, taking us to the next beat with a dramatic up arrow.

Hamlet then enlists Horatio in his scheme to watch Claudius' reaction to the theatrical recreation of his apparent crimes. This resembles one of those moments in play when players engage in a planning session, quickly harmo-

nizing player and character knowledge. Although it makes sense for Hamlet to enlist his friend, this plot point doesn't really come to anything, and is best regarded as an expression of Hamlet's emotional up note in this beat rather than a significant beat of its own.



3.2.C
Hamlet Subjects Ophelia to Ribald Jokes

3.2.C *Hamlet greets the king's entourage. Resuming his madman act, Hamlet baits Ophelia with ribald remarks. She deflects him, commenting on his merry mood. He responds by challenging her to agree that his mother seems too happy, given his father's recent death.*

Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia only tangentially impacts on his current procedural scheme, to test Claudius' reaction to an enactment of the murder. You could argue that it is chiefly for Claudius' benefit, so that Hamlet won't seem to be suddenly dropping his cover just as the trap is about to be sprung. If so, this would be a procedural scene. But since we don't see Claudius react to this, it doesn't resolve as such. As a **dramatic** scene, Hamlet seems to be testing Ophelia, to see if her affection for him transcends his madness and crudity. In a perverse way, he's petitioning for her affection. Ophelia gently denies him her concern or loyalty, diminishing his comments as merely "merry." He then switches tactics, giving her another chance to side with him and against tradition and authority as represented by her father and the king. Again she rebuffs him. She doesn't particularly get what she wants, either, resulting in a dramatic no-win resolution. We come out of this exchange on a down note, representing the trajectory for both characters. (You could more cynically characterize this as Hamlet's attempt to gain a sense of emotional power by picking on Ophelia, but he loses that way, too.)



3.2.D
Play Prompts G.'s Unwitting Admission

3.2.D *Hamlet comments on the action as the players reenact Claudius' murder of the king. He baits his mother, asking her what she thinks of the play. Gertrude's answer to his question seems inadvertently revealing.*

Finally we see Hamlet's plan in action. His mother's reaction seems to be a minor procedural success. But since he's said nothing about using the scheme to uncover his mother's guilt, it's slightly off-target. This can also be seen as a dramatic moment—he wants her to concede to him that she's behaved shamefully. However veiled and unknowing, Hamlet presumably takes satisfaction in her words—as does the audience. As his **procedural** and **dramatic** aims dovetail here, the moment is both emotional and charged with suspense. We score the scene with both arrow types, headed up.



3.2.E
Claudius Reveals Himself by Storming Off

3.2.E *A nervous Claudius asks about the play; Hamlet claims that it's about a murder committed in Vienna. The action continues until a distraught Claudius abruptly rises and storms off, confirming Hamlet's suspicions...*

...and paying off the scheme he's been hatching since the arrival of the players in Act II, Scene II. This is a major **procedural** win for Hamlet. It's not much of a dramatic scene, as a) Hamlet never seems to want much from Claudius, emotionally and b) it's achieved through complicated trickery, as opposed to the use of an emotional tactic in a duel of petitioner and granter.

Hamlet confers briefly with Horatio, now taking the ghost's words about his murder as the truth.

This is not so much a separate beat as a confirmation of Hamlet's victory and a capper to the last one. In a game, this would play out as non-contentious dialogue between PCs.



3.2.F
H. Gives R. & G. Second Chance at Contrition

3.2.F *Guildenstern and Rosencrantz arrive with a summons for Hamlet from his mother. He agrees to see her. Dipping back into his madman persona, he lashes out at them for their continuing effort to manipulate him.*

Hamlet tests his former friends for signs of contrition. We see no indication of his doing this to further his plans, so his objective appears to be mostly **dramatic**. They respond with either feigned or genuine incomprehension. Again they disappoint him, ending the scene on a down arrow.



3.2.G
Hamlet Subjects Polonius to a Cloudy Jape

3.2.G *Polonius, as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern did before him, comes to tell Hamlet that his mother wants to see him. Hamlet takes the opportunity to have some pseudo-madman fun at his expense, getting him to agree that a cloud is shaped like a camel, then like a weasel.*

This beat accomplishes nothing new for Hamlet in the procedural plot line: Polonius is as well convinced as anyone that the prince is mad. Its purpose must be **dramatic**: after once again being disappointed by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's steadfast commitment to Claudius, Hamlet regains a measure of emotional power by making a fool of the father of all lickspittles, ending on an up note. Note how it compensates for Hamlet's previous down arrow, giving us a varied emotional rhythm and a sense of reversal.

Act III, Scene III



3.3.A
Claudius Assigns R. & G. to Hamlet's Exile

3.3.A *Claudius informs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that they are to escort Hamlet to exile in England.*
By escalating the exile story thread, the scene further threatens to move Hamlet further from his **procedural** goal, earning a down arrow.



3.3.B
Polonius Plans to Spy on Hamlet's Talk

3.3.B *Polonius informs Claudius of his plan to hide behind an arras and spy on Hamlet's conversation with his mother.*
Immediately after one antagonist-driven scene that intensifies the pressure on an unknowing Hamlet, we get a second one. Hamlet's big feint at Claudius through the players has engendered a furious counter-reaction. This too rates a **procedural** icon and a downward arrow.

[**No number.**] *Hamlet's mother scolds him for offending Claudius; he responds in kind, accusing her of offending the late king.*
This is really the header of a dramatic scene which will continue in a moment, after a deadly intrusion by the narrative's procedural thread. On the map, we'll treat this as a single scene that occurs when it reaches resolution.



3.3.C
Hamlet Kills Polonius

3.3.C *Mistaking Polonius for his uncle, Hamlet kills him.*
This disastrous mistake represents a grave **procedural** loss for Hamlet. If only he hadn't failed his Perception check...

This analysis has until now skipped over the relative weight of narrative beats. Some of the moments we've isolated and placed on the diagram are fleeting and not especially memorable. The upcoming scene where Hamlet approaches upon Claudius at prayer and vengefully decides not to kill him is of greater emotional, thematic and narrative importance than the earlier moment when Hamlet makes fun of Polonius by getting him to agree that a cloud looks first like a camel, then like a weasel, then like a whale.

An elaborate system to mark relative importance of various beats would cost us more in abstruse complexity than it would yield in understanding of narrative patterns. However, certain beats represent major turning points in a story, and this is one of them. The mistaken murder of Polonius inflects every plot development that follows it. If we were varying our arrow sizes according to their weight in the narrative, this would be the biggest and most precipi-

tous drop of the lot.

In roleplaying games, we're used to treating the deaths of enemies as victories. Here it's the opposite. To ensure that a failed Perception check leads to disaster, the GM would make sure that Polonius can be easily killed, at least in this instance. Under most game rules Hamlet would have to hit Polonius multiple times to do him in, making this plot point unworkable.



3.3.D
Haces Laces into Gertrude; She Sees Her Guilt

3.3.D *The confrontation between Gertrude and Hamlet resumes. She demands that he justify his disrespectful treatment of her. His blistering response provokes an epiphany in which the queen responds to her own actions with shame and guilt.*

Here we have an archetypal **dramatic** scene. Each participant seeks capitulation and remorse from the other, doubling as petitioner and granter. Hamlet gets what he wants, taking the emotional power and ending on an up arrow.



3.3.E
Ghost Pressures Hamlet to Kill Claudius

3.3.E *The ghost appears to chide Hamlet for his slowness in killing Claudius.*

The ghost increases the urgency of the **procedural** thread by pointing out that Hamlet's purpose is "almost blunted." This doesn't so much advance the procedural storyline as re-inflate its necessity. In its function it's not dissimilar from the standard moment in a *Law & Order* episode when a tearful family member shows up to ask the prosecutors why they aren't moving faster to convict the guy who killed their relative. This added pressure constitutes a down moment for Hamlet.



3.3.F
Ghost: "Save Gertrude's Soul."

3.3.F *The ghost introduces a new demand, that Hamlet help save his mother's soul.*

This **dramatic** beat increases our sympathy for Gertrude by portraying her as redeemable. At the same time, it increases our fears for the narrative's ultimate outcome, by adding the new awful possibility of her damnation. As such, it points the arrow downward.

The issue of damnation confuses the emotional and the practical. Thankfully, this point is never directly dealt with again. We can therefore duck the theological implications of our two main beat types.



3.3.G
Hamlet Can't Persuade G. Ghost is Real

3.3.G *Gertrude, not seeing the ghost, takes Hamlet's behavior as evidence of his madness. Hamlet tries to convince her that it's real.*

Here an element from the procedural storyline leads to an **dramatic** loss for Hamlet. He tries to persuade her that the ghost is real but fails. The result is an interesting crossing of the streams: a failed persuasion attempt, usually associated with procedural scenes, that leads to a loss of emotional power. In this beat, their conflict arises from a factual question: is Hamlet seeing a ghost, or is he crazy? Hamlet is trying to convince her rationally rather than to overcome her emotionally. Before Hamlet had the upper hand, inducing remorse in his mother. Now, thanks to an ill-timed spectral intervention, that seems to be in doubt. As is the ghost's very existence, which Claudius' reaction to the play seemed to confirm.

Here Shakespeare uses a time-honored technique, engineering a failure that is not the hero's fault, but results from the interference of a secondary character. We'll see this again in *Dr. No*.

Stupid ghost!



3.3.H
H. to G.: Rebuff Claudius; Keep My Secret

3.3.H *A heartbroken Gertrude asks Hamlet what he wants her to do. He makes two requests. One, he tells her to rebuff Claudius' future affections. Two, after admitting that his madness is a ruse, he swears her to secrecy. She agrees to the second with such passion that Hamlet—and perhaps the audience—fails to notice that she makes no mention of the first request.*

Hamlet's two requests split along structural lines—the request for his mother to reject Claudius is dramatic, while the request for secrecy furthers his **procedural** goal. He gets the latter, but not the former. Further complicating matters, the loss of his emotional objective is not evident here; it doesn't become apparent until later that Gertrude has chosen to remain with her new husband. Victories and defeats need to be felt by the audience to impact the dramatic rhythm, so we'll leave off notating this emotional loss until it becomes apparent, in beat 4.1.C.

This is Hamlet's first procedural victory since Claudius revealed his guilt during the players' performance.



3.3.I
Hamlet Fears Treachery from R. and G.

3.3.I *Hamlet reminds Gertrude that he's being banished to England, revealing that he distrusts his escorts, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*

As soon as Hamlet secures a victory by (seemingly) winning Gertrude to his cause, Shakespeare increases the pressure on him again. His distrust introduces a note of danger, making us worry about his success in pursuing his **procedural** goal. Increased tension means a downward arrow.

Act IV, Scene I

Hamlet disappears for a while, leading to three beats whose POV limitations would require reconfiguration in an RPG context.



4.1.A
Gertrude Keeps Hamlet's Secrets

4.1.A *Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius. We can see that she's taking her son's side to a degree, because she portrays him as mad, with no mention of his admission from the previous scene. Claudius responds by vacillating, fearing that he'll ultimately be blamed for his nephew's actions.*

Though offstage, Hamlet gains the upper hand in his struggle against Claudius, scoring another moment of **procedural** advantage. His mother keeps her promise to him—tellingly, she also omits the fact that Hamlet thought he was stabbing her husband. Claudius is taken off-guard, worrying as much about political fallout as the personal threat posed to him by a mad and violent Hamlet. The arrow points up.



4.1.B
R. and G. Dispatched to find Hamlet

4.1.B *Claudius orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet and recover Polonius' body from him.*

This simple **procedural** moment increases suspense by promising a confrontation with Hamlet. It places Hamlet in additional jeopardy, so we give it a down arrow.



4.1.C
Gertrude Still Allied With Her Husband

4.1.C *Claudius departs with Gertrude, announcing his plans to confer with allies, and his dismay.*

This beat reprises Claudius' previously expressed distress. In addition, Gertrude's silent acquiescence suggests that Hamlet's previous injunction to avoid her husband fell on deaf ears. It confirms that she's his procedural ally (keeping

secret his confession of false madness) but not his **dramatic** one. Although he hasn't yet discovered this, perceptive audience members register it as an emotional defeat for him.

Act IV, Scene II



4.2.A
Hamlet Mocks and Rebuffs R. and G.

4.2.A *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern confront Hamlet. He subjects them to verbal abuse they're too obtuse to understand, but refuses to reveal the location of the body.*

In this scene of verbal conflict, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the petitioners, seeking the location of the body—an external, and thus procedural objective. They lack any power over Hamlet, the granter, and get nothing from him. It's an easy victory, and up arrow, for our hero.

Purists of procedural construction might argue that Shakespeare introduces false suspense, following up a couple of beats in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to be threats, but then letting Hamlet blow them out of the water when the confrontation occurs. We can happily discard this theory, especially when faced with the pressures of on-the-fly creation. So-called false suspense is just a variety of reversal, and no more a cheat than any other time-honored storytelling technique. Or, to put it another way, if it's good enough for Shakespeare...

Act IV, Scene III



4.3.A
Why Claudius Doesn't Kill Hamlet

4.3.A *Claudius explains to his attendants why he's sending Hamlet away instead of punishing him for the death of Polonius.*

This beat doesn't so much advance the procedural thread—we have known for some time that Claudius intends to send Hamlet away—as address a logical question concerning the antagonist's behavior in it. (I'm picturing an incident where the actor playing Claudius asks Shakespeare, "Why don't I just kill him?," and he responds by inserting this speech.) It preserves our suspension of disbelief regarding another story moment, rather than being a beat unto itself. It's a **reveal**, though not one we were particularly dying to discover—as indicated by its weak outcome, a lateral procedural arrow.



4.3.B
Hamlet Mocks Claudius

4.3.B *Claudius demands that Hamlet produce Polonius' body; Hamlet refuses. Hamlet continues his madman act and reveals where he's stashed the remains.*

Hamlet is advancing his procedural goals only insofar as he reinforces his madman ruse, which Claudius has already bought into. At best, he seems to be temporizing. Emotionally, he's attacking Claudius by showing contempt for the dead, and the very idea of death. His revelation of the body's location isn't a loss for him; he's giving up a bargaining chip of no great value. The dialogue doesn't indicate how shaken Claudius is by Hamlet's emotional assault. It might play as a victory, a loss, or a wash, depending on how the actor playing Claudius chooses to react. For the purposes of this map, let's treat it as an inconclusive beat, with a lateral **dramatic** arrow.



4.3.C
Hamlet Departs for England

4.3.C *Hamlet departs for England. Claudius orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to make sure he boards the ship will all due haste.*

If he's anywhere but Elsinore, Hamlet can't take revenge on Claudius, making this a **procedural** down beat.

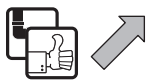


4.3.D
Claudius to Ask English King to Kill Hamlet

4.3.C *Claudius reveals his intention to kill Hamlet after all, acting by proxy, through the English king.*

Another suspense-heightening **procedural** moment. Because we now increasingly fear for Hamlet, this can be scored as a down beat. As per usual, in an RPG version this would register only when the players learned of the increased threat.

Act IV, Scene IV



4.4.A
Re: Fortinbras, Hamlet Inveighs Against War

4.4.A *Fortinbras, a prince of Norway, dispatches a captain to affirm his permission to march through Denmark on his way to wage war on Poland. Hamlet meets the captain and asks him whose forces he beholds. The two of them commiserate on the pointlessness of war—this particular war, at least.*

This exposition highlights an aspect of Hamlet's character—as a critic of pointless war, he'd make an admirable king. It's laying **pipe** for the play's very last beats when Fortinbras declares a kingly funeral for him. Its opportunity for our hero to express noble sentiments might also register as

gratification. If so, that justifies our use of an upward free-floating arrow to mark the beat's outcome.

In a game session, this could be seen as a plot thread dangled in front of Hamlet's player: the GM is giving him the chance to go and interact with Fortinbras. We can imagine various plot branches not taken: maybe Fortinbras would help Hamlet with Claudius. But of course this doesn't happen. Hamlet's player makes the choice to stick to his plan, to go with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to his exile in England.



4.4.B
Hamlet Contrasts Himself with Fortinbras

4.4.B *Hamlet soliloquizes, comparing himself unfavorably to Fortinbras. Where he has good reason to act and is stymied, Fortinbras is able to whip himself and his people into a whirlwind of warlike activity over nothing.*

As his soliloquies tend to be, this is a self-inflicted **dramatic** down moment for Hamlet — even if we feel that he's being too hard on himself, and don't particularly admire Fortinbras' devotion to meaningless warfare.

In a game, this might be a moment of player discouragement, expressed in character. This implies that moments of player discouragement should be treated as emotional down moments for the character. They should be taken into account when designing upcoming obstacles—perhaps by lightening the mood with an easy or comic challenge.

Act IV, Scene V



4.5.A
Horatio Persuades Gertrude to See Ophelia

4.5.A *Torn by her own guilt, Gertrude refuses to see a tormented Ophelia—until Horatio persuades her otherwise.*

We're treating both Ophelia and Horatio as secondary PCs. This beat represents an emotional victory for Ophelia, but is brought about by Horatio. He secures it by invoking the queen's concern for her people, arguing that Ophelia's madness might prove a danger to others. Although Ophelia is offstage, the description given (by an unnamed walk-on character) of her behavior gives her a sort of presence in the scene. We can intuit that she's seeking solace in her distress—a **dramatic** goal rather than a practical one. Horatio's brief intervention gives us no indication that he's pursuing a tactical end aside from his worry for Ophelia, so the dramatic up arrow applies to him, too.



4.5.B
O. Confronts King and Queen With Her Madness

4.5.B *In her famous flower speech, Ophelia insanely sings and babbles to Gertrude and then to Claudius.*

This mad scene gives interpreters considerable leeway in choosing an intention for Ophelia. As its ultimate effect is to remind the king and queen of the guilt they ought to feel over the tragic events they've set in motion, let's say that she's subconsciously seeking a show of remorse from them. Whatever Ophelia wants, it's not procedural in nature, so we can score it as a **dramatic** scene. She garners only bafflement from them, leading out on a down note.



4.5.C
Claudius Plans to Suborn Returning Laertes

4.5.C *Disturbed by what he's seen, Claudius reveals to Gertrude that Laertes is on his way back to Elsinore, and that he plans to suborn the young man to his cause.*

With Hamlet bound for England, we're not sure what the consequences for him will be, but we know that a new ally for Claudius is bad news in general. This fresh note of suspense serves as a **procedural** down note for our absent protagonist.



4.5.D
Laertes Threatens Claudius

4.5.D *An enraged Laertes bursts into the royal chamber, demanding satisfaction from Claudius regarding his father's death.*

This quick beat introduces a moment of narrative uncertainty in which we think that Claudius might suffer a setback at Laertes' hands. Although none of our three protagonists are present (making this another reminder of POV limitation) a defeat for Claudius would be, by default, a victory for Hamlet. This warrants a **procedural** up arrow.



4.5.E
Claudius Calms Laertes

4.5.E *Claudius calms him.*

After keeping the narrative rhythm jagged with the prospect of a reversal, Shakespeare returns to his structural aim for the entire sequence: cranking up the suspense by developing the threat Laertes poses to Hamlet. We mark this as a **procedural** down note for the absent Hamlet.



4.5.F
Laertes Discovers Ophelia's Madness

4.5.F *Laertes encounters his sister, discovering her madness.*
This **dramatic** beat continues Ophelia's downward emotional spiral. Where her madness took on a slightly menacing note the last time we saw her, she now regresses to a child-like, eerily innocent craziness. Like a *Call Of Cthulhu* character, she's lost all her Sanity points and is about to be withdrawn from play.



4.5.G
Claudius Makes an Ally of Laertes

4.5.G *Claudius enlists Laertes as an ally.*
This scene builds on the already established suspense, cementing the fact that Laertes must now also be considered an antagonist to Hamlet. The moment also introduces a note of emotional ambiguity, as we sympathize with Laertes. We may be worried for him, too, sharpening the edge of this **procedural** down moment. The prospect of a deadly clash between two characters we fear for bodes ill no matter how it comes out.

This beat might be analogous to a moment in a game where the GM creates sympathy for a character the PCs are in opposition with. When this happens players feel a similar sense of ambiguity. They might act against the character as they'd planned to do, but then feel bad about it, or change their plans to accommodate their new feelings toward the obstacle NPC. The GM then might ring another change by having the antagonist turn on them again, and so on.

Act IV, Scene VI



4.6.A
Hamlet Has Escaped

4.6.A *Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet telling of his pirate-assisted escape from the ship taking him to England.*
In a game, we'd see Hamlet escape rather than hearing about it second-hand—meaning that this scene would occur earlier in the action.

A heroic escape from captivity is a staple **procedural** success, so we score this with an up arrow. After three successive down beats, it's about time we felt some vicarious triumph.



4.6.B
Claudius Seeks Laertes' Trust

4.6.B *Striving to earn Laertes' trust, Claudius justifies his leniency toward Hamlet as a gesture of love for Gertrude.*
Though still doubtful and offering resistance to Claudius, Laertes seems mollified, making this a victory for the antagonist and thus a **procedural** down arrow for our offstage hero.



4.6.C
C. Dismayed by Hamlet's Plan to Return

4.6.C *Claudius is dismayed to receive a vaguely threatening letter from Hamlet announcing his imminent return.*
Claudius' moment of discomfort counts as a **procedural** victory for the hero over the antagonist. Although Hamlet is only present in letter form, it's still a dialogue interaction—in a game, we might resolve it with an Intimidate check.



4.6.D
Claudius Plans "Accidental" Death for Hamlet

4.6.D *Claudius proposes to Laertes that they contrive to kill Hamlet and make it seem like an accident; Laertes agrees.*
Suspense is reintroduced through the plans of the antagonist and his new ally. Our worry for Hamlet merits a **procedural** down arrow.



4.6.E
Ophelia Drowns

4.6.E *Gertrude describes Ophelia's drowning.*
In a game, this would be our first player character death. Clearly Ophelia has been completely removed from play after failing her Sanity check. In a game we'd describe it directly rather than hearing it through an NPC. Ideally, Ophelia's player would be given wide leeway to choose the manner of the character's harrowing ultimate fate.

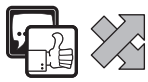
This is clearly a down moment, and a big one. This is a point where the **dramatic** and **procedural** dovetail, as is appropriate at a story's truly pivotal moments. Ophelia is an unintended casualty of actions taken by Hamlet to further his procedural aims—his mistaken killing of Polonius, and perhaps his feigned madness. Yet we also anticipate that her death will take an emotional toll on Hamlet. If anything, we feel more pity (the hallmark of a dramatic down moment) than suspense (the marker of a procedural down beat). Our concern for how this will affect Hamlet's plans are pushed to the background.



4.6.F
Laertes' Rage Ignites; Claudius Worries

4.6.F *Laertes' rage flares again; Claudius fears his success in calming him will now be undone.*
On the surface, it might seem that anything that worries our antagonist is good for our hero. But we know that Laertes' fury won't be good for Hamlet, even if it also scotches Claudius' exact plan for cleverly disposing of his nephew. We simultaneously hope that Laertes will harm Claudius and fear that he'll harm Hamlet. This mixed result is marked by a crossed pair of **procedural** arrows, reflecting the confusion of our hopes and fears.

Act V, Scene I



5.1.A
Clowns Jape Over Ophelia's Grave

5.1.A *The two gravediggers (billed as First and Second Clown) engage in Elizabethan badinage. They cast satirical doubt on the decision to grant Ophelia a Christian burial, despite her apparent suicide.*

Shakespeare follows a moment of procedural ambiguity with one of emotional ambiguity. On the surface, the clowns' turn-of-the-17th-century japery appears to serve as pure comedy relief, a form of **gratification**. It provides a free-floating up moment for the audience—one that none of the main characters, as the story spirals toward tragedy, is now capable of providing. GMs often throw in comedy relief walk-ons and underlings to lighten the proceedings, but due to POV limitations can't keep all the PCs offstage while they do it.

However, this is a prime example of a Shakespeare clown scene that proves to be darker than it first appears on the surface. In mocking the decision to bury Ophelia on consecrated ground, the gravediggers cast a jaundiced eye on the privilege of our entire main cast. Their commentary cynically undercuts the proceedings in general, and our sympathy for Ophelia's fate in particular. In this interpretation, they offer another twist of the emotional knife, confronting the audience with a subtle but troubling irony. A GM might convey a beat of this type with a quick aside, for example a description of cynical or doubtful onlookers to the main action.

With none of our main characters present, the crossed arrows reflecting the emotional uptick of the gratification and the competing downward effect of the commentary are free-floating.



5.1.B
Hamlet Muses on the Irony of Death

5.1.B *Hamlet muses on the ironies of death.*

Despite the gruesome subject matter of his musings, we find the returned Hamlet in a calm and reflective mood. He has the emotional power to display a philosophical distance from death, the threat of which he faces as he pursues his vengeance against Claudius. This moment of pause gives us hope for Hamlet's emotional well-being.

At the same time, there's yet another irony Hamlet is of yet unaware of. We know that his melancholy detachment will reverse itself when he learns who's in that grave. This gives us our third ambiguous outcome in a row, this time with crossed **dramatic** arrows.



5.1.C
Clown Won't Reveal Whose Grave He Digs

5.1.C *Hamlet ask the gravedigger whose grave he digs, getting only tantalizing clownish wordplay in return.*
Shakespeare draws out the moment of horrible realization, by giving Hamlet a chance to learn the truth but then snatching it away from him. This outcome moves us from an ambiguous **dramatic** beat to a clearly downward one.



5.1.D
Clown Provides Rumors About Hamlet

5.1.D *The gravedigger provides Hamlet with rumors about himself.*
Hamlet regains a measure of emotional power here—now it's the gravedigger who speaks without knowing the full import of his situation. This moment registers as an **dramatic** up beat.

You could also score this as a procedural victory for Hamlet, as it confirms that his madman ruse is still operational. However, since he gains no further advantage from this pose for the remainder of the action, it's scarcely worth noting.



5.1.E
Yorick's Skull

5.I.E *The skull of the jester Yorick sends Hamlet on a nostalgic reverie.*
This beat reprises beat 5.1.B, to the same ambiguous **dramatic** effect. Now the source of Hamlet's upward emotional trajectory are his memories of childhood, as opposed to the more abstract musings heard earlier.



5.1.F
Laertes Vents Anger at Priest

5.I.F *Confronting the priest in charge of Ophelia's funeral, an angry Laertes demands greater ceremony for Ophelia's funeral.*
This beat serves as another reminder of Laertes' temper, and thus his danger to Hamlet. The threat he poses is external and physical, making this a **procedural** down beat.



5.1.G
Hamlet Realizes the Funeral is Ophelia's

5.1.G *Hamlet realizes that the funeral is for Ophelia.*
Hamlet now shares the audience's knowledge of Ophelia's death. Through him, we re-experience our earlier downward reaction to it. In game terms, this is the equivalent to the moment when the character is allowed to acknowledge something horrible that the player has known about for a while.

Ophelia's death represents a dramatic setback for Hamlet. He may have treat-

ed her callously in furtherance of his procedural goal, but, assuming we accept the dramatically strongest choice for the actor playing him, he also loved her.

If you accept the alternate theory mentioned in reference to beat 3.1.D, that he tried to remove her from Elsinore in preparation of his campaign of vengeance, this would also count as a procedural loss.



5.1.H
Hamlet Scuffles with Laertes in Ophelia's Grave

5.1.H *Seeing Laertes leap into the grave, Hamlet follows. A fight ensues as each seeks to prove the greater magnitude of his grief.*

By allowing himself to be overcome with grief and anger, Hamlet sabotages his **procedural** goal in the course of seeking a **dramatic** goal. He's seeking emotional absolution, but impulsively employs an aggressive tactic. Not unexpectedly, he fails to achieve his emotional goal, too. His choice yields another pair of matched down arrows.

This scene reminds us of games like *Pendragon* or *Dying Earth* where characters must roll to avoid acting on their emotional impulses. It seems as if Hamlet's player has been forced by his character's emotional qualities to act against his procedural interest.



5.1.I
Hamlet and Laertes are Separated

5.1.I *Gertrude and Claudius temporarily smooth the waters as the scuffling Laertes and Hamlet are separated.*

Hamlet is spared immediate repercussions for his outburst. However, we know that Claudius wants the inevitable fight between Laertes and Hamlet to occur on his terms, so he's not out of the procedural woods yet. The outcome of this **procedural** beat is ambiguous, and is marked with crossed arrows.

Act V, Scene II

Now we reach the play's very long final scene.



5.2.A
Hamlet Seeks Assurance From Horatio

5.2.A *Confiding in Horatio, Hamlet reveals that he had a restless night, and justifies his graveside indiscretion as possibly useful.*

Hamlet seeks assurance from Horatio and, as is usually the case with this confidant character, easily gets it. All along Horatio's role in the narrative has in large part been to give our hero the emotional victories that every other character withholds from him.

This could easily be played as an emotional down moment, on the other hand, with Hamlet's self-assurance seeming like a rationalization, and Horatio's acquiescence coming off as worried or otherwise double-edged.

Under the theory that the choice that a doubtful interpretation should be decided in favor of the one that grants the greatest rhythmic variation, let's treat this as an actual emotional victory for Hamlet, and give it a **dramatic** up arrow.



5.2.B
Hamlet Reveals R. and G.'s Death Sentence

5.2.B *Hamlet reveals further details of his escape from exile, culminating in the news that he's sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths.*

Here Shakespeare serves up another powerfully equivocal moment. Hamlet's decision to doom his erstwhile friends doesn't actively further his vengeance against Claudius. Hamlet has swept some pawns from the table, but we're given no indication that they were of any further use to the king anyway. Spurred by a sense of betrayal, Hamlet satisfied an emotional goal by external, active means.

This raises the prospect of a victory for the protagonist that we in the audience don't share. If we found Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be buffoonish poltroons, we probably feel (as Horatio will in the forthcoming beat) that they met a harsher fate than they deserved. The character we're identifying with feels a sense of emotional victory, but our sympathies are split. A divide between audience and protagonist demands crossed **dramatic** arrows.

Players often supply moments like this, dealing so harshly with rivals and enemies that an outside observer would have trouble maintaining sympathy for them.



5.2.C
Hamlet Defends His Decision; Blames Claudius

5.2.C *To a doubtful Horatio, Hamlet defends his decision to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths.*

As noted above, Horatio is the character who doesn't push back against Hamlet. So it's significant that he now privileges his role as audience stand-in over his position as Hamlet's supporter and confidant. Like us, he protests the harshness of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's fate. Stung, Hamlet simultaneously concedes the point and shifts the blame to Claudius. If he hadn't killed Hamlet's father and married his mother, he wouldn't have set Hamlet on this corrupt path, letting "this canker of our nature come in further evil."

This beat ends in dramatic defeat for Horatio, who, failing to get the assurance he seeks, shifts to the more comfortable pragmatic issue of how

quickly Claudius will get news from England. If only by default, that makes it a victory for Hamlet. We score this with split **dramatic** arrows for our two remaining PCs.



5.2.D
Hamlet Mocks and Befuddles Osric

5.2.D *Another oleaginous courtier, the buffoonish Osric, shows up to issue an invitation. Hamlet befuddles him with a stream of contemptuous verbiage.*

Once again, an apparent intrusion of comic relief introduces a darker note. Just as Claudius has corrupted Hamlet, he's turning the court into a haven for clowns like Osric. Osric has no choice but to cheerily deflect Hamlet's scorn, ceding him the beat's emotional power. Hamlet scores a somewhat cheap **dramatic** up note at his expense. Since Osric is a ridiculous lackey figure, we feel he deserves it.



5.2.E
Osric Explains the Duel

5.2.E *Osric lays out the terms of the wager and duel with Laertes.*

This **procedural** beat also supplies the **pipe** needed to follow the final duel. We know that Claudius and Laertes are scheming to secretly kill Hamlet, so his acceptance of the duel increases our fear for him, registering a down moment.



5.2.F
Horatio Fails to Talk Hamlet Out of the Duel

5.2.F *Horatio tries to talk Hamlet out of the duel with Laertes. Hamlet dismisses his concerns.*

This is a **procedural** beat in which both of our remaining PCs debate Hamlet's tactical situation. Horatio's goal is practical, not emotional. Horatio loses; Hamlet wins. But the audience, knowing that Claudius intends the duel as cover for a murder attempt, feels a sense of heightened anxiety. That makes this a downbeat moment, so we'll enter the down arrow for Horatio as the more accurate reflection of audience's response.



5.2.G
Hamlet Asks for Laertes' Forgiveness

5.2.G *Hamlet seeks Laertes' pardon for wronging him; with some reservation, Laertes seems to grant it.*

Here we have a mixed beat, where one participant pursues an emotional goal and the other follows a procedural goal. Hamlet's intent is **dramatic**; he wants forgiveness from Laertes. Laertes wants to conceal his intention to harm Hamlet, and so pretends to accept his attempt to make amends. As audience members, we know that Hamlet's victory is only apparent, and that he re-

mains ignorant of the plot to kill him. This is the second beat in a row in which his apparent victory in an exchange conceals a threat of defeat—and is again scored with a downward procedural arrow.



5.2.H
Hamlet's Veiled Mockery Rattles Laertes

5.2.H *Hamlet offends Laertes by praising his reputation for swordsmanship in overly lofty terms. Laertes accuses him of mockery, which he denies.*

This brief exchange can be played two ways—either Hamlet is cleverly provoking Laertes or has innocently triggered his opponent's dangerous temper. All else being equal, the strongest choice is the one that provides contrast and rhythmic variance. After three successive procedural setbacks, Hamlet could use a win, if only a minor one. Let's treat this as an intentional and successful attempt to rattle Laertes. (If Hamlet was a player character, he'd certainly be trash-talking his antagonist.) Hamlet's victory is both **procedural**, rendering Laertes more prone to error, and **dramatic**—Hamlet establishes his dominance and superiority by so casually setting Laertes off.



5.2.I
Claudius Offers a Regal Toast

5.2.I *Claudius recapitulates the terms of the wager and offers a toast to the duelists. He offers a pearl to Hamlet if he scores the first hit.*

Claudius acts the benevolent king as part of his ongoing deception. Hamlet, presumably preoccupied with his choice of blades, doesn't challenge him. Claudius' speech underlines our unease, reminding us that Hamlet still hasn't twigged to the scheme. We mark the beat with a **procedural** down arrow.



5.2.J
Hamlet Scores the First Hit

5.2.J *Hamlet scores the first hit, winning the pearl.*

Hamlet scores a **procedural** victory by hitting Laertes first. It may be an equivocal one, since he doesn't know about the scheme, but a win is a win.



5.2.K
Hamlet Declines Poisoned Chalice

5.2.K *Hamlet declines to drink from the cup, which we know to be poisoned—perhaps by the supposed pearl itself.*

This unknowing win for Hamlet encourages us to take heart in the possibility that he won't be poisoned. He scores his second **procedural** up arrow in a row.



5.2.L
Hamlet Scores Second Hit

5.2.L *Hamlet hits Laertes again.*

Another **procedural** victory! Our hero is winning!

Of course, the laws of rhythmic variance being what they are, a bunch of wins at the beginning of a suspenseful sequence bode ill for our hero—just as a series of losses is likely to lay the groundwork for a thrilling come-from-behind triumph.

Note also how many separate beats Shakespeare devotes to this climactic sequence. The more important it is, the more finely grained its portrayal.

Individual beats are spaced closer together than ever before as the tragedy spirals to its climax.



5.2.M
Gertrude Drinks the Poison

5.2.M *Gertrude toasts Hamlet from the poisoned cup; Claudius tries to stop her but is too late.*

Hamlet has always sought to protect his mother. We see her as a flawed but sympathetic character, and don't want this to happen to her. Ironically, our failure is also Claudius'; we are allowed a moment of sympathy for the villain, too. This beat reverses Hamlet's previous successes with a vengeance, as marked by an outsized **procedural** down arrow.



5.2.N
Laertes Fails to Assure Claudius

5.2.N *Laertes assures a doubtful Claudius that he can hit Hamlet.*

A secondary antagonist fails in his attempt to reassures the main villain. We're not so much rooting for Laertes to fail as enjoying Claudius' conclusion that Hamlet will win. This gives us hope, and even though Hamlet isn't directly involved, warranting a **procedural** up arrow.



5.2.O
Inconclusive Sparring

5.2.O *The two duelists resume the match, neither hitting the other.*

Shakespeare drags out the suspense by inserting an even-steven moment, indicated by a lateral procedural arrow. Usually inconclusive results drag the story out without effect, but in the middle of a tense sequence they can put us on the edge of our seats. The technique only works when used sparingly.



5.2.P
Hamlet Wounded by Poisned Rapier

5.2.P *Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned rapier.*
Showing his mastery of pacing, Shakespeare follows the inconclusive moment with the most conclusive one of all. The moment we've been dreading since Act IV comes to pass. Our hero is doomed. You don't get a more obvious **procedural** down arrow than that.

Note our string of procedural arrows. We're in action territory now, with no dramatic arrows in sight. The beats continue to fall close together as the climactic sequence plays out.



5.2.Q
Laertes Wounded

5.2.Q *Hamlet wounds Laertes.*
To get to Claudius, Hamlet will have to go through Laertes, so this counts as a **procedural** victory toward his still unfulfilled goal.



5.2.R
Gertrude Collapses

5.2.R *Gertrude collapses.*
Hamlet didn't wish this fate on his mother, and neither did we. This escalation of her situation stands as a **procedural** loss for him and a down note for us.



5.2.S
Laertes Confesses

5.2.S *Laertes confesses his treachery, pronouncing himself justly killed.*
This moment of renunciation serves as a **procedural** victory for Hamlet. Laertes has come over to his side. It seems as if it comes too later to confer any advantage, but in beat 5.2.U, we'll see it pay off.

(Hamlet is not a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense because he does not achieve an *anagnorisis*—a state of awareness after it's too late to reverse one's horrible error. It's not even clear that Hamlet has been laid low by the tragic flaw required by broader definitions of tragedy. Even the indecision he curses himself for is always justified in context. However, if seen from Laertes' point of view, the play is an Aristotelian tragedy—and this is his moment of anagnorisis.)



5.2.T
Gertrude Dies

5.2.T *Gertrude dies.*
As soon as Hamlet scores an up arrow, he gets a **procedural** down arrow to balance it out.



5.2.U
Laertes Reveals Claudius' Guilt

5.2.U *Laertes reveals Claudius' role in the poisoning scheme.*
Hamlet's attempt to win Laertes over at the beginning of the scene, coupled with Laertes' essential decency, grants him this **procedural** victory, unequivocally identifying Claudius, in the presence of many witnesses, as a poisoner. This is what he needs to take his vengeance, and have it regarded as justified.



5.2.V
Hamlet Kills Claudius

5.2.V *Hamlet kills Claudius.*
Hamlet has now achieved his ultimate **procedural** objective, completing the mission handed him by his father's ghost at the end of Act One. Everything from here on out is denouement.

The proximity of this and the previous beat give the lie to the notion, instilled mostly by a self-blaming Hamlet, that he is paralyzed by indecision. The moment he has what he needs to fulfill his goal, he does so, without soliloquy or hesitation.



5.2.W
Laertes Wins Hamlet's Absolution

5.2.W *Laertes seeks Hamlet's forgiveness, dying before Hamlet can speak. Hamlet grants his absolution posthumously.*
Neither of them has anything left to lose, unless they plan to keep on fighting in the afterlife. The interaction's stakes are not practical but emotional, indicating a **dramatic** beat. Here an NPC is the petitioner, with the PC as a granter. Laertes calls on Hamlet's sense of sympathy, a tactic that proves successful. This doesn't cost Hamlet anything, and in fact makes him appear nobler to the audience.

Knowing Hamlet to be doomed, the only hope we have left for him is that he'll be emotionally redeemed during and after his death. The beat leaves us with a positive feeling and so is scored with an upward arrow.

It has been twenty beats since we last had a purely dramatic interaction. That was Hamlet's mocking of Osric, hardly one of the play's pivotal moments. It is a common complaint that Hollywood movies abandon their drama in order to devolve into action sequences at the end. Given its appearance here, we see that this structural feature boasts a long and distinguished

pedigree.



5.2.X
Hamlet Convinces Horatio to Live and Tell His Story

5.2.X *Hamlet, knowing he's doomed, asks Horatio to bear witness to his cause. Horatio responds by declaring his intention to commit suicide. Hamlet successfully dissuades him by invoking their friendship.*

In the course of this beat Hamlet adds a second intention. He starts out with a **procedural** request, to have his case fairly aired after he dies. When he realizes that Horatio intends to kill himself, **dramatic** stakes are added—he also wants to save his friend. He succeeds in both. Although Horatio technically loses the exchange by backing down from his suicide threat, the audience doesn't feel it as a defeat for him. Accordingly the beat calls for double up arrows for Hamlet, with no countering down arrow for Horatio.



5.2.Y
Hamlet Hears Fortinbras' Approach

5.2.Y *Hamlet hears the warlike approach of Fortinbras' men.*

This is the briefest of beats, but if played according to the meaning of the line, we should feel some apprehension over the arrival of the oft-foreshadowed Fortinbras. Are things about to get even worse, if that's even possible? This new element of possible danger is a **procedural** moment, and warrants a down arrow.



5.2.Z
Hamlet Makes Fortinbras King

5.2.Z *Hamlet tells Horatio that Fortinbras is his choice to become king of Denmark.*

This being the denouement, beats are quickly resolved. Hamlet allays our fears by passing the throne along to Fortinbras. Today, in an age skeptical of autocratic power, this is often played as an ambiguous or sinister moment. In its original monarchical era it was meant to be reassuring—legitimate order has been restored.

This also represents Hamlet's sole act of governance as king, after killing Claudius. He exercises power, if only once, if only while dying, and therefore scores a final procedural victory, complete with up arrow.



5.2.aa
Hamlet Dies

5.2.aa *Hamlet dies.*

Our hero finally fails the last-ditch saving throw that allows him to linger on and conduct business while mortally wounded. Stakes don't get more physical than death, so this

is clearly the mother of all **procedural** setbacks. One might think that Hamlet's death forestalls future victories on his part, but we're about to see that this is not the case.



5.2.bb
Horatio Mourns Hamlet

5.2.bb *Horatio mourns his passing.*
Hamlet is more a doomed hero than a tragic figure deserving of his cathartic fate. We mourn his passing with less ambiguity than we might feel toward Othello, Lear, or Macbeth. Horatio's emotional response to the death of his friend moves the action back from the realm of the procedural and into the **dramatic**. It's a down moment for us and for him.



5.2.cc
Fortinbras Horrified

5.2.cc *Fortinbras reacts with shock and horror to the scene of carnage at the Danish court.*
This beat heightens our sense of the tragedy's awful impact. We might feel a little better about this Fortinbras guy now that we see that his reactions to the events parallel ours. Overall, though, this is a down moment, warranting a **dramatic** arrow.



5.2.dd
R. and G.'s Deaths Announced

5.2.dd *An ambassador arrives with the news that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.*
Here Shakespeare breaks up a series of similar beats by introducing an ambiguous note. Hamlet was sure that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deserved the demises he arranged for him, but we never quite see them through his eyes. Their deaths seem out of scale with their crimes, a fact Tom Stoppard will later make brilliant absurdist hay of in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Hamlet has achieved one of his **procedural** aims, so it warrants an up arrow. At the same time, the unease we feel at this particular victory deserves a **dramatic** down arrow. It doesn't erase our empathy for Hamlet, but does remind us of his personal imperfection, and of the collateral damage done by these events.



5.2.ee
Horatio Tells Hamlet's Story

5.2.ee *Keeping his promise to Hamlet, Horatio begins to tell his story.*
Though dead, Hamlet scores a posthumous victory, as his friend makes good on his vow, rather than killing himself. Surprising as it is, we mark this beat with a **procedural** up arrow. We are still feeling modulations of hope and fear even

during these final moments of mourning.



5.2.ff
Fortinbras Claims the Throne

5.2.ff *Fortinbras claims the throne; Horatio suggests that this would be in accordance with Hamlet's wishes.*
This beat reiterates 5.2.Z. It puts a period on Hamlet's second posthumous victory, granting another **procedural** up arrow.



5.2.gg
Hero's Funeral for Hamlet

5.2.gg *Fortinbras commands a hero's funeral for Hamlet.*
Hamlet didn't ask or seem to desire a splendid funeral, so this isn't a procedural victory. We're glad that he's being treated with respectful fanfare, but mourn his passing. Thus we end the play on a mixed emotional moment, with **dramatic** arrows crossed.

If you look at the combined beats from Hamlet's death onwards, you see a downward curve that bottoms out in the ambiguous announcement of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths, and then moves steadily upward to the end. That's your diagram of catharsis, right there—the wrenching demise of our doomed hero, followed by the release of purged emotion.

Summing Up

Looking at the *Hamlet* narrative map as a whole, we see how Shakespeare metes out hope and fear in exquisitely calibrated doses. The play never presents us with more than three unambiguous down beats in a row. Beats 5.1.I (Claudius and Gertrude stop the fight in Ophelia's grave) and 5.2.dd (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths are confirmed) come closest to being fourth down beats, but are both ambiguous, featuring crossed arrows. Only once do four up beats cluster together. This streak begins with Laertes' implication of Claudius at 5.2.U, encompasses the climax of the play, Hamlet's killing of Claudius, at 5.2.V, and concludes with the sound of Fortinbras' approaching army.

Crossed or mixed outcomes appear sparingly at first: none appear until "get thee to a nunnery," at 3.1.D, nearly halfway into the proceedings. They cluster most tightly together in the graveyard scene. This preponderance of mixed beats accounts for its disquieting qualities. Most of the ambiguous beats revolve around Ophelia or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is Hamlet's treatment of these characters that most strongly tests our sympathy for him.

Like any narrative map measuring gradations of hope and fear, its basic line undertakes a slow, incremental movement from beginning to end. To the extent that it creeps slowly downward over time, it is because clusters of down beats outnumber corresponding clusters of up beats. Measured in this way, tragedy's downward trajectory is a subtle one.

Perhaps surprisingly, the lowest point occurs not with Hamlet's death, but with Gertrude's. After this, an upswing occurs, starting with Laertes' confession and implication of Claudius. This enables Hamlet the certainty he has always needed to fulfill his goal and kill Claudius.

The greatest thematic revelation spurred by our beat analysis arises from Hamlet's series of post-mortem victories. They establish him as more a doomed hero than a tragic one. He redeems himself in death, a conclusion more appropriate to the end of a John Woo movie than to the classic Aristotelian model. Unlike tragic heroes, Hamlet is not transgressing under the influence of a fatal flaw, but reluctantly sacrificing himself to restore the disorder caused by Claudius' illegitimate kingship. In the monarchical Elizabethan worldview, you can't kill a king and get away with it, so Hamlet must die. But we are glad that he did what he did, even if Ophelia and perhaps Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were wronged along the way. You can't say the same thing about Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan; Othello's to strangle Desdemona, or for that matter, Lear's decision to abdicate in favor of his insincerely flattering daughters.

Dr. No

Although 1962's *Dr. No* was hardly the first movie to feature a mix of investigation and action, its particular take on these elements exerts a continuing influence on similar efforts nearly half a century after its release.

Bond may be a spy, but he exists firmly within the structure of the detective genre. Some of the more enduring precursors include the film adaptations of Dashiell Hammett's *Thin Man* (for its emphasis on sophistication, quippery, and alcohol intake) and Howard Hawks' film of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, notably for the gothic weirdness of its hero's journey, not to mention his sexual magnetism. 007 spends his time unraveling a mystery, which begins with a pair of murders no less. Various low-level bad guys attempt violence to stop him from finding the truth. When he gets it, he battles the perpetrator and, in a wrinkle new to the mystery genre, blows up his complex. A disappointed No underlines the point for those who missed it when he refers to Bond as a "stupid detective."

The first film to adapt Ian Fleming's already-famous iconic hero, *Dr. No* compels in part because it has yet to fully coalesce into the classic Bond formula. You can see the pattern begin to emerge. Also striking, given the position the franchise would soon exert as mainstream entertainment, is its heady undercurrent of Sadean/Freudian perversity.

Perhaps because the writers, led by Richard Maibaum, are still feeling their way toward the cinematic formula that will fully establish itself in *Goldfinger,* the film serves as an ideal exemplar of procedural structure. Only a relative handful of its 215 beats fulfill dramatic or other functions. Even when the film digresses to explore Bond's character or gratify the audience, it swerves unerringly back to Bond's quest to solve the mystery of Strangways' death and prevent an attack on a US missile launch.

In the breakdown that follows, take it as read that a beat is procedural unless otherwise specified. Beats are numbered sequentially.

Dr. No contains more beats than *Hamlet*, often of very short duration.

Each of the various reversals in a piece of physical action can constitute a beat of its own, even though they zip by quickly on screen. Fortunately, they can also be described in a few words. Their effect on oscillation between hope and fear is often self-explanatory.



1
Credits I: Bond Theme

1. *The credits sequence begins, accompanied to the first of three distinct musical motifs. We begin with the most famous and potent music cue in cinema history: the James Bond theme.*

The story proper hasn't begun yet, but the film is already providing **gratification** in the form of a music cue, and the animated placement of credits. The theme, credited to Monty Norman but thought by many to be the work of arranger John Barry, stirringly evokes a sense of dangerous power.

Reinforcing this response is the trademark quasi-animated sequence in which we look through the barrel of a gun at Bond, only to have him shoot us. He shoots us so hard, in fact, that the inside of our gun barrel bleeds. But never mind the merely literal. You'd think that being shot by Bond would be a down beat, but instead, through a complicated cognitive backflip, we identify with the powerful figure we can see, rather than the unseen assassin whose shoes (or gun) the shot composition has placed us in. The hero figure has established dominance over us. This permits a transference allowing us to vicariously share in his power for the remainder of the narrative. Even though, as viewers of *Dr. No* in 1962, we're not necessarily sure who he is.

As cognitively complex as this one is, gratification beats always conclude in a free-floating up arrow.

Like most credit sequences, this makes a promise to the audience about the type of film they're about to witness. As such, this, like the one to follow, might also be broadly considered an anticipation beat. However, since its payoff is not a particular anticipated event but the entire film, that would stretch the definition of that beat type past the point of usefulness.



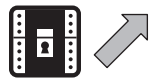
2
Credits II: Dancing Girls

2. *The theme shifts to a sultry calypso beat as the silhouetted figures of female dancers appear on screen.*

A second form of **gratification** is promised, as the credits signal that we will experience a sense of erotic power. (It assumes a heterosexual male viewer, as would be the unquestioned norm in 1962.) The link between adventurous action and sexual dominance informs the entire film, so it's fitting that its first two beats are devoted to evoking it through the non-literal pairing of music and

abstracted visuals.

We'd be failing the spirit of Bond if we failed to quip about sexy women making our free-floating arrow point up.



3
Credits III: Blind Mice

3. *Three blind men with canes stumble across the screen, still in credit sequence silhouette.*

Even in silhouette, we can infer that these men are poorly attired; we can even somehow tell that they're black. The nursery song "Three Blind Mice" plays, arranged in strains suggestive of gentle mockery. It informs us that their pathetic condition is amusing. The film is soon to reverse this impression, but for the moment it expects us to react to this pairing of image and music as a third note of **gratification**.

This is the first of several beats in the film that read differently to a contemporary viewer than they would have at the time of their original release. It's hard to imagine a current mainstream film hoping to elicit an indulgent smile at the expense of apparently poor and disabled characters. For the purpose of this analysis, we'll score narrative beats according to the way they were meant to land. Which means that this now discordant note was presumed by the filmmakers to be an up note in 1962.

Together, these three beats remind us of the ability of music to introduce not only simple moods, but complex expectations of genre. Many GMs use music cues to excite or scare players. The playing of an rousing intro theme at the beginning of a session might be considered an up beat of its own, as it is for our audience here.



4
Blind Men at Queen's Club

4. *The three blind men, now seen in live action, wend their way toward the exclusive Queen's Club.*

In a later era, the contrast between the poverty of the three men and the luxury of the club might signal a moment of commentary. This luxury-loving film has something less caustic on its mind.

Now that we see the three blind mice in the real world, we're left to **question** their significance in relationship to the club. Once we're engaged with the story, questions will be scored as procedural down beats, because they increase our sense of suspense and frustration. At this point we have no reason to feel either hope or fear and are waiting attentively for the story to engage us. A lateral arrow seems most appropriate here.



5
Strangways Leaves Card Game

5. *Inside the club, an Englishman we soon identify as Strangways, leaves his card game, to the disappointment of fellow players.*
This outwardly quotidian exchange provokes another **question**: Why does this matter? Without context it provokes neither hope nor fear, and warrants a lateral arrow.



6
Blind Men Kill Strangways

6. *Revealing themselves as sighted assassins in disguise, the three blind mice shoot and kill Strangways.*
Now we have enough context to form an emotional response—dismay, which points the arrow down. We feel horror and pity for Strangways, and are appalled to learn that we were made to misjudge the killers as humorously hapless figures.



7
Unseen Figure Enters S.'s Compound

7. *An unseen figure enters Strangways' compound.*
In a common cinema trope we all accept, but which is odd when you stop to think about it, we are put in the POV of a menacing, mostly unseen figure, and feel menaced as a result. Realizing that the murder of Strangways is about to be the first in a series of dismaying events, this beat pushes the arrow down again.



8
Radio Operator Menaced

8. *We cut inside the compound to see a shapely radio operator in mid-transmission.*
We realize that she is in jeopardy from the unseen figure and feel fear for her. Another down arrow.



9
Radio Operator Killed

9. *One of the blind mice assassins guns her down.*
Our fears are realized, for another down beat.



10
Killers Take Items and "Dr. No" Folder

10. *The killers search the office for an item, finding it, and also seize a folder bearing the name Dr. No.*
This beat introduces **questions**: what is the item? Who is Dr. No? Unlike the questions that kicked off the story, we're now sufficiently oriented—we know there are bad guys, and victims—to feel a sense of unease until they are answered. They move the arrow down again.

This ends a sequence of five downbeats—more than you ever see in *Hamlet*. But these are the much briefer, more sub-divided narrative units not only of the procedural form, but of cinematic storytelling technique.

Beats 4 through 10 fulfill the same purpose here that the appearance of the ghost does in the opening scene of *Hamlet*. They introduce the procedural goal before we even meet our viewpoint character.



11
HQ Notes Stopped Transmission

11. *Back at headquarters, reassuringly bureaucratic British intelligence officers discover the interrupted transmission and alert the chain of command.*
In our first up beat since the story got rolling in earnest, we feel a sense of relief—the murder of the radio operator has been noticed, and something is being done about it.



12
Bond Sought at Le Cercle

12. *A functionary looks for Bond at an exclusive casino.*
We don't know who this man is, although the proximity to the last scene infers that he may be a functionary from British intelligence. We also don't know who Bond is—a luxury denied to future screenwriters. Another **question** has been dangled over us; the down arrow marks our frustration.



13
Baccarat Establishes B.'s Awesomeness

13. *In a sequence of shots ingeniously deployed to suggest his awesomeness, we see Bond playing baccarat.*
This **reveal** partially satisfies the question posed in the last beat. This Bond fellow is clearly a masterful individual—the sort you'd come to when you have a problem to solve. If questions point the emotional arrow toward confusion and fear, answers move us back toward hope and order.



14
Functionary Gives Bond Message

14. *Our assumptions are confirmed as the functionary gives Bond a message from headquarters.*
As this second **reveal** allows us to feel increasingly oriented, our sense of assurance builds, for another up arrow.

This apparently innocuous beat marks an important turning point—the narrative torch has been passed to our protagonist. With the exception of a single curious sequence starting at beat 66, Bond will remain our focus character for the rest of the film.

Unlike *Hamlet*, this is clearly a solo game featuring a single PC. Later we'll see how even the characters who lend him assistance serve as foils to him, as opposed to exerting an independent impact on story advancement.



15
Seductive Impression on Sylvia

15. *Sylvia Trench shows an amorous interest in Bond.*
Now that we identify with Bond, we can vicariously enjoy the effects of his sexual magnetism, earning us an up arrow, **gratification** style.



16
Bond Withholdingly Flirts With Sylvia

16. *Bond flirts with her, but in a withholding way.*
This beat ups the **gratification** ante, allowing Bond to seize the power in his nascent relationship with Sylvia. It introduces to the core of Bond's character, in addition to his procedural competence—his assertion of sexual dominance. To be desired is not enough: 007 must also be in charge.



17
Bond Flirts With Moneypenny

17.Back at the office, Bond flirts with Moneypenny.
Bond now immediately recapitulates the **gratification** beat with a new target. The reiteration confirms sexual dominance as his key behavior. First he establishes it over Moneypenny by moving into and over her space. When she returns the flirtation, he retains his power by deflecting her. When she then pulls away from him, he declines to acknowledge her tactic.

She mentions the Strangways situation but provides no further information, except to indicate its importance. The reveal is postponed to the next beat.



18
M Reveals Strangeways' Mission

18. *M reveals Strangways' mission.*
M informs Bond that Strangways was investigating radio interference with Cape Canaveral's rockets. By granting context to the story's opening beats, this **reveal** assures us, giving us an up arrow.



19
M Gives Bond His Mission

19. *M gives Bond his assignment.*
Although Bond's procedural goal comes into the story at beat 6, he has been unaware of it until now. This **reveal** is the equivalent of beat 1.5.A in Hamlet, where the ghost charges him to seek vengeance against Claudius. Knowing that a clear goal has been established for our hero, we feel a sense of relief and can now settle into the story. The emotional dial moves upward.



20
Emasculating Gun Talk

20. *M and his assistant tut-tut Bond for his preferring an outmoded weapon, the Beretta.*
In the first **dramatic** beat of the film, Bond loses emotional power when his boss questions the adequacy of his handgun. In *Dr. No*, a cigar may occasionally be just a cigar, but a gun is always loaded with hollow-point Freudianism. By denigrating his Beretta, they're threatening his sexual dominance.

It is M's role in the Bond universe to not only dispense the assignments, but to serve as Super-Ego to his Id. Bond's sociopathy is softened and made acceptable because he has made himself a weapon of a safely paternalistic state, as represented by M. (The contemporary decision to cast M as a woman typifies the series' ongoing attempts to reconstruct its original sexism. The hyper-masculinity of today's Bond is kept in check by a maternal state.)

Although on a thematic level, M's dominance over Bond allows us to enjoy our hero's anti-social behavior, it still registers as a loss of power for the character we identify with, and warrants a down arrow.

ROASTED BY THE BOSS

Moments resembling beat 20 are a staple of RPG sessions, especially in games where the activities of the player characters take on a picaresque flavor. Speaking through a leader, patron or other sympathetic yet authoritative NPC, the GM amusingly teases the play-

ers. These comments might tee off on the PC's defining character traits. More typically they roast the players for mistaken decisions that got them into trouble. In this case, the GM (M) might be kidding the player (Bond) for his failure to adequately minimax his choice of handgun from the game's firearms table.

These burns seem to register as up moments, because they get everyone at the table laughing, including the player who's getting razzed. However, the character is still losing emotional power. As such, these moments are down moments hidden under a cloak of amusement. If you're going to indulge in them—and I have to admit that I've fallen into this trap until this very moment—count them as down moments and see that you provide compensating opportunities for the PCs to regain the emotional high ground—if not from their irascible superiors, from some more fitting GM character.



21
Dangers of 007 Job Emphasized

21. *The gun discussion takes a more somber tone as M reminds Bond of the dangers of his job, including a recent six-month hospital stint.*

This discussion reminds us that Bond will, despite his demonstrated awesomeness, be placing himself in jeopardy. It culminates in his reluctantly accepting a new and improved phallus in the form of a Walther PPK. The beat reawakens our fear, pointing the arrow down.



22
M Interrupts Repartee With Moneypenny

22. *M interrupts Bond's resumed flirtation with Moneypenny.*

Although we read the result as amusing, M is once more emasculating Bond by blocking his re-assertion of sexual power over Moneypenny. He's on the losing end of the exchange so this is a **dramatic** down point, if a lighthearted one.

If you're questioning this beat's downward trajectory, imagine your PC in a game being blocked during a flirtation attempt: it would feel like a defeat, even if it was also funny.



23
Someone in Bond's Apartment

23. *Bond returns to his apartment to find an intruder inside.*
If Bond is in danger, we're feeling fear—a down beat. This is also a **question** beat: we're wondering who's in his place.



24
Sylvia Leggily Golfing

24. *It's Sylvia, whiling her time with some trouser-free putting practice.*
A classic reversal, this **reveal** shows the previous beat to have been one of false suspense. Our relief, and possibly our admiration for actress Eunice Grayson's legs, mark this scene with an up arrow.

False suspense is discussed in regard to beat 4.2.A of Hamlet. Even more than that scene, in which the threat Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pose to Hamlet in the wake of Polonius' murder turns out to be a weak one, this beat shows how much fun a reversal after a false suspense beat can be. As should go without saying, this trick would soon wear out its welcome if used too frequently or in a cliched manner. This is why we groan when the thing making the awful noise in the horror movie turns out to be the cat.



25
Bond Rebuffs, then Relents

25. *Bond gently rebuffs her, then relents.*
Although Bond is no physical danger, the dizzyingly liberated Sylvia has seized the sexual initiative—tightly gripping a golf club, no less. After establishing his ability to resist her, preserving his dominance, he can proceed to bed her. This is both a **gratification**, insofar as we enjoy our hero making time with a desirable partner, and a **dramatic** uptick, as we've also seen him recapture the emotional power in the relationship. If there's drama in the mix, the beat isn't free-floating, so this dual-purpose beat is marked with a single dramatic arrow.



26
Mysterious Pomaded Figure

26. *A mysterious figure rocking a ducktail haircut awaits Bond's arrival at the Kingston, Jamaica airport.*
We don't know who this is, and his surveillance is composed in a menacing way, so his presence makes us fear for Bond—a down arrow.



27
Another Watcher (Female)

27. *He's not the only watcher—an angry-looking young woman also observes him.*

This is a variation of the previous beat, resounding to the same effect, and thus another down arrow.

Letting the players know that their PCs are being watched is a classic and reliable way of unnerving them. The only thing better for this purpose than a successful Perception check is a check they know they've failed. This is an example of an instance where both success and failure lead in the same emotional direction—to a down arrow, because the players' fears are brought to the forefront. While failure almost always leads to a down arrow, success can also provide a downward emotional trajectory. Especially when the success leads to the discovery of alarming information. Be sure to track the players' position on the hope/fear cycle accordingly.

In a film, the director doesn't have to indicate that Bond is aware of the surveillance in order for the audience to be fearful on his behalf. If anything, it's more effective for us to know and the hero to remain unaware. Division between audience and character knowledge is the engine of Hitchcockian suspense[6].

You could argue that the failed roll that yields to no information is the gaming equivalent of Hitchcockian suspense—the player knows that something's wrong, or at least being missed, while the character remains ignorant. However, in a gaming context it's often more effective for the characters to be aware that they're being watched. Generally it's more effective if an obstacle prevents them from immediately catching and identifying their watchers. In the case of the airport watchers, it's more satisfying for Bond to identify them later, which happens in beats 52 and 55.

As we'll soon see, Bond's failure to spot or act against these watchers doesn't undermine our sense of his mastery, because he does immediately twig to a third threat waiting for him at the airport.

6: Thriller master Alfred Hitchcock distinguished suspense from surprise, in which something awful suddenly happens. Although associated primarily with suspense, typified by the poisoned glass of milk in *Notorious*, the kidnapped child in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* or the murderous secret of Uncle Charley in *Shadow Of a Doubt*, he also used surprise where effective. A prime example would be the attack on Arbogast (Martin Balsam) in *Psycho*.



28
Mr. Jones, Shifty Chauffeur

28. *To Bond's surprise, a shifty chauffeur, Mr. Jones, greets him at the airport taxi stand.*
Directed to telegraph his hinkiness, the actor playing the chauffeur gives us another reason to fear for Bond, and another down arrow.



29
Bond Confirms Jones is Hinky

29. *Bond calls the Jamaican station to confirm that they sent no chauffeur.*
After apparently missing his first two watchers, we're happy to see that Bond has cottoned on to one of the seeming threats awaiting him at the airport. An up arrow breaks the previous string of three down beats.



30
Predatory Smirk

30. *A predatory smile plays across Bond's lips.*
This brief close-up, relying entirely on Connery's expression, alters the emotional temperature, giving us a moment of **anticipation**. We see that Bond is looking forward to dealing with the chauffeur. Through him, we look forward to this moment of dominance and mastery, and a moment of deserving comeuppance. We no longer fear the coming confrontation, but instead look forward to it, with perhaps a sense of righteous sadism.

RPG encounters tend by default to challenge the PCs. Some wear them down, depriving them of resources and making later fights tougher than they otherwise would be. Then you get the extremely tough boss fights, requiring luck, skill and heavy preparation to get to.

Moments like this remind us of the value of encounters that are meant to be easily mastered. To achieve the effect, though, you have to let the players know as a given that they can overcome the opposition. By saying, "You know you can take this guy," as Bond's GM is clearly whispering in his ear, you create anticipation, and the special kind of up note like the one presented here.



31
"Someone's Following Us"

31. *Now on the road, the chauffeur announces that they're being followed.*
Intriguingly, the anticipation beat is followed by a new wrinkle suggesting that Bond's victory might not be so assured after all—he didn't account for a car following them.

This isn't a cheat, as the film does deliver a corresponding gratification to its anticipation a few beats from now. However, it shows us that there's nothing wrong with a little doubt sown along the way. (Later, in a

spate of thread-tying dialogue at beat 54, we'll learn that this is a moment of false suspense: it's good guy Felix Leiter in that car.)



32
Pursuer Lost

32. *The chauffeur loses his pursuer.*
The effect of this beat on our hope and fear depends on how carefully we're following the plot. It's shot and scored as if the pursuing car jeopardizes Bond. But if we ignore these cues, we remember that Mr. Jones is trouble, and might conclude that any force that makes him nervous is good for Bond. This moment of deliberately obscured suspense warrants crossed procedural arrows.

Introducing a beat whose true impact on the hope and fear depends on careful reasoning is a risky move, and should be used sparingly. The beat is satisfying in retrospect, when the viewers/players figure it out, and recall an earlier scene in a new light. Introducing cognitive dissonance is risky: if players spend too much time unsure as to whether a given event puts them in lesser or greater danger, they'll lose the ability to accurately picture in-game events.



33
Bond Gets the Drop on Jones

33. *Now stopped, the chauffeur discovers that Bond has the drop on him.*
The film revels in the chauffeur's discomfiture as he realizes that Bond has achieved physical dominance over him. We see a close-up of Jones' surprised take, and Bond as a looming, masterful figure. Thus we get the first installment of a **gratification** that will be split up over two separated beats.

Since the situation has yet to fully resolve, a chance of reversal still exists. This is still a procedural beat—albeit one concluding on an up arrow.



34
Bond Stops Jones From Getting the Gun

34. *Bond stops Jones from grabbing a gun hidden in the car's glove compartment.*
Bond's continued dominance of the situation earns us another up arrow.



35. *Mr. Jones attacks him unarmed.*
We're forced to wonder if our gratification was premature as Jones escalates to a physical fight. This beat scores as a down arrow.



36. *Bond punches him out.*
There's no up arrow more unequivocal than our hero decisively whaling on a bad guy.



37. *Bond gets Jones to agree to talk.*
Victory is apparently at hand. Not only has Bond evaded the jeopardy Jones put him in, but he's about to gain information that will bring him actively toward his procedural goal—warranting an up arrow.



38. *Jones swallows cyanide.*
The additional advantage of Bond's victory evaporates as Jones commits suicide before his eyes. This is a procedural downbeat.



39. *Arriving at the British station in Jamaica, Bond drops off Jones' corpse with a quip.*
Jones may have frustrated us in the last beat, but here he provides us with a spot of unseemly **gratification**, as we enjoy Bond's joke at his expense. This is the second payoff of the anticipation created in beat 30. Jones proved such a poor match for Bond that his death can be dismissed with a contemptuous joke.

RPG characters often pursue their players' anti-social fantasies to the detriment of a plot where intelligent protagonists act with an awareness of action and consequence. They may kill walk-on characters who represent minor annoyances to them, rip up the town out of boredom, or exploit a useful rules conceit by deciding to stage a raid on the local magic shop. Beats like this show the value of engineering plot events so that the impulse toward irresponsible celebration of power is channeled to acceptable ends. Bond's disrespect for this poor sap is thrillingly naughty, but the guy deserves it, and

our hero indulges it while pursuing a virtuous goal—and furthering the main plot. Having been given a chance to exercise acceptable dominance here, his player won't get itchy and suddenly launch an attack on the Queen's Club or raid a gun shop.



40
Station Chief Briefing

40. *Bond is briefed by the station chief.*
This **reveal** of information comforts us; the more we and Bond understand about the situation, the happier we are—garnering an up arrow.

Note how exposition is doled out in bite-sized beats; the last reveal of information relevant to the plot occurred twenty-two beats ago. We're now, however, about to enter a sustained information-gathering phase. The difference is that Bond is going to go out and actively acquire clues, rather than listening to briefings.



41
Clue: Dent Labs/ Geology Test

41. *Investigating Strangways' place, Bond finds an invoice from Professor Dent's geological lab.*
Bond has secured a point of information allowing him to move forward toward his procedural goal, earning an up arrow.

This is the sort of clue you want to ensure that the PCs can easily gather, because without it, the GM has to scramble to find an alternate way to launch them into the story. This insight underpins the *Gumshoe* rules system, which specializes in investigative play[7]. It defines essential clues like this as core clues, and ensures that the characters can't fail when looking for them. A failed check here, as with most information-gathering scenes, wouldn't lead anywhere interesting.



42
Bond Spots Photo of Quarrel

42. *Bond spots a photo of Quarrel, identifying him as having been in the car that pursued him and Jones.*
Like any information that promises greater understanding of the mystery, this earns an up arrow.

7: Yet more full disclosure: this example comes readily to mind because the author designed *Gumshoe*.



43
Bond Secures Hotel Room

43. *Bond secures his hotel room.*
Preparations undertaken by the hero can engender suspense or anticipation. As in this beat, they may be defensive in nature, reminding us of the jeopardy the hero is in and the care he must take to protect himself. This beat moves us toward fear.

Preparation for aggressive action, for example the classic suiting-up sequence, inspires the hope of righteous ass-kickery to come, and would register as an up arrow.

RPG prep tends to be flat, dead time, suggesting that the GM should look for descriptions that intensify unease when PCs are engaged in defensive prep. Likewise, they might encourage players to describe their aggressive prep in loving, gung-ho detail, so that it carries the emotional charge you'd get in the equivalent movie sequence.



44
Dent Remarks on Dead Secretary

44. *During a social interview at the club, Dent remarks louchely on the attractiveness of Strangways' murdered secretary.*
As this beat occurs, it seems to be an oddly jarring character note (which would register as drama.) Later we'll see that this disguises a piece of **pipe**; Dent's awareness of the secretary is incriminating. Though it lowers our sympathy for Dent, the fleeting moment seems to get Bond no closer to or further from his goal, warranting a lateral procedural arrow. We use that arrow type instead of a free-floating one because Bond engages Dent in pursuit of his mission.



45
Bond Learns About Quarrel

45. *Bond learns about Quarrel.*
Although Dent has given him nothing, Bond still has a plot thread to pursue, which bodes well for his success—so this **reveal** adds an up arrow to the hope/fear map.



46
Quarrel Casually Resistant

46. *Bond finds Quarrel casually resistant to his queries.*
This initial failure to gain information impedes Bond's procedural progress, hitting us with a down arrow.



47
Bond Follows Quarrel to Restaurant

47. *Bond follows Quarrel to a nearby open-air restaurant.*
007's decision to persist implies the possibility of success after the first failure.

(To pursue is to take emotional power and establish dominance, and is, as here, associated with upward movement. To be pursued indicates weakness, jeopardy, and the dreaded down arrow—unless you've set up anticipation that the hunted party plans to reverse the positions of hunter and prey.)



48
Quarrel Says He'll Talk in Back

48. *Quarrel agrees to talk in the back room.*
This seems promising—must be an up arrow.



49
Quarrel Pulls Knife; Feller Grabs Bond

49. *Quarrel pulls a knife; club proprietor Puss Feller grabs Bond in a bear hug.*
Bond is in danger, and the previous promise of information has been withheld. We're headed down.



50
Bond Gets the Drop on Them

50. *Bond breaks free and overcomes them, training his PPK on them.*
As reversal follows reversal, Bond's seizure of the upper hand moves us back up.



51
Leiter Gets the Drop on Bond

51. *The pompadoured man from the airport gets the drop on Bond.*
In the third consecutive reversal, Bond surrenders his physical dominance to a figure we have been primed to regard as menacing. The arrow goes down.



52
Leiter IDs Himself as CIA

52. *The man reveals himself as an ally: Felix Leiter, CIA operative.*
This fourth reversal is a **reveal**, and yields an up arrow.



53
Calypso at Puss Feller's

53. *Night comes to Puss Feller's, and with it, a brief calypso break.*
Appearing at the dawn of the tourism age, the early Bond flicks serve as both thrillers and exotic travelogues. Like most musical interludes, this number acts as **gratification** and provides us a free-floating up arrow.

Bar scenes in which the heroes relax and swap information have always been an RPG staple. Until you look at them as a source of gratification, in which jeopardy and challenge is temporarily suspended, the form's reliance on them seems peculiar. Depending on regional and national vagaries, gamers may or may not enjoy hanging around in pubs. But they universally seem to enjoy imagining their characters hanging around in pubs.



54
Key Clue: Crab Key

54. *Bond learns that Strangways was investigating the nearby island of Crab Key when he was killed.*
This **reveal** promises literal as well as metaphorical movement toward Bond's goal, and earns an up arrow.



55
Bond Spots Shady Photographer

55. *Bond spots the last of the airport watchers—a young photographer in a glamorous Chinese-style outfit.*
Paying off the beat 27, the woman spying on him in the airport returns. The idea that Bond is still under surveillance wakes us from our calypso-lulled complacence, reminding us of the jeopardy he faces. The arrow goes down.



56
Quarrel Grabs Photographer

56. *Quarrel captures her.*
By neutralizing the threat of surveillance, Bond's new ally moves us from fear to hope, and the arrow back up.



57
Photographer Resists Interrogation

57. *She resists interrogation.*
Our hope that this will lead to progress for Bond fades, moving the arrow down, as she stonewalls him.



58
Photographer Cuts Quarrel

58. *She cuts Quarrel with a broken flashbulb.*
We react in dismay as Bond's new ally is injured. The arrow heads further down.



59
"Want Me to Break Her Arm?"

59. *Quarrel shrugs it off and asks Bond if he wants her arm broken. "Another time," an insouciant Bond replies.*
With their willingness to treat the young woman to the same violence they'd use on a male attacker, our heroes retain and extend their dominance. We are meant to enjoy this as a transgressive up beat.



60
Who Inspires Such Fear?

60. *They release her; Bond wonders who can inspire such fear as to render her, like Jones, impervious to intimidation?*
The departed photographer reassumes dominance, becoming, if not a figure of fear herself, a reminder of the fear inspired by her unknown boss. If we're feeling fear, the arrow must be moving down.



61
Crab Key is Scary

61. *Bond, Leiter and Quarrel discuss the mystery and danger of Crab Key.*
More fear equals more downward movement.



62
Strangeways' Samples From Crab Key

62. *Quarrel establishes that Strangways' samples came from Crab Key.*
This **reveal** solidifies Bond's, and our, understanding of the mystery, pointing the arrow up.



63
Leiter Supplies Ominous Name: Dr. No

63. *Leiter supplies the ominous name of Crab Key's master: Dr. No.*
The movie reveals its titular villain in careful increments, each of them ominous. This is an example of a **reveal** whose effect is predominantly menacing, moving us toward fear.



64
Two Blind Mice Creeping About

64. *We see two of the Blind Mice lurking around, armed with a rifle.*
This beat begins on an ominous cut—we don't know where or when we are, but we know these guys are deadly. Our disorientation contributes to our increased fear, marked by a down arrow.



65
Shot at Bond Ruined

65. *Their shot at Bond, who gets out of a cab at his hotel, is ruined by a passing car.*
This deflation of procedural tension moves the emotional trajectory back up again.

Here we have an example of an outcome that happens all the time in action movies but is rarely accounted for by game rules: a passive success. Bond did nothing to cause the vehicle to pass by and wreck their shot at him. Yet we get the uptick in the hope/fear cycle nonetheless.

You could argue that the RPG versions of the blind mice have missed their roll, and that the GM has found an interesting way to describe their failure. (This observation sets aside the POV limitation issue: Bond never becomes aware of his close call.) This type of incongruent suspense beat, in which the assassins' shooting ability seems to be pitted against Bond's luck, is best handled by a narrative-style rules set, like *HeroQuest,* than one that strictly models the physical interactions of weapon and target. Perhaps Bond's player spent a narrative resource, like a hero point, to cancel out a hit, which was then represented in story as the passing vehicle.



66
Bond Gets Nothing But Rattles Dent

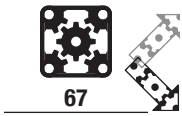
66. *Armed with new knowledge of Crab Key and Strangways' samples, Bond interviews Dent in his office. He gets nothing but clearly rattles Dent.*
Bond fails to get anything useful out of Dent, even as his demeanor confirms 007's suspicions of him. This setback scores a down arrow.

We might think that he has scored an advantage by rattling Dent, and may continue to assume this for several beats to come. However, nothing actually comes of this. In fact, Bond will not seize the initiative and find a means of moving forward in the story again until beat 82, when he realizes that Miss Taro is working for the enemy.

SEIZING DOMINANCE

Sometimes players may surprise you by failing to seize the emotional high ground in an interaction scene. Good drama dictates that NPCs who are meant to provide up moments for the PCs put up strong resistance and then crumble. Watch out for situations where the players accept the tough front and get steamrollered when they're meant to do the steamrollering. You may need to telegraph NPCs' weaknesses more strongly for players unaccustomed to seizing the emotional high ground. Even when the rules provide a means to do so, they may fail to use them. Often they're reacting more as the shy or laid-back people they are in real life than as the dominant badasses they're playing. Rather than lean back and let this happen, the GM should intervene to remind the player of the character's emotional wherewithal.

(This is another lesson the author now resolves to take into account in his own future GMing.)



Dent Demands Trip to Crab Key

67. *A rattled Dent breaks procedure to seek a daylight trip to Crab Key.*

Something very peculiar now happens. For the next eight beats, Dent takes over as protagonist. Using a device unavailable to GMs due to POV limitations, the script sustains suspense even as Bond is momentarily stymied by following the actions of a minor antagonist.

The voyeuristic quality of the film medium allows quicksilver shifts in sympathy and identification that defy rational logic. A classic example occurs after the shower murder in *Psycho*. Having identified with the Janet Leigh character for the first act of the film, we suddenly find ourselves rooting for Norman Bates, even as he cleans up the bloodied bathroom. A moment ago, we were feeling horrified for the vulnerable victim of the killing. Now our hope is that Norman successfully hide the evidence of her death, and fearing that he'll fail.

A subtler version of the same shift occurs here. Dent, still visibly agitated from his meeting with Bond, surprises a boatman who evidently works for Dr. No. He domineers the reluctant henchman into complying with his request. The boatman nervously says, "I hope you know what you're doing."

Shifting sympathies complicate our effort to identify our hopes and fears

for the scene.

We might be thinking that Dent's nervousness is all part of Bond's plan. Perhaps 007 rattled him in the hopes of following him to his boss. If we're thinking that, the scene warrants a procedural up arrow—but this turns out not to be the case. Bond, we'll later discover, is waiting around at his hotel, unaware of any of this. We've already encountered false suspense; now we see that mistaken hope is also a force that moves the hope/fear needle. We'll indicate this misplaced hope by shading our upward-pointing procedural arrow.

However, we also, thanks to the boatman's discomfort, find ourselves oddly fearful for Dent, who heretofore has registered as a louche and shifty character. That points the needle down.



68
The Bauxite Mine

68. *We see the bauxite mine on Crab Key, which we've previously heard about.*
The audience gets information about something we've been extensively teased about. Even if Bond isn't seeing it, we're satisfied by the infusion of knowledge, and register this as a positive **reveal**.



69
…is an Armed Camp

69. *Then we start to wonder why the mine is a tense armed camp.*
This beat emphasizes the danger of the place, which we feel on Bond's behalf even though he isn't present. A mirror of the previous beat, we respond to this as a negative **reveal**.



70
Guard Gives Dent a Dirty Look

70. *One of the uniformed guards shoots a menacing glare at an oblivious Dent.*
In case we'd forgotten to worry about Dent, this fleeting moment keeps that fear on the boil. Fear points the arrow down.



71
Ominous Meeting Chamber

71. *Dent is ushered into a vast, loomingly ominous interview chamber.*
The building concern we feel for Dent in this downward procedural beat is generated largely by the brilliant production design of Bond series stalwart Ken Adam. The off-kilter geometry of this vast space dominates Dent on behalf of its unseen owner.



72
Dr. No as Disembodied Voice

72. *Dr. No, heard only through a menacingly reverberant speaker, scolds Dent.*
Here we have another stage in the intricate multi-step reveal of our main villain. Our concern, meriting a downbeat, is both for Dent, our temporary protagonist, and for Bond, who we know will have to eventually confront this unnervingly withheld figure.



73
Kill Bond With This Tarantula

73. *Dr. No renews calls for Bond's assassination, revealing the terrifying weapon they'll use—a tarantula!*
Oh, for the innocent bygone days of 1962, when you could induce a heart-stopping down beat by whipping the cover off a tarantula cage. Here our concern has shifted from Dent, who we see is not going to be appallingly punished for his breach of protocol, back to Bond.



74
Foxy Hotel Clerk Checks 007 Out

74. *A foxy hotel clerk checks Bond out as he picks up his car.*
You could argue that this otherwise innocuous scene increases suspense by showing Bond to be unaware of his upcoming appointment with a terrifyingly deadly arachnid. However, the use of the Bond theme, with its signals of vicarious power and dominance, tips us to its primary intent, as a **gratification** beat. Speaking of the theme music, note the heavy lifting it performs in adding excitement to a decidedly routine transaction.



75
Bond Enters Darkened Hotel Room

75. *Bond enters his darkened hotel room.*
Now the shift to suspense music earns us a down beat by telling us to be frightened for Bond. In a game, you could use a music cue for this, or you could lay on the prose description. The mere phrase "Okay, so you enter your darkened hotel room..." is generally enough to set off players' paranoia meters.

INSTANT BEAT SHIFTS

Need to move the emotional arrow in a game session you're running? A simple line or two of narrated description can do the trick. These examples will suggest others tailored specifically to your genre, characters, and the situation of the moment.

To move the arrow down:

- "Suddenly, the forest goes quiet."
- "You feel like you're being watched."
- "You catch fleeting movement in your peripheral vision."
- "Storm clouds darken the sky."
- "Make a Perception check."

To move the arrow up:

- "At the crest of the ridge, your allies triumphantly appear."
- "Intuition tells you that you have all the pieces of the puzzle. Now you just have to put them together."
- "In the corner, you spy the tell-tale glint of gold and gems."
- "A [beautiful woman/gorgeous man] greets you at the door."
- "From yonder clearing wafts the smell of bacon."



76
Bond Keeps Cool Over Signs of Intrusion

76. *Bond keeps his cool even as he encounters signs of intrusion.*
Although the discovery confirms that Bond is in danger, we nonetheless experience an up beat here, both because of the confidence he projects, and because it pays off the prep scene in beat 43.

NARRATIVE NEATNESS AS PLAYER REWARD

Roleplaying games sacrifice the comforts of structure for the spontaneous discoveries of collective creativity. Some players, burned by bad experiences with uncollaborative GMs, have learned to fear structure as a sign of that dreaded bugaboo, railroading.

However, if within the bounds of a truly spontaneous and collaborative game, moments that pay off previous beats, as if they were planned, provide a jolt of pleasure equivalent to a free-floating up beat. This is especially so when they feel like planned moments, even though

both payoff and setup were clearly improvised separately.

Stories possess internal rhyming schemes. The ending of a well-constructed story "rhymes" with the opening by resolving the questions it answers. It often mirrors the imagery of the opening, or allows it to be seen in a new light.

Any beat that recalls and enlarges on or completes a previous one instills a feeling of structural unity. The further apart paired setup and payoff beats appear, the greater the sense of pleasantly surprising neatness. (An exception occurs when they're separated by so much time that the setup has been forgotten when the payoff occurs.)

Expected connections, like Bond taking precautions against intrusion and then seeing them violated, effectively serve our innate desire for order. Beats that pay off previous ones in unexpected ways pack an even stronger punch.



77
Cold Glass Gesture

77. *In a tiny gesture of vulnerability, Bond holds his cold drink glass to his forehead.*
This hairline fracture in Bond's poise suggests his sense of strain. It humanizes him while also making us fear for him, turning the arrow down.



78
Tarantula!

78. *The tarantula crawls onto Bond as he sleeps.*
Although every schoolboy can now tell you that tarantulas pose no great threat to humans, this scene remains unnerving today. The beat's downward power arises mostly from the controlled alarm Connery projects when Bond becomes aware of the spider.

Obviously this beat works more strongly on certified arachnophobes than on others. This raises the gaming ethics question of how ruthless you're willing to be as a GM in exploiting specific real-world fears you know your players have. The makers of *Dr. No* were aware that many members of the audience would be especially terrified of spiders, but they weren't targeting particular individuals, whose sore spots they knew first hand.



79
Bond Smashes Tarantula

79. *Bond stays cool until the spider makes the mistake of crawling onto his sheet, then flips it onto the floor and kills it with his shoe.*

Note the simplicity of the suspense rhythm exhibited by this famous sequence: down, then up.



80
Station Chief: Crab Key File Missing

80. *Consulting the station chief, Bond is unsurprised to learn that the station's files on Crab Key have gone missing.*

This is Bond's first active move since his meeting with Leiter and Quarrel at Puss Feller's, which concluded seventeen beats ago. He doesn't really find a new way forward toward his goal until beat 82. Still, the fact that Bond has resumed inquiries, and is unfazed by the files' disappearance, puts him in some degree of emotional control, enough to warrant a minor up beat.



81
Mystery Box for 007

81. *Bond receives a mysterious package.*

This beat tantalizes the audience with a **question**, one that comes at us from an unusual angle. We want to know what's in the box, but it's not part of the mystery Bond is working to uncover. Instead, it's information he, our protagonist, is withholding from us (and from the station chief). So it creates less a sense of dissatisfaction, as is typical for question beats, than of anticipation.

Wow! When we finally find out what's in this box, we're going to be totally blown away!

This situation, common enough in other narrative forms, has no evident RPG equivalent. In a game, a mysterious box whose contents are known only to one player would most definitely spur nagging unease and dissatisfaction in the others.



82
Bond Catches Miss Taro Eavesdropping

82. *Bond catches the station chief's secretary, Miss Taro, eavesdropping on his conversation with the station chief.*

This **reveal** not only establishes Bond's dominance (he catches her kneeling) but promises a new avenue of investigation, scoring a solid up beat.



83
007 Agressively Flirts Taro into Sightseeing

83. *Bond aggressively flirts her into agreeing to accompany him on a future sightseeing expedition.*

In contrast to his withholding interactions with Sylvia Trench and Moneypenny, Bond takes the initiative here and pursues Miss Taro. However, taking on the role of petitioner doesn't cost him his emotional power, as we intuit that he's only doing it to achieve his procedural goals and has nothing dramatic at stake should she turn him down. Her resistance is visible; without overtly referring to it, he overcomes her by leveraging the compromising position he caught her in during the previous beat.

In gaming terms, he might be applying a bonus gained from a previous Perception check to his Seduce, Persuade or Intimidate check.



84
Samples Radioactive; Dent Lied

84. *Bond confirms that Strangways' rock samples from Crab Key are radioactive, establishing that Dent probably lied to him about them.*

Just as a tarantula serves as a perfectly adequate menace in this first installment of the Bond series, the **reveal** shows us that the exciting item inside the package teased in beat 80 is... a Geiger counter. We're far from the outlandish gadgetry we'll see as the formula solidifies.

As it relieves our satisfaction about the mystery box and sheds more light on the mystery, this beat earns an up arrow.



85
Quarrel Resists Crab Key Trip

85. *Quarrel resists going to Crab Key, on the grounds that it would tempt providence. And plus, there's a dragon there.*

As a foil to Bond, Quarrel is allowed to feel the fear we'd reject in our hero. His objections build on the sense of menace already surrounding Crab Key, particularly with the introduction of the dragon. They push the arrow back toward fear.



86
007 Willing to Go On Without Quarrel

86. *Bond offers to go without Quarrel.*

This prospect increases our admiration for Bond, singling him out as an iconic figure who can take action on his own.

This beat makes Bond seem less culpable when Quarrel's fear of being killed by a dragon turns out to be warranted, as happens in beat 148.

THE ICONIC HERO

An iconic hero re-imposes order on the world by reasserting his essential selfhood. The nature of his radical individuality can be summed up with a statement of his iconic ethos. It is the ethos that grants higher meaning to the hero's actions, and a clue to his creator's intentions. An iconic hero's ethos motivates and empowers him.

- Sherlock Holmes solves mysteries using rigorous deductive logic.
- Miss Marple solves mysteries with a sharp mind, hidden behind a deceptively doddering demeanor.
- Conan uses his barbaric superiority to overturn the false order of corrupt civilization.
- Dr. Gregory House caustically tramples social decencies to solve medical mysteries, temporarily assuaging his self-loathing.
- Batman brings justice to cowardly and superstitious wrongdoers, doing for others what he could not do for his murdered parents.
- Storm overcomes the enemies of human- and mutant-kind by wielding nature's untamed power.
- Tarzan upholds the noble values of the jungle against the predatory outsiders who would despoil it.
- Aldo Raines brutalizes the brutalizers, marking them to strike terror into their compatriots, and to prevent those he spares from escaping their crimes.
- Philip Marlowe goes down mean streets, without himself becoming mean.

An iconic ethos implies both action and motivation, and is thus a powerful tool for defining player characters in roleplaying games.

The ethos refers to something we, the audience want to see happen. Thus it ensures sympathy for what is often eccentric, anti-social or cruel behavior. The iconic hero is free of society's constraints, yet acts to restore order. This order may be different from our own, as it is for Conan and Tarzan, but is privileged within the moral framework provided by the author. In real life, you might be a PR rep for a firm engaged in clear-cutting old growth forest, but if you disconnect your own values from the ethical universe portrayed

by Edgar Rice Burroughs, you can still enjoy rooting for Tarzan. Where the iconic hero trope is used in an ironic or revisionist fashion, we might be made to feel conflicted about the outcome. This occurs with Raines, centerpiece of *Inglourious Basterds'* disorienting moral universe.



87
Quarrel Relents

87. *Quarrel agrees to go anyway.*
With 007 now preemptively absolved for his foil's later demise, Quarrel relents. With him along, we are less concerned for Bond and his mission, so the arrow points up.



88
Seductive Invitation From Taro

88. *A purring, seductively posed Miss Taro, seen on the phone, invites Bond to come to her. He accepts.*
As it has already been heavily indicated that Miss Taro works for Dr. No, Bond's acceptance of her invitation puts him in jeopardy, moving the arrow down.

Dr. No telegraphs the villainy of its treacherous characters rather than withholding their identities from us. This sequence works on suspense, rather than the sudden jolt of surprise you might get if Taro were suddenly revealed to be an enemy agent.

The same moment happens in a game whenever the PCs head into a situation believing that it might be a trap.



89
Suggestive Car Dissolves

89. *An extremely long dissolve suggests that Bond is penetrating her with his car.*
Rarely has a transition between shots evoked the same degree of psychosexual **anticipation** as this particular edit. This visual cue subliminally invites us to share in Bond's sense of dominance over Taro, and the situation in general, as he heads knowingly into a trap. The fear for him we felt in the previous beat transforms into an up arrow.



90
Cement Plant Blackness

90. *The bleakness of the cement plant Bond's car passes suggests that something other than romance lies ahead.*
In a break from the prevailing exoticism of the Jamaican landscape, Bond finds himself in an industrial no man's land—subtly cuing our sense of unease, and earning a down arrow.



91
Bond Pursued by Car

91. *Bond is pursued by a car.*
The trap has been sprung, jeopardy is in play, and the arrow moves toward fear.



92
Bond Navigates Equipment Obstacle

92. *Bond out-drives them, steering his car under a construction equipment obstacle.*
His successful move grants him the upper hand, and the audience an up arrow.



93
Pursuers' Fiery Plunge

93. *The pursuers turn to avoid the obstacle and plunge into a ravine, dying in a fiery crash.*
Bond has won the exchange, and his enemies (presumably the blind mice, who otherwise disappear from the film after beat 65) are destroyed. He racks up another up arrow.



94
Quip: On Their Way to a Funeral

94. *Bond treats a shocked construction worker to a mordant quip: "I think they were on the way to a funeral."*
Recapitulating beat 39, Bond again uses sardonic wit in a display of dominance. As before, it is gratuitous, in that it doesn't further his procedural goal. This must then be another **gratification** beat, concluding on a free-floating up arrow.



95
Taro Surprised to See Bond

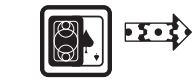
95. *Miss Taro appears at her villa door, wrapped in a post-shower towel and clearly surprised to see Bond alive.*
Bond has the upper hand, and another up arrow is scored. We are encouraged to enjoy both the prospect of his securing an advantage that will move him closer to his goal, and her sexual vulnerability. The situation supplies us a justifying permission

for this unseemly **gratification**: she tried to have him killed, after all.



96
Bond Amorously Tests Taro's Imposture

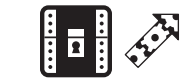
96. *Bond tests her imposture by coming onto her. She's forced by her precarious position to appear receptive.*
Here Bond successfully presses the advantage implied by the previous beat: another up arrow.



97
Taro Takes Call From Dent

97. *Miss Taro takes a phone call from her superior, who we presume to be Dent.*
This beat clarifies the situation for those whose drive-in speakers may have momentarily shorted out, but doesn't really alter our sense of hope or fear. The beat is a **reveal**, albeit a weak one. If you didn't get that Taro is a bad guy, or that Bond is playing a delaying game in hopes that reinforcements will come, you realize it here.

Screenwriters work to avoid moments of reiteration like this, but sometimes succumb out of necessity. The typical GM resorts to them all the time. It's much harder to convey information in an RPG than in other forms, as it relies on off-the-cuff verbal descriptions to foster a set of shared mental images. Players easily make mistaken assumptions about their situations, which the GM must periodically rectify. At times it even becomes necessary to rewind to a past event and revise a series of beats which came about due to a misunderstood plot point. Though little spoken of, this ability to self-correct is unique to RPGs.



98
Bond Advances With Garrote-like Towel

98. *Bond casually advances on her, while holding a towel like a garotte.*
In case we didn't notice that we've been rooting for our hero to engage in an act of sexual coercion, here we go. The film now flaunts its awareness of our darker hopes with a cheeky suavity. It's a moment of deeply ambiguous wish fulfillment that few actors other than Connery could pull off.

We are meant to be with Bond here, savoring the transgressive edge of what we want him to do. Today, under a very different set of social mores, we may react to this entire sequence with more queasiness than greasy delight.

This thought brings us to another advantage of the RPG form. The audience consists only of a group of participants at a given gaming table. Except at convention or other pick-up games, GMs know their preferences, prejudices

and expectations. Game masters can tailor the events they introduce into play accordingly. With one group you might be willing to explore a contemporary equivalent of this now-uncomfortable sequence. With another, you might know to stay a million miles away from territory that would prove troubling or uncomfortable.



99
Bond Pulls Taro Into Another Dissolve

99. *He pulls her into a clinch, followed by a dissolve. And we all know what that means.*

Bond completes his achievement of dominance over Miss Taro by sexually possessing her. He gains the power in the scene. 007 has a procedural aim in mind, as we'll see when Dent shows up (beat 107), but this is not yet apparent to us. Although Taro yields to his advances with still-evident reluctance, music cues and a light comedy playing style encourage us to treat this as a **gratification** beat, marked by a free-floating up arrow.

If we care to peer behind the veil of style to consider what's really happening in front of our eyes, the beat takes on a darker tone. Miss Taro's consent is granted under duress: she must fear Bond, as an enemy agent. It has also been established (in beat 60, for example) that Dr. No's agents have good reason to be terrified of him. Though played as seduction, Bond's conquest is actually a quasi-rape, and we are meant to root for him as he slyly commits it.



100
Parody Domestic Scene

100. *In a scene of parodic domesticity, Bond tests her to see if she's trying to keep him at her place. He suggests that they go out to a restaurant; she insists on cooking for him.*

The discerning viewer can spot Bond's procedural aim in this cat-and-mouse verbal duel disguised as post-coital chatter. Taro isn't sure if Bond has twigged to her, but must pretend that he hasn't, just in case. Bond, surer of the situation than she is, retains power, earning an up arrow.



101
Taro Slips, But Recovers

101. *Taro wonders why Bond has ordered a taxi if he drove to her place—then backs off her questioning when she realizes she's giving herself away by seeming overly sharp and inquisitive.*

Taro's recovery from her tantalizing slip frustrates us, pushing the arrow down.



102. *As a delaying tactic, and because he enjoys it, Bond presses Taro into a second bout of questionably consensual lovemaking.*

Bond's predatory sexuality may seem more blatant the second time around, but now sensing his procedural objective, we score this as another victory for Bond. The cruelly gratuitous nature of his action merely adds to the beat's transgressive bite. (Or is meant to, under the moral system the film expects us to buy into.)



103. *The supposed taxi Bond ordered turns out to be an agent to take Taro into custody.*

This surprise played on Taro gives us a moment to exult in the hero's power over her—an up arrow. Bond has fucked her for a third time, this time metaphorically.



104. *Taro spits in his face.*

Although this act betrays Taro's relative weakness, it is also a threat to the dignity of the figure we're identifying with. Nothing procedural is at stake here, but we fear for the emotional state of our hero, so this beat resolves with a **dramatic** down arrow.



105. *Bond keeps his cool.*

We regain our emotional equilibrium as Bond maintains his, yielding a **dramatic** up arrow countering the downward move of the previous beat.



106. *With Taro spirited away, Bond secures her place, expecting trouble.*

In echo of beat 43, which took place in his own hotel room, Bond increases our anxiety for him by taking defensive preparations.

Though the threat of having one's physical space violated by intruders is a staple of the espionage genre, it takes on a special tang here, given the film's Freudian undercurrents. The hero and villains establish dominance over one another by entering each other's living environments, just as Bond establishes dominance over Taro by literally entering her. In *Dr. No*, infiltration isn't just breaking and entering, it's metaphorical sexual assault.



107
Dent Shoots Dummy; 007 Gets the Drop

107. *Dent enters Taro's bungalow, thrusts a gun through the door, and shoots an obvious dummy in the bed. Bond gets the drop on him.*

You could arguably split this into two beats, but director Terence Young milks the moment of menace so little that it scarcely registers as a down beat. Instead the focus is on Dent's falling into Bond's trap—a moment of power for us and our hero.

Note the extension of the home invasion as sexual penetration metaphor. Unfortunately for Dent, he's a premature shooter, unable to compete with a true alpha male.



108
Bond Cites Dent's Secretary Comment

108. *Bond cites Dent's comment about the murdered secretary as his first inkling that he was working for the enemy.*

The pipe laid in beat 44 pays off in this moment, where Bond furthers his dominance over Dent by confronting him with his error.



109
"Smith & Wesson, and You've Had Your Six."

109. *Dent grabs the pistol he's been surreptitiously moving toward himself by pulling on a throw rug with his foot. He pulls the trigger, but it's out of ammo, leading to the quintessential Bond line: "It's a Smith and Wesson, and you've had your six." Bond executes him.*

If you're a woman and you try to have Bond killed, he will merely rape you a couple of times. If you're a man and you shoot at him with no hope of success, you deserve summary execution. We are happy to enjoy the cold display of 007's power, just as, a generation later, we will delight when a weary Indiana Jones whips out his gun and shoots down the Arab killer flashily whipping his scimitar about. An up arrow.

Bond is able to kill Dent because he needs nothing more from him. The entire Taro ambush sequence, beginning at beat 88, would be seen in game terms as an optional plot branch. 007 sweeps some pawns off the board, but takes nothing from his encounters with Taro and Dent he needs in order to move on to the Crab Key exploration, which has already been planned. In a game, the player might easily skip straight to Crab Key before you could have Miss Taro issue her invitation. You'd miss some interesting scenes but nothing essential to the progress of the story.



110
Moment of Disquiet

110. *Regret flits fleetingly across Bond's face, indicating that he's not entirely without feelings for those he must dispatch.*
Here the film allows us a hint of moral absolution for enjoying Dent's execution. Bond loses emotional power, resulting in a **dramatic** down arrow. At the same time, our sympathies for him are strengthened—and we get to forgive ourselves for the dark impulses the last beat slaked.



111
Crab Key Preparation: Quarrel Nervous

111. *Quarrel resists Bond's efforts to reassure him as they prepare for Crab Key.*
This recapitulation of beat 61 puts us in an appropriately apprehensive state of mind as we embark on the series of linked sequences that take us to the end of the film.



112
Bond Rebuffs Leiter's Bid to Go

112. *Bond rebuffs Leiter's offer to come along.*
By showing his confidence in the face of danger, Bond reassures us, moving the arrow up.



113
Leiter Makes Quarrel Rum Breath Joke

113. *Leiter cracks wise at Quarrel's expense, quipping that he'll be able to breathe on the dragon, killing it with his rum-soaked breath.*
This strained moment of comedy relief might not yield much **gratification** but is intended as such. If we mark it according to the response it was meant to engender, it resolves upwards.



114
Successful Landing

114. *Bond and Quarrel land on Crab Key without incident.*
Successfully penetrating the lush virgin jungle of his enemy's hideout, Bond scores an initial up arrow.



115
Quarrel Takes a Drink

115. *Quarrel takes a drink.*
If you thought the crypto-rape sequence was going to provide the film's queasiest moment of culture shock, this comedy relief beat discordantly drops us into Stepin Fetchit territory.

We're supposed to find this funny because Quarrel is black, and because funny music is playing, and because he presumably needs his rum for courage and blacks are cowardly. Of course Bond drinks like a fish but suave or suspenseful music plays when he does it.

Though you'll find more blatant racism than this in the Fleming novels, it's hard to shrug this one off. This moment was glaringly dated at the time of the film's release, at the height of the civil rights movement. The beat reverberates unfortunately through the rest of the piece, casting otherwise borderline scenes in the worst possible light. Quarrel serves as a foil to Bond, showing fear in situations where the filmmakers want us to be afraid, while protecting 007's heroism. Given the history of the stereotypically cowardly black character, the choice to place an Afro-Caribbean in the foil role gives rise to a host of unwanted associations, which this beat brings crashing home. It undermines beats in which Quarrel is shown to be brave and competent, like his unflinching response to being cut with the broken flashbulb in beat 59.

For the purposes of this exercise, we'll score it the way it was intended to land, as a gratification beat with a free-floating up arrow. If we noted it as it plays today, it would be as an unintentional bringdown, with its free-floating arrow pointed down.

FAILED BEATS

Discordant beats occur all the time in storytelling. Any beat can fail to exert its intended effect, and not just because it falls out of step with evolving societal values. A scary moment might fall flat, or invite ridicule. Dramatic scenes meant to uplift or upset us deflate when we withdraw our sympathies from the protagonists. Narrative confusion can prevent any beat from hitting its mark.

RPGs differ from passively-consumed, predetermined story forms in that they allow you to adjust for failed beats on the fly. If a suspenseful moment fails to bring the players to the edge of their seats—whether because it was misconceived, or one of the players chose an unfortunate time to insert a pop culture quip—you can regroup, up the stakes and try again. If they treat a supporting character you expect them to care about with indifference or hostility, you can reroute the developing story so that it no longer depends on their affection for him.

We notated Quarrel's Stepin Fetchit beat as it was intended to play. However, when keeping your mental or literal narrative map of an RPG session, follow the example given on p. 25 and mark the up and down notes as they actually hit. This allows you to modulate forthcoming beats to maintain the desired balance between hope and fear.



116
Enter Honey Ryder

116. *In one of cinema's all-time classic entrances, Honey Ryder appears on the beach, like Venus emerging from a conch shell.* This racy glamor shot arouses our **anticipation** of sexual fireworks between Bond and this new arrival, scoring an up arrow.

Most of the dramatic material of *Dr. No*, such as it is, revolves around the formation of a relationship between Bond and Honey. We can tell that the piece lodges firmly on the procedural side of the continuum because she doesn't even appear until an hour into the picture.



117
Honey Resists 007's Approach, Reassurances

117. *Bond tries to approach her reassuringly; she keeps him at bay.*
Bond makes the first move in their courtship, and is rebuffed, losing emotional power. This is a **dramatic** down beat.

Although 007 has a procedural reason for trying to figure out who she is and deal with her, viewers familiar with movie tropes know what's going on here. The dramatic courtship beats will soon dovetail with the procedural goal of investigating Dr. No, but at this stage Bond is starting by trying to establish a personal connection with her.



118
Honey Asserts Herself w/ Knife, Then Relents

118. *Honey softens her attitude to Bond after overreacting and pulling a knife on him.*
This initial show of trust moves Bond toward his unstated, if audience-presumed goal, of forming a relationship with her, and earns a **dramatic** up arrow.



119
Bond Courts Honey With Questions

119. *Questions about Dr. No's awareness of her provide a text for their courtship.*
Dramatically, this beat brings the couple closer, which we hope for, and reminds us of the danger they're in, and hence our fears. An upward **dramatic** arrow crosses a downward **procedural** one.



120
Quarrel Warns of an Approaching Boat

120. *Quarrel warns them of an approaching boat.*
Their danger goes from hypothetical to imminent, pushing the procedural arrow down.

In a game, you might be tempted to mark this as a victory, as presumably Quarrel's player succeeded at his Perception check. But the check reveals alarming information, which exerts a greater emotional impact than the fact of the successful roll that preceded it. Being in less trouble than you otherwise would be (if you'd missed the check and allowed an ambush) still counts as a down moment.

From here on out, with occasional pauses, the procedural beats get shorter and more numerous. The rhythm has grown faster. We've seen this happen before, in the final act of *Hamlet*.



121
Henchmen Demand Surrendur

121. *The boat's crew, blindly calling on a bullhorn, demands their surrender.*
Their jeopardy increases—another down arrow.



122
Henchmen Fire Machine Guns

122. *They fire machine guns on the beach.*
Another escalation of their jeopardy, with down arrow.



123
Henchmen Threaten to Return With Dogs

123. *The henchmen threaten to return with dogs.*
Even though they're leaving, dogs don't sound good. Overall, this beat still puts our hero in a worse procedural spot.



124
Honey Confirms Dragon

124. *Honey confirms the presence of a dragon.*
A dragon sounds even worse than dogs. Another down arrow.



125
What is it That Looks Like a Dragon?

125. *Bond wonders what the so-called dragon could really be.*
This beat introduces a nagging question, and so also moves the procedural arrow down.



126
"Ever Seen a Scorpion With Sunstroke?"

126. *Honey defends her natural and experiential viewpoint against Bond's rationalist worldview.*
In a delightfully bizarre speech that would warm the cockles of Werner Herzog's heart, Honey challenges Bond: "Have you ever seen a mongoose dance? A scorpion with sunstroke sting itself to death?" Her monologue places a roadblock between her and Bond, moving them away from our hoped-for union. It gives her greater character shading than either Trench or Taro, while establishing her as a more difficult conquest. The **dramatic** arrow dips.



127
H.'s Reluctance to Leave in Day Overcome

127. *Bond overcomes her reluctance to depart in daylight.*
We want Bond to protect this civilian from harm, and react with hope when he successfully convinces her on this tactical point.



128
Honey's Boat is Bullet-riddled

128. *They see that her boat is riddled with bullets from the prior machine gun fire.*
This new complication reverses the victory of the previous beat, pushing the arrow down again.



129
Honey Blames Bond

129. *Honey blames him for the damage to her boat.*
The procedural setback has now become a **dramatic** one, too. Our hopes for romance dim, with as indicated by a down arrow. The two streams have now dovetailed—in order to win Honey, Bond must get her safely off the island.



130
Slog to Hiding Place

130. *Bond, his sidekick and his love interest undertake a tough journey to a good hiding place.*
The arduous journey beat is another staple of adventure fiction. It increases our sense of tension—and drives the procedural arrow down—by emphasizing the toll taken on its slogging heroes.

Tolkien relies heavily on the arduous journey; it is a dominant trope of both *The Hobbit* and the *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Through his influence, it has also become a staple of RPGs—perhaps to an extent that outweighs their narrative interest.

MAKING ARDUOUS JOURNEYS DRAMATIC

It's sometimes effective to use journey beats simply to wear down a group's resources. This creates useful tension. That said, if you look at a journey beat and see that dropping it wouldn't change your broader narrative at all, it could probably benefit from a rethink.

The arduous journeys in *The Lord of the Rings* bear dramatic weight by testing and deepening the bonds between the characters. Frodo and Sam's trek through Mordor typifies this. They're not about getting from one point to another in physical space, but about the limits of loyalty and love between friends.

Make your journey sequences earn their keep, becoming more than just confrontations with meaningless plot impediments. Construct obstacles so that they activate a PC's internal conflicts, or provide the opportunity to alter relationships within the group. If supporting characters are along for the ride, relationships with them might likewise be sharpened by procedural beats encountered during a journey.

Even on a strictly procedural level, the consequences of well-constructed journey beats exert an influence on subsequent scenes:

- The object gained as a possible benefit from obstacle A aids in overcoming obstacle B.
- Eating those tempting eggs triggers the wrath of the bird goddess.
- Success in dealing with the tribesmen of Vho gives the team an earned rescue if they need it later.



131
Honey Rubs Bond to Ward Off Mosquitoes

131. *Applying a remedy against mosquitoes, Honey rubs salt water on Bond.*
In this **dramatic** beat, hopes for romance leap upwards as our heroine finds a pretext to get sensual with our hero.



132
Pursuers With Dogs

132. *The henchmen return, with the promised dogs.*
Jeopardy resumes; the arrow moves down.



133
Honey Cries Out; Bitten Underwater

133. *Our heroes stand waist deep in water. Honey cries out; something has bitten her foot.*
Her cry increases our fear and earns a down arrow.



134
Dogs Find Birds Instead of Bond

134. *Instead of finding Bond, the dogs flush a covey of birds.*
Bond and company are now a little safer, moving the arrow up.



135
There's a Gunman They Don't See

135. *The group comes out of hiding, not realizing that there's still one patrolling gunman left.*
Unseen danger points the arrow down.



136
Bond Ambushes and Kills Gunman

136. *They spot him in time. Bond ambushes and kills the guard.*
The danger dealt with, the arrow points up again.



137
Honey: "Why?" Bond: "Because I Had To."

137. *Honey appalled, asks why Bond had to kill the guard.*
Returning to the **dramatic** territory of their nascent romance, Honey is again distanced from Bond, earning a down arrow. Bond justifies his actions as necessary. As we're about to see, their courtship revolves around a most 007ish issue: when it is acceptable to kill.



138
Past the DANGER Zone

138. *The three plunge deeper toward No's base.*
Here jeopardy is represented with a shot of a literal DANGER sign, complete with skull and crossbones. There might as well be a sign below it reading PROCEDURAL DOWN ARROW.



139
"You Smell Nice Already."

139. *Honey and Bond have a flirtatious moment as they bathe together.*
This water, one must presume, is cleaner than the stuff they've just been trudging through. Honey remarks that Bond already smells good. Clearly she likes a man who works up a sweat while engaged in manly activities. The beat brings them closer together, registering an upward **dramatic** arrow.



140
Dragon Tracks Made by Tires Still Ominous

140. *They spot dragon tracks, which seem ominous even when obviously made by tires.*
A reminder of danger earns a down arrow. Like Dr. No himself, his "dragon" is introduced in stages, for maximal impact.



141
Honey: "Dr. No Killed My Father."

141. *Honey supplies her backstory, including the fact that she attributes the death of her father to Dr. No.*
In this **reveal**, a dramatic up arrow (because Honey is opening up to Bond, bringing them closer) crosses a procedural down arrow (because Dr. No is made more menacing).



142
She Also Kills With Spiders

142. *Honey tells Bond that she once used a black widow spider to kill a would-be protector who wanted to take advantage of her.*

Suddenly, and in curious contrast to her concern for the guard just a few beats ago, it turns out that Honey isn't such an outsider to Bond's deadly world after all. Now she **reveals** herself to be a counterpart to Bond, coldly dispatching those who need and deserve to be killed. At the same time, she's his symbolic opposite: her weapon is the natural world. Use of spider as murder weapon also connects her symbolically to the bad guy, who we have seen deploy a tarantula in an attempt to assassinate Bond.

Bond's oddly priggish reply, "Well it wouldn't do to make a habit of it," shows an amusing discomfort as he finds an apparent equal who has given herself license to kill. She is untamed and independent, where he has to accept occasional fusty emasculations from M in order to keep his own license in proper order.

Despite the violence of the imagery and Bond's ruffled reaction, the sharing of information brings them closer together and works as a dramatic up arrow. In the world of James Bond, murder talk is the equivalent of an intimate coffee date.



143
She Asks 007 If He Has a Woman Of His Own

143. *Honey leaves Bond momentarily speechless by asking if he has a woman of his own.*

Although it's amusing to see Bond's savoir faire momentarily deflated, his failure to keep up with her lessens his emotional power and is a setback toward our hope of seeing them together—even as it suggests that she might mean something more to him than his previous conquests. A **dramatic** down arrow resolves the beat.



144
Quarrel Sights the Dragon

144. *Quarrel reports a dragon sighting.*

Jeopardy interrupts their last romantic interlude, driving the arrow down. Quarrel is the one to spot both the dragon here, and the boat, earlier, because as Bond's foil, he is allowed to exhibit the fear response the filmmakers want to convey to the audience. Bond is protected from seeming afraid, although we are afraid for him.

PROCEDURAL FOILS

In RPGs we tend to view sidekicks, allies and other supporting characters as resources for the heroes to draw on. They extend the PCs' capabilities, allowing them to perform tasks that would otherwise seem out of character for them. Sidekicks, servants and retainers help collapse time by performing uninteresting tasks off-screen. All of these are useful qualities.

We tend to forget, however, the emotional value of foil characters, which is to establish the hero's dominance. Quarrel is allowed to feel frightened and ultimately get killed, without tarnishing Bond's aura of mastery. Felix demonstrates Bond's dominance by being almost as cool and well-placed as he is, but still left admiring on the sidelines, whether 007 is infiltrating Crab Key or snogging Honey Ryder.

Help to build your PCs' sense of dominance and competence by arraying foil characters around them. Like *Star Trek* red shirts, they can demonstrate the dangers the heroes avoid, registering down beats without saddling the PCs with direct failures. Periodic interactions with admiring foils allow for easy up beats, which leaven interactions with antagonistic or amusingly frustrating witnesses, guards, and other NPCs who act as obstacles to their aims.



145
Spotted by the "Dragon" Crew

145. *They are spotted by the crew of the flamethrower-equipped jeep.*
Jeopardy increases; the arrow dips.



146
Bond Fires on Jeep, Hits a Headlight

146. *Bond fires on the jeep, hitting a headlight.*
Bond gains an advantage, moving the arrow up.

In a game, any hit scored by one of the PCs in a combat scores as a procedural up arrow. Any other advantage gained, including actions that decrease enemies' ability to attack, does likewise. Conversely, hits suffered by the PCs, or effects lowering their combat effectiveness, act as procedural down arrows.

Running RPG fights involves enough bookkeeping as it is without stopping

to map their many up and down beats. As an exercise, it might be enlightening to record a combat in your game system of choice and map it out later.



147
Honey Distracts 007; He Misses Second Light

147. *A panicked Honey runs to Bond's side, distracting him and preventing him from shooting out the other headlight.*
As we're about to see, this down beat will bring about a major setback for Bond. It's staged, however, to protect our conception of him as heroically ultra-competent. Bond doesn't simply miss the second headlight. The setback comes about because an outside force—in this case, a frightened Honey—intervenes.

In RPGs, the default practice is to treat setbacks as direct failures of the protagonist. Bond's player would roll and fail to hit. Honey's distraction might be taken into account as a negative modifier on the roll. If the modifier made the difference between success and failure, it would be interpreted by the player as having made the difference. Otherwise, it would be discounted as irrelevant.

Where we wish to emulate the ethos of iconic heroism found in most serial adventure material, including the Bond series, we might do better to depict setbacks as the effect of outside factors. In this model, the player would roll and fail. Then the GM or player would supply description that recognized the setback while protecting the character's sense of competence—only then deciding that Bond's shot is spoiled by Honey's sudden appearance at his side. (In keeping with today's preference for gender-equal adventure, you'd probably pick a distraction other than a panicking love interest.)



148
Quarrel Burned to Death

148. *Quarrel is killed by the flamethrower.*
In this down beat, Quarrel's earlier fear of dragons proves to be justified. If we remember that moment, we feel an additional degree of dismay at his demise.

The unheeded prophecy goes back to the mythic roots of narrative. It is an example of a paired set of beats which point downwards both times—when the feared outcome is initially predicted, and when it comes true.

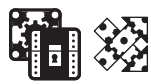
In a game, any prediction of doom might go either way—it could be a pair of down beats, as with Quarrel's demise, or a suspense note paid off by an up beat, when the prophesied fate is avoided.

Here Quarrel completes his arc as an exemplar of unfortunate racial stereotyping, by proving himself to be the expendable black sidekick. This trope

will persist long after the blatant minstrelsy seen in beat 115 disappears from the cinematic playbook.


149
Bond and Honey Taken Prisoner

149. *Bond and Honey are taken prisoner.*
Being captured is always a down beat. Bond loses his dominance and with it his ability to act. This moment would play as an even deeper down beat in a game, where players traditionally find the capture of their characters extremely upsetting. While we vicariously identify with characters in passive media, we expect to control the destinies of our PCs. When that control is taken away from us, the sense of loss can prove surprisingly vehement. To successfully emulate the Bond universe, or any other genre in which heroes are routinely captured, GMs may need to strongly telegraph the fact that they will soon be able to escape. It also helps to remind them that imprisonment typically provides a hero with vital advantages of information or access.


150
They're Taken Inside the Base

150. *Bond is taken inside No's base, where he sees its army of radiation-suited minions.*
Some reveals are satisfyingly informative and others ominous. This **reveal** is both, leading out on a set of crossed arrows.


151
They Need Radioactive Decontamination

151. *No's minions discover that Bond and Honey are radioactive.*
This note of danger moves the arrow down.


152
Connery and Andress Hit the Showers

152. *Bond and Honey are stripped and showered.*
Danger turns to **gratification** as we get a racy (by 1962 standards) eyeful of our appealing leads.

Despite the occasional vogue for cheesecake art in published game products, sex appeal is harder to evoke in an RPG context than in passively consumed media. It's one thing to quietly enjoy a peek at a fetchingly dampened Andress or Connery as a private jolt of pleasure. Entering into a participatory evocation of titillation with one's friends and acquaintances crosses an intimacy boundary. Sexiness in gaming sessions may be one effect that becomes more unwelcome the more successfully it is evoked.



153
Successfully Decontaminated

153. *Bond and Honey are deemed decontaminated.*
Whew! Thank goodness *that* threat was so easily overcome! An up arrow.

Joking aside, these three beats, though played to set up and play out the previous gratification beat, prefigure a darker sense of sexual vulnerability that will later become apparent as Bond's imprisonment continues.



154
Ominously Solicitous Welcome

154. *They are welcomed by ominously solicitous attendants.*
The suspense here comes from reversed expectations: the attendants are friendly... *too* friendly. A down arrow. Overly friendly bad guys are a staple element of the GM's kitbag.



155
Opulent Guest Suite

155. *Bond and Honey are escorted into a luxurious guest suite.*
Just as audiences of stage productions (especially those of a certain age), ooh and awe predictably at pretty chandeliers, the audience is here invited to enjoy the visual sumptuousness of No's complex. This indulgence in vicarious wealth fantasy registers as **gratification**.



156
Bond Shows His Cool by Eating Their Meal

156. *Bond demonstrates his cool by eating the food his captors have supplied for them.*
Bond asserts dominance in what is intended to be an off-putting, if opulent, environment by showing his lack of fear. In a moment, this show of *sang froid* will prove to be unwise, but for now it scores an up arrow.



157
Bond Warns Honey the Place is Likely Bugged

157. *He warns Honey that the place is probably bugged.*
After several up arrows, Bond reminds us, through Honey, of the jeopardy they face, moving the arrow down.



158
Drugged Coffee; They Pass Out

158. *Bond and Honey pass out, drugged by the coffee they just drank.*
With this down beat, Bond's insouciance in beat 156 is now shown to be misplaced. This is a rare instance of Bond making an outright mistake. However, as we're about to see, the consequences of his error are more creepy than disastrous.



159
Dr. No Entrance as Pair of Shadowy Feet

159. *Dr. No enters, seen only as a pair of shadowy feet.*
The step-by-step unveiling of our main villain continues in this menacing down beat.



160
Dr. No Peeps at Bond in Bed

160. *Dr. No pulls back the sheets to peer at a sleeping Bond.*
In this downward suspense beat, our helpless and unaware hero is at the mercy of our gleaming-handed villain. It establishes an unmistakable sexual undertone to No's upcoming dealings with Bond. No's brand of sexual dominance, in contrast to our charming hero's, occurs at a cowardly, voyeuristic remove. In case there are any doubts about No's predilections, we see him check out Bond but not Honey.

The series' depiction of gayness as perverse and sinister becomes particularly stark with *Diamonds Are Forever* and its hitman lovers, Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd. They aren't the only villains whose attitude toward Bond takes on a sexual subtext. Blofeld's cat is surely a signifier of something. Enemies have been trying to castrate him since Goldfinger's laser table, a tradition carried on by Mads Mikkelsen's Le Chiffre in the revisionist *Casino Royale*.



161
Bond Reassures Honey by Admitting Fear

161. *The next morning, Bond and Honey are summoned to meet their host. Bond reassures her by admitting to being scared.*
This beat serves both dramatic and procedural purposes. Dramatically, it brings our couple closer together. Procedurally, it increases the sense of threat and tension—even our hero is anxious. Once more the script protects Bond's iconic heroism. By having Bond admit his fears in the context of calming Honey, he retains a sense of dominance—his admission is not cowardly, but gallant.



162
Into Dr. No's Sanctum

162. *They head into Dr. No's imposing inner sanctum.*
No's weirdly luxurious apartment is yet another step on his multi-staged reveal. As they come closer to meeting this terrifying figure, the tension mounts, for another down beat.



163
Dominance by Aquariums and Martinis

163. *No establishes dominance with talk of his extremely impressive aquarium, not to mention his spookily precise knowledge of Bond's martini requirements.*
Dominance for the villain is a down beat for the hero.



164
Bond Wryly Notes Napoleon Portrait

164. *Bond wryly notes No's portrait of Napoleon.*
This beat, consisting of a look from Connery and a single comedic soundtrack sting, arouses our **anticipation** that Bond has found something to use against No in what is clearly an imminent verbal duel. It scores an up note.



165
Bond Flatters Dr. No

165. *Bond flatters No.*
Bond takes the verbal initiative with a gambit we think might work, given the megalomania signaled in the previous beat. He scores the first up arrow of the verbal contest. So far we're scoring this as a purely procedural interaction: Bond wants No to satisfy his practical needs, not his emotional ones.



166
Bond Needles No, Pumps Him For Information

166. *Bond subtly needles him regarding his use of atomic power, while also pumping him for information.*
Bond retains the floor, upshifting to a more aggressive verbal tactic. Another uptick in his—and our—favor.



167
Bond Claims He Checked In; No Calls His Bluff

167. *Bond oversteps, claiming to have sent information back to headquarters. No calls him on it.*
The advantage shifts to No: a down arrow.


168
No Stays Cool as 007 Lists His Enemies

168. *Bond tries to rattle him with a list of his enemies. No coolly deflects him: "I only gratify your curiosity because you're the one man capable of appreciating what I've done."*
007's next gambit fails, too, for another down arrow. No's response suggests that their verbal contest is asymmetrical. Bond may not want anything emotional from No, but No seeks validation from Bond. His earlier voyeuristic gazing session with the sleeping Bond indicates that what he seeks from him isn't entirely platonic, either.

Bond wants to learn about and disrupt No's rocket scheme.

No wants Bond to love him.

The audience doesn't have a rooting interest in the subtextual motivations of our antagonist, absolving us of the need to track his dramatic arrow.


169
007 Argues For H.'s Freedom; No Seems to Agree

169. *Bond argues for Honey's freedom; No appears to agree.*
We're more worried for Honey than for Bond, so this development raises our hopes. It moves Bond closer to the secondary procedural goal (rescuing Honey) that fulfills his dramatic goal (winning Honey), and earns an uptick.


170
Honey Taken Away; Rape Threatened

170. *No immediately withdraws his offer, threatening her with rape: "I'm sure the guards will amuse her."*
No sadistically reclaims dominance by threatening the sexual violation of Bond's woman. Our fears increase, pushing the arrow down. Note that any raping of Honey will be done by proxy. No's interests are apparently elsewhere, and, as we'll soon see, he is a metaphorical eunuch.


171
Guard Thwarts Bond's Rescue Bid

171. *A guard gets the drop on Bond, preventing him from intervening as Honey is led away.*
Bond's failure to save her earns a downtick.



172
Bottle Sparks Duel of Wine Snobbery

172. *No sees that Bond has seized a champagne bottle to use as a club. Bond recovers verbal dominance by one-upping him in a duel of wine snobbery.*

Bond's maintenance of his cool even as Honey is being dragged off to a degrading fate earns him an uptick. If we'd seen Bond take the bottle before No spots it, the discovery of the bottle might count as separate beat, in which Bond is defeated again. Since we are never given time to hope that the bottle will be used, it doesn't register as a moment separate from the dueling quips about the best year for Dom Perignon.



173
No Disappointed Bond Has Tried to Steal a Knife

173. *No expresses disappointment as he sees that Bond has also grabbed a knife.*

No has begun to sour on the object of his affections, but what we register is the down beat telling us that Bond isn't going to get out of this one, at least not with a hidden weapon.



174
Bond Mocks No; No Reveals SPECTRE

174. *Bond mocks his insecurities, in overtly Freudian terms: "Does the toppling of American missiles really compensate for having no hands?" Thus baited, No reveals the wider scope of plan and his membership in (and the existence of) SPECTRE.*

Bond retakes the verbal initiative with a direct strike at No's sexual inadequacies, making a metaphorical eunuch of him. In response, No gives him what he wants—a massive **reveal**, and an up arrow to go with it.



175
More Needling Prompts No to Crush Buddha

175. *Bond continues provoking him, referring to his Napoleon complex and dismissively uttering another classic line: "World domination, that same old dream." In response, No switches to a display of physical dominance, crushing a brass Buddha statuette with his prosthetic hand.*

Here Bond pushes his luck, repeating a successful tactic more forcefully, and gets shut down. The result of this is ambiguous from a procedural point of view. No is displaying both literal strength and emotional weakness by shifting from the verbal to the physical. Bond succeeds in ruffling him but gets no further reveals. The mixed outcome yields crossed procedural arrows.

This scene embodies a principle seen in some story-based rules sets, including *Over the Edge* and *HeroQuest,* where repeated uses of the same tactic

are penalized. Bond should have switched to a new tactic against No, but tried to double down. The logic of the hope/fear cycle explains why this must be so. Each beat must be distinct from the one that came before it. If the situation is repeated, the only opportunity for rhythmic variance comes from a different outcome.



176. *A miffed Dr. No lays a guilt trip on Bond.*
No goes on the attack without success, leaving Bond with an uptick. He peevishly complains that Bond has cost him time and money, and even admits that Bond's rejection of him has damaged his pride. Further, he confesses to having had a place in SPECTRE picked out for Bond. His clipped, hurt tones indicate that this place would have been very close by No's side. Like any guilt trip, it's a bid to force the other party to give in, to assuage the petitioner's injured feelings. In response, Bond hits him with a quip.



177. *No abandons his seduction attempt, curtly calling Bond "A stupid policeman whose luck has run out."*
Having run out of tactics in his bid for Bond's love, No ends the contest. We might be happy to see him fail in achieving his goal, but any joy there is outweighed by his threat to our hero, which drives the arrow down.



178. *The countdown is about to begin.*
The tension ratchets up again, as No draws closer to completing his scheme. If that happens, Bond loses his primary procedural objective, so that prospect triggers a down arrow.



179. *No orders the guards to beat Bond, which they proceed to do.*
A beatdown for the hero spells a down arrow for the audience. No tells the guard to "soften him up"—that is, to make Bond submissive and rob him of his masculinity. This ends an extended contest between No and Bond that began with beat 163. Both Bond and No have lost the entire sequence. Aside from some info on SPECTRE which is of no immediate consequence, Bond has gained

no advantage that he doesn't have simply for being in the complex already[8]. No has failed to win Bond's love or affirmation. Their losses were in a sense fore-ordained, as neither is prepared to grant what the other petitions.



180
Bond Wakes Up in a Tougher Cell

180. *Bond regains consciousness in a prison cell.*
At first sight, this cell seems like it will be much harder to get out of than the luxury guest suite, so we assume that Bond is in a worse position. The arrow dips.



181
Grate-breaking Attempt Gets 007 Zapped

181. *Bond's attempt to break a grate covering the cell's duct work results in electric shock.*
The arrow drops further as the obstacle to his escape proves to be greater than anticipated.

In traditional RPG practice, the GM would decide in advance that the grate is electrified and penalize the character with a hit point loss or other ill effect for failing to spot and overcome the obstacle. Here we see that the dramatic rhythm requires that Bond suffer at least nominal resistance to his escape attempt. Otherwise this sequence, which is already about to stretch its credibility, would break it altogether. The electrification doesn't cost Bond resources or add to his ongoing burdens. It is the reason why he can't get out on his first try. This beat might be better rendered in game terms by having Bond make his Escape or Athletics check against a high resistance. When he fails, the GM explains it by describing the electrical shock.



182
Shoe Beats Electric Grate

182. *Bond uses his shoe to break through the grate.*
The apparently tough cell turns out to be fairly easy to get out of—although this is just the first stage in a multi-step escape that continues for another six beats.

In our hypothetical game session, the player has been challenged to change the circumstances of the grate-breaking attempt, gaining permission to repeat a failed check. The GM, knowing that escapes must be as easy in RPGs as they are in adventure stories, generously allows the shoe justification. She drops the resistance significantly to avoid the repetitive stall of forward momentum that would occur if Bond

8: After the events of the film, Bond presumably reports the information he's gained about SPECTRE back to headquarters. As this victory exists only in theory, outside the confines of the narrative, it by definition can't give us the sense of vicarious triumph that would earn an up arrow here.

fails again. He makes his check against the lowered resistance and moves on to the next stage of the escape.



183
Eerie Tunnel Network

183. *Bond climbs through a weird duct network.*
Disturbing sound effects and the strange ribbed structure of the wet piping lend a foreboding quality to Bond's new environment, moving the arrow down again. In a film as laced with Freudian dominance as *Dr. No*, it is sadly impossible not to note the intestinal quality of the duct network design. Bond is now crawling up his enemy's metaphorical nether regions.



184
Bond Falls

184. *Bond falls.*
This action beat shows the difficulty of Bond's situation, for another down arrow.



185
Jacket Beats Hot Tunnel

185. *He counters too-hot tunnel surface by tearing off his jacket.*
After an ominous beat and an explicit setback, Bond earns an up arrow by overcoming an obstacle.



186
Tunnel Floods

186. *The tunnel floods.*
Then he's in danger again, for another down arrow.



187
Bond Holds On

187. *Bond holds on, withstanding the deluge.*
The arrow moves back up with this successful action.



188
Bond Escapes Into Holding Area

188. *007 crawls through even hotter piping and escapes through a grate into a holding area.*
Bond completes the entire escape sequence on a upward beat.



189
007 Overpowers Guard, Steals Hazmat Suit

189. *He overpowers a techie to steal his conveniently disguising radiation suit.*
Advantage—Bond. Another up arrow.



190
Bond Infiltrates Command Center

190. *He enters the control center, where he watches No prepare for his toppling attempt.*
Bond is now in position to wreak havoc on No's plans, moving the arrow up.



191
Bond Waits for the Moment to Strike

191. *007 waits for the ideal moment to strike.*
Although Bond doesn't lose an advantage here, having to wait for the right moment to act always ratchets up the tension. It implies that the chance to act may not come, increasing our sense of worry and putting us on the edge of our seats. A down arrow.

The suspense of waiting is easiest to pull off in movies or on stage, where moments can be held and extended in real time. In verbal or written forms, including fiction and RPGs, the effect becomes more difficult. Impatient readers can jump ahead through text that attempts to draw out temporal tension. Likewise, it's hard for a GM to dilate time through simple description, as players can jump in at any time to ask questions, engage in side talk, or jump forward in time to their characters' next actions.



192
No Spots Bond, Orders Him Away

192. *No sees that Bond is out of place and orders him out of striking distance.*
What we feared has come to pass—Bond missed his chance. A down arrow.



193
Bond Waits as Countdown Ticks

193. *Bond waits as the countdown to launch ticks away.*
007 is waiting again but in a worse position, increasing our worry. Ticking clocks are always hope/fear downticks.



194
Radio Beam Synchronized For Toppling

194. *No's scheme is about to come to fruition. The radio beam has been synchronized for toppling!*
We've never gotten a clear explanation of what No's rocket-toppling plan is meant to achieve or what disaster it foretells, but his person and his fiefdom of Crab Key are sufficiently sinister that we know it must be bad. The tension surrounding the launch has now reached its peak—and on a hope/fear map, tension points us down, toward fear.



195
Bond Exposes Control Rods

195. *Bond exposes the control rods of No's nuclear reactor.*
Our hero finally takes concrete action to stop No's scheme. The arrow ticks up.



196
Techie Tries Countermeasure

196. *A techie tries to compensate for Bond's sabotage.*
The prospect of Bond's action being reversed moves the arrow toward fear.



197
007 Punches Techie Over Railing

197. *Bond punches the techie over a railing.*
007 counters the countermeasure, scoring an up arrow.



198
No Spots Bond, Orders Shutdown

198. *No spots Bond, ordering a shutdown.*
This is a mixed procedural beat, marking a success on Bond's part while at the same time increasing our worry for him. Although Bond has succeeded in foiling No's plans, it can't be good news that his enemy is now aware of his presence and able to take action against him. Until No has been per-

sonally brought to heel, Bond's procedural goal remains incomplete.


199
Techies Flee Control Center

199. *Techies abandon the control center.*
A second mixed beat follows: it's good that the henchmen are fleeing, but if they're evacuating, the control center must be about to blow.


200
No Attacks With Super-hands

200. *No attacks Bond with his super-strong hands.*
No attacks, seizing the upper hand, so to speak, and chalking up a down arrow for Bond. Students of 007ology will note that Dr. No is both the mastermind and the wielder of the gimmick-weapon, a role that will in future be split between a primary and secondary antagonist.


201
Fight Goes to Control Rod Platform

201. *The fight takes them onto the control rod platform.*
Their struggle has just become more dangerous, creating an additional reason to fear for Bond. In the end it turns out to be worse for No than for 007, but that's not what this beat telegraphs.


202
007 Escapes No's Grip and Climbs Away

202. *Bond escapes No's grip and climbs away.*
As Bond moves toward safety, he pushes the arrow up.


203
No Doomed by Slippery Hands

203. *No dies, falling into the radioactive cooling pool when his metal hands can't find purchase on the slippery railing.*
Bond's equation of No's metal hands with impotence proves metaphorically prophetic as our primary antagonist's source of strength leads to his ironic demise. An up arrow is scored.

With his main goal taken care of, Bond shifts to secondary goals: to save himself (thus avoiding Hamlet's fate, that of the doomed hero) and to rescue Honey, fulfilling both his secondary procedural goal and his late-breaking dramatic goal.



204
007 Staggers Out of Control Room

204. *A battered Bond staggers out of the control room.*
Though he's paid a price for his fight with No, Bond has emerged victorious and is moving away from the center of the coming blast. Our worry for him decreases, tilting the arrow up.



205
Bond Can't Find Honey

205. *Bond can't find Honey.*
The shift in goals from defeating No to saving Honey now becomes explicit. Our worry is now for her—and thus that Bond might fail in his remaining goals. The arrow moves down.



206
Bond Grabs Techie, Who Doesn't Know

206. *007 punches a random techie to demand her whereabouts, but he doesn't know.*
Our worry increases: a down arrow.



207
Bond Grabs Attendant Who Does Know

207. *Bond finds an attendant who does know where Honey is.*
He moves closer to success, and the arrow shifts up.



208
Bond Finds Honey in Manacles

208. *He finds Honey manacled to a ramp leading to an exhaust pool.*
The situation allows us to register as a victory for Bond, with its attendant up arrow. The nasty implications of her predicament are buried in the film's subtext and are never referred to by the characters. The last time we saw Honey, No was giving his guards implicit permission to rape her. Now we find her manacled in a distinctly sexualized bondage pose. The manacles are permanently installed in an extremely unlikely location, a ramp in an industrial-looking sector of the complex. Were we encouraged to dwell on this, which we are not, we might find ourselves wondering what just kind of Sadean orgies No's henchfolk get up to on a boring Saturday night.



209
Bond Frees Honey

209. *Bond frees her.*
When the manacles turn out to be a negligible obstacle, we get another uptick.



210
Evacuation Panic

210. *They seek an exit from the complex amid general evacuation panic.*
Although we don't particularly care what happens to the various henchmen and attendants, their fear reminds us of the danger Bond and Honey are in. This ominous note pushes the needle down after three successive up beats. It is also the very last suspense beat of the film—it's all uphill from here. This is appropriate, because now that Bond has Honey, his goals have essentially been met. Additional suspense beats at this point would only serve to drag out the story.

At the gaming table, GMs often find themselves vamping and extending storylines in order to hit a predetermined end point. When the heroes beat the main villain with an hour left to go, good options grow scarce. You can reveal a new goal with bigger stakes, but might be better off to allow the story to reach a natural end point, perhaps followed by downtime, a quick standalone sequence, or a simple break into out-of-character chatting. An extended denouement, in which the characters get to enjoy their victory free from down beats, might also prove gratifying. You wouldn't want to do this in any other narrative, but RPG players are often content to explore their characters' situations while under minimal procedural or dramatic pressure.



211
Bond Overcomes Two Guys to Grab Boat

211. *Bond overcomes two escaping men to seize a motorboat.*
This is Bond's last active procedural victory.



212
Complex Blows Up

212. *The complex blows up.*
Audiences love a good explosion. This **gratification** beat adds a big exclamation mark to Bond's adventure. It's an after-effect of his action from beat 195, and occurs when he is already out of danger and all of his goals have been achieved.



213
Bond Clinches With Honey

213. *Bond and Honey clinch.*
This beat confirms that his courtship of Honey, as finalized by his rescue of her, is now complete. It gives us the ritual **gratification** of the big final kiss between our fetching leads.



214
Leiter's Rescue Party

214. *Felix shows up to give them a tow, supplying a jealous quip affirming Bond's status as master womanizer.*
Here Bond's personal satisfaction widens out into a moment of social **gratification**. Acting as foil, Felix sarcastically underlines Bond's status as the movie's alpha male. By identifying ourselves with Bond, we not only get to vicariously make out with Ursula Andress, but establish our dominant status over other men. British viewers get an extra jolt of gratification, in that the usual tropes of masculinity are reversed, with the Englishman as emblem of swaggering masculinity and the American reduced to grudging admiration.



215
Bond Release Tow Rope to Claim Honey

215. *While making out with Honey, Bond releases the rope towing the boat.*
In this closing **gratification** beat, 007 asserts his dominance by abandoning social obligation in favor of private pleasure. Even a friendly tow rope is too much bondage for Bond. The moment slyly tweaks the prevailing sexual conventions of Hollywood film, implying more strongly than would be usual for the period just what Bond and Honey are going to do in that boat.

Summing Up

Although *Dr. No* is very much an escapist entertainment, its overall direction still slopes downward—though not as steeply as *Hamlet*'s procedural/dramatic mix or *Casablanca*'s predominantly dramatic arc. Its lowest point occurs very near the climax of the film, at beat 207. This is the minor moment when Bond fails to get information on Honey's location from a random guard he's grabbed and punched. This shows strong procedural construction—the tension is not relieved until as close to the end as possible. It's this continuing jeopardy that prevents us from relaxing after the main villain has been dispatched.

The highest points on our map are the alternating beats 117 and 119, which occur soon after the entrance of Honey Ryder. They correspond to the

early flirtations between our newly evident romantic couple.

The length of uninterrupted down sequences exceeds that of *Hamlet*. A sequence of seven down beats occurs, starting at beat 120, when the boat full of henchmen shows up to hunt Bond, Honey, and Quarrel. This is attributable in large part to the shorter beats of an action movie as compared to an Elizabethan drama. *Dr. No* in fact presents us with more beats than either of our other narratives.

The longest streak of up beats we get is five. This occurs twice, from Bond's survival of the highway assassination attempt to Taro's call from Dent (beats 92–97) and during the preparations for and arrival at Crab Key (beats 112–116).

Like *Hamlet*, it includes a relatively small number of crossed beats—seven all told. Moreover, most of these are procedural beats, where we see a mix of hopeful and ominous implications arise from the unfolding action.

Casablanca

Of the many movie masterpieces arising from the heyday of the Hollywood studio system, none are more emblematic of its strengths than 1942's *Casablanca*. The film bears the unmistakable flair for movement and staging that characterizes the work of Michael Curtiz, the most chameleonic of studio-era master directors. Movie stars Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman deliver searing performances in roles perfectly suited for them. An array of Warner Brothers' most memorable contract players fill out the seething mix of its exotic setting. Claude Rains steals every scene he's in, and when he's not around, someone on the order of Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, Paul Dooley, Conrad Veidt, or S. Z. Sakall is. Paul Henreid, whose other performances tend toward the flat and stolid, skillfully balances the challenge of being both more admirable and less charismatic than Bogart.

Beat analysis of *Hamlet* and *Dr. No* revealed their stories in a sharply different light. *Hamlet* showed itself to be the story of a doomed hero. The Freudian weirdness of *Dr. No* leaps into plain view when you break down the villain's sexually fraught petitions to its hero. Our *Casablanca* analysis will yield no such surprises. The shock here, if any, is to be again confronted with the airtight symmetry of its construction. This is all the more remarkable if you buy the legend of its creation, in which screenwriting brothers Julius and Philip Epstein dropped a half-finished script in the hands of junior writer Howard Koch, who was left frantically churning out pages just in time for Curtiz to film them. One wants this to be true, if only as an roleplaying-friendly fable of the powers of inspiration and improvisation. For all we know, the true genius of *Casablanca* was its editor, Owen Marks.

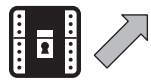
Our default beat here is the dramatic. All other beats are called out specifically. Read any beat not explicitly categorized as a dramatic one.



1
Credits: Exotic Intrigue

1. *Credits I: a stirring score superimposed over a map of Africa foretell exoticism and intrigue.*

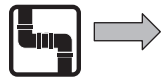
Together these elements build **anticipation** for the story to come. Unlike the *Dr. No* title sequence, this much shorter prelude is less about luxuriating in a gratifying fantasy than in ushering the viewer into the story. It telegraphs the genre and setting, and the general excitement of what we're about to watch, and then moves briskly on. Like any anticipation beat it resolves on an up arrow. We don't have enough context yet to mark it as anything other than a free-floating arrow.



2
Credits: Marseillaise

2. *Credits II: the strains of the Marseillaise strike a note of wartime defiance.*

This even shorter soundtrack sting acts as another **anticipation** beat, this time injecting a note of propgagandistic fervor into the proceedings. Along with it comes another free-floating up arrow.



3
Refugee Route Explained

3. *A globe, maps and newsreel-style footage illustrate the flight of refugees from France to Casablanca in the wake of the German invasion.*

This beat supplies **pipe** which we will need to understand the importance of the film's propelling plot device, a pair of exit visas. Although we'll eventually develop a set of hopes and fears regarding those visas, for the moment we have no one to identify with. The beat resolves on a free-floating lateral arrow.



4
Alert Sounded for Document Thieves

4. *A French police officer sends orders to round up suspects in the hunt for murderers who stole important official documents and are believed headed for Casablanca.*

This beat poses a **question**, regarding the identity of the killers, and a diffuse sense of jeopardy. It establishes a problem, one that we might conclude will be our central problem. We'll soon find out that we're not actually watching a movie about the hunt for the killers, but for now this beat supplies a modicum of suspense regarding this external problem, earning it a procedural down arrow.

In one of the film's many symmetrical constructions, its call to round up the usual suspects is invoked at the end of the film, in beat 171.



5
Suspects Rounded Up

5. *The police round up suspicious characters on the streets of Casablanca.*

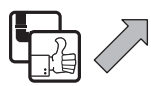
This pipe beat fills us in on the environment our characters will be operating in. It concerns an external goal—the capture of the document thieves—and as such registers as a **procedural** moment, with no apparent dramatic stakes. We're still not sure who we're identifying with or rooting for or why exactly we care, so this resolves laterally.



6
Shot Refugee is With the Resistance

6. *A shifty-looking refugee without current papers flees police and is shot dead. Pamphlets found on his body show that he's with the French resistance.*

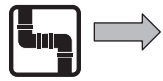
This **pipe** beat further establishes the political situation our as-yet-unseen characters will navigate. The exposition leaves us on an emotional down note while scoring a propagandistic point. The refugee is shot in front of a mural depicting the collaborationist French leader Pétain. After his pamphlets are found, the camera cuts to the French national slogan emblazoned over an archway: Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité. The contrast between the meaning of the words and the killing of the refugee serves as a **commentary** meant to shock wartime audiences into a feeling of solidarity with the French resistance. An extra measure of irony appears moments later, when the camera pans down to show that the words appear on the Palais de Justice. Through this combination of pipe and commentary, the beat establishes one of our secondary hopes for the coming action, that those responsible for this act will be punished. That hope is satisfied, at least on a metaphorical level, with the killing of Strasser in beat 168.



7
Man Reiterates Exposition, Steals Wallet

7. *A Frenchman at a café explains the situation to a fusty pair of English tourists, lifting the man's wallet in the process.*

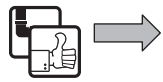
This beat reinforces the pipe for those slow to follow the complicated foreign situation, while injecting a moment of **gratification** in the form of comedy relief. The contrast between the man's words (in which he warns that Casablanca has filled with the scum of Europe) and his actions (in which he proves himself to be a member of that selfsame scum) gives us an up beat to leaven the grim preceding moments. The victims are portrayed as rich and silly, allowing us to enjoy a chuckle at their expense.



8
Plane Overflies Rick's Café

8. *Excited crowds watch a plane descend; it flies over the sign for Rick's Café Americain.*

Pipe continues to be laid: an expectant crowd looks at the plane as a symbol of their hopes for escape. The beat establishes the importance of secondary characters Annina and Jan, given a close-up in a previous crowd shot. She voices the hope that they'll get on that plane next, giving the beat a yearning quality. It establishes hopes for these characters without clearly raising or lowering them.



9
Delegation Greets Strasser

9. *An airport delegation awaits the arrival of grinning Gestapo officer Major Strasser (Conrad Veidt) who is introduced to charming local police prefect Captain Renault (Claude Rains).*

In a reversal, our symbol of hope turns out to contain a figure of menace. However, the friendly bonhomie of this **pipe**-laying scene (complete with a **gratifyingly** amusing moment in which an Italian representative reacts with ruffled feathers to a casual brush-off) is more interested in conveying information than building our unease, and so leads out with a lateral free-floating arrow. It ends with dialogue establishing the importance of its main setting, Rick's Café.



10
Meet Sam, See Rick's Café

10. *To a musical performance by Dooley Wilson as Sam, a series of wide shots plunges us into the exotic atmosphere of Rick's Café.*

Music, exoticism and glamor combine to provide **gratification** as we take a tour of our central location.



11
Café Patrons Desperate to Flee Casablanca

11. *Vignettes featuring café patrons underline the desperate need to get out of Casablanca.*

The film continues to reinforce its **pipe** regarding the importance of exit papers, creating the fear that our characters, who we haven't even met yet, will be trapped here. The issue of exit papers is an external one, and so warrants a procedural down arrow.



12
Carl Rebuffs Entitled Parton on Rick's Behalf

12. *Well-heeled patrons ask to have a drink with Rick, and are informed by the maitre d' that he never does such a thing.*

Like Hamlet and Bond, Rick is established as an impressive figure before we meet him. In this instance, he establishes dramatic dominance while absent, through his proxy, the head waiter Carl. The importuning guests are the petitioners, seeking Rick's approval. Their tactic is to cite their social and economic importance. Carl shuts them down, indicating that status means nothing to Rick—especially when privilege isn't what it used to be. (The requesting guest may be with the second largest bank of Amsterdam, but the president of the largest bank is in the kitchen washing dishes.) We don't know Rick yet but like his place, and we're cued to disapprove of the sense of entitlement projected by the guests. So we score this as a dramatic up arrow, rooting for our hero before we lay eyes on him.

This is the first dramatic beat of a predominantly dramatic piece, setting up Rick as an admirable figure who gains emotional power by withholding his approval—the essence of modern cool.

For an example of a procedural victory in absentia, see *Hamlet*, beat 4.6.C. POV limitations make both types of victory in absentia uncommon in RPGs.



13
Meet Rick

13. *We meet Rick.*

Like Bond in beat 13 of *Dr. No*, Rick's emotional dominance is established with a slow reveal that introduces him in stages: first his hand, then his hand signing a check, a lingering pause, and only then a pan up and out to show his whole face. Also like Bond, we meet him while playing a game, but here he's playing a chess game solo. This shows us that, unlike Bond, his struggle is primarily internal. Bond battles external threats. Rick will be at war with his own competing impulses, from which the drama of the piece will arise.

This beat creates **anticipation**—we know we're impressed by this guy and want to see what happens if we follow him—and sets up a **question**: why is he so pained? Crossed dramatic arrows reflect the mixture of identification and information-seeking invited by the introduction of our protagonist.



14
Rick Rebuffs Demanding Gambler

14. *Rick refuses a haughty would-be gambler access to his back room casino.*
This is a reiteration of beat 12, this time with Rick actually present. Again he establishes his dominance by refusing to acknowledge an entitled fop's self-proclaimed status, scoring a dramatic victory.

Note how the screenwriters repeat themselves without being repetitive: the variation of Rick's presence makes this beat feel different, even when it's making the same point in the same way.

This beat contains a small pipe element, as Peter Lorre's Ugarte squeezes through the doorway in mid-interaction. GMs might swipe this technique, disguising expository material by dropping it as a descriptive aside in the midst of an interaction scene.



15
Ugarte Tries to Buddy Up to Rick

15. *Ugarte tries to buddy up to Rick and is rebuffed.*
Ugarte is the petitioner, his tactic presumed intimacy. Rick, the granter, shuts him out with curt evasion. He retains power in the scene, achieving dramatic victory, for an up arrow.



16
Rick Asked to Hold Letters of Transit

16. *Ugarte asks Rick to hold the letters of transit.*
After failing to win Rick's approval, Ugarte shifts intentions from the emotional to the practical. A **procedural** interaction ensues, in which petitioner Ugarte deploys an ironic sincerity: "Perhaps because you despise me you are the only one I trust." His manner is rather like that of Renault, who we'll meet later, but with an anxious neediness that sabotages the effect. Granter Rick employs a wary reluctance but ultimately agrees. It's been established that the letters of transit are dangerous to hold onto[9], and we've started to like this sardonically dominant Rick fellow. His acceptance promises to bring him into jeopardy, resolving the beat on a down note.

9: Other commentators, including Roger Ebert, have gone into detail on the wobbly logic behind the letters of transit. Papers signed by resistance leader Charles de Gaulle would not carry inviolable authority in quasi-occupied Morocco. But the film believes that they would, and so we do too.



17
Ugarte Hopes Rick is Impressed Now

17. *Ugarte makes a more overt bid for Rick's approval: "I hope you're more impressed by me now."*
Even with this tertiary character, the main import of the transit papers is their status as unit of emotional exchange. Here, having achieved his aims in a procedural negotiation, Ugarte switches back to a dramatic exchange. While *Casablanca* based itself on an unproduced play called *Everybody Comes To Rick's*, the title that best describes its subtext is *Everybody Wants Rick To Love Them*. The problem, as we'll eventually see, is that Rick does not love himself.

Ugarte goes all out with a naked plea for Rick's admiration. Rick, as granter, gets tough with him, invoking the fate of the murdered couriers. The beat resolves in a densely layered fashion. Bogart plays as if Rick *is* a little more impressed by Ugarte, now that he has shown himself to be capable of murder. At the same time, his delivery includes a cynical undertone that makes it clear Rick still holds the power of judgment over Ugarte. He is simultaneously granting and withholding. At any rate, as figure of judgment, he retains the emotional power and scores an up arrow.



18
"Knock On Wood" Interlude

18. *Paul Dooley as Sam performs "Knock On Wood."*
This musical interlude registers as **gratification**, with its typical free-floating up arrow.



19
Rick Nervously Checks the Guest List

19. *Rick nervously surveys his guest list.*
We're never really sure why Rick is concerned, but given this beat's proximity to his receipt of the transit letters, we may assume it's anxiety about the danger they've put him in. If so, this is a **procedural** down beat.



20
Rick Exchanges Glances With Ferrari

20. *Enter Signor Ferrari (Sydney Greenstreet) who exchanges significant glances with Rick.*
A mysterious entrance poses a **question**, with its attendant down arrow. We don't know whether Ferrari's significance is procedural or dramatic, so the arrow is a free-floating one.



21
Ferrari Wants Bar, Sam, and Partnership

21. *Ferrari wants to buy Rick's place, hire away Sam, and/or recruit Rick's partnership in black market activities.*

Ferrari is the petitioner, employing a cheery cynicism: "isolation is no longer a practical policy." He references the film's core theme, the choice between self-interest and altruism, but in an inverted manner. Ferrari's using the rhetoric of engagement to argue for greed. His objective is asymmetrical: he offers cash, an external, practical good, hoping Rick will give him his freedom and loyalty, which are internal values. As the dialogue suggests, he buys and sells people, the main commodity of Casablanca. Where Ugarte bids for Rick's admiration with a show of his ability, Ferrari wants to purchase it. Rick, the granter, responds with blunt refusal. Ferrari is not yet satisfied, so the exchange continues to a new beat featuring a new participant.



22
Rick Calls Ferrari's Bluff by Asking Sam

22. *Rick calls Ferrari's bluff by asking Sam if he wants to work at the Blue Parrot.*

Ferrari stands by as Rick makes himself petitioner and Sam the granter. This is the first time Rick has taken this role. His tactic is to show the trust he places in Sam, as granter. Indeed, Sam gives him what he wants: an affirmation that loyalty is more important to him than money. The beat also serves as pipe, establishing his relationship with Sam.



23
Yvonne Rebuffs Bartender

23. *Sascha the bartender plies Yvonne with Rick's special stock; she rebuffs him.*

Sascha is the petitioner, seeking sex from Yvonne. His tactic is to display his status, which is a reflection of Rick's. Yvonne, the granter, wants nothing from him. She easily bats him away, looking at Rick as she does it. As we'll see in the next beat, Yvonne wants the real Rick, not a substitute. Once we understand the situation, we retroactively register this as a proxy victory for Rick. Even though he's only present by invocation, he's the one who holds the power in this scene.



24
Yvonne Gets Clingy

24. *Yvonne gets possessive, asking Rick where he's been and whether she'll see him.*

Yvonne is the petitioner, projecting hurt. Rick, the granter, adopts a coldly withholding stance: "I never make plans that far in advance."

This is a victory for Rick, but an ambiguous one. We might not admire the desperately clingy Yvonne, but aren't so happy to see her bested as we were the variously sleazy Ugarte and Ferrari.

Not only does Rick mostly act as granter during this early sequence, but he tends to use variations of the same tactic, remaining aloof and withholding. Ordinarily you'd want more variation from our protagonist but here the unity of his position and tactics is central to the story. Our initial sequence with Rick establishes the status quo for him, and makes us admire him for the power he's found in it. Gradually the film strips that away from us, eventually revealing his stance as wounded and self-destructive. By the end, we root for him to abandon it. This becomes his dramatic goal for the entire piece.

Rick concludes the beat by having Sascha take Yvonne home, but not before deep-sixing the bartender's designs on her. Thus he establishes dominance over Sascha, too. (This brief moment is too brief and tossed-off to warrant its own position on the narrative map. It really functions as a capper to his proxy defeat of Sascha in beat 23.)



25
"I Came to Casablanca For the Waters"

25. *In an exchange of banter, Renault asks Rick what brought him to Casablanca.*

"I came to Casablanca for the waters."

"Waters? What waters?"

"I was misinformed."

Petitioner Renault offers up a breezy wit in his quest for information from, and thus intimacy with, Rick. His ironic distance seems a more promising tactic than the neediness of Yvonne or Ugarte. Rick, the granter, returns the outwardly friendly banter, while withholding the answers Renault seeks. He scores another dramatic victory, this time against a wilier, worthier opponent. The arrow goes up.



26
Rick Reassures Casino Manager

26. *Rick reassures his casino manager, who apologizes for a loss at the gaming tables.*

The manager petitions, with apologetic submission. Rick magnanimously gives him what he seeks, which is reassurance.

This beat shows that a granting character can win a dramatic exchange even if he accedes to the petition, provided he retains emotional dominance. It is not what is asked for that defines victory, but who is more powerful at the end of the transaction.

A game system emulating the structure of dramatic exchanges would have

to account for the possibility of an uncontested exchange like this, in which the granter offers no resistance, grants the petition, but still retains emotional power.



27
Renault Warns Rick of Coming Arrest

27. *Renault warns him he's about to make an arrest, and not to interfere.*

Thematically, this beat crystallizes Rick's self-interested, neutralist stance: "I stick my neck out for nobody." In case anyone fails to see the broader political metaphor, Renault wittily describes this as "a wise foreign policy."

The exchange is procedural: in beat 25, petitioner Louis wanted to deepen his friendship with Rick. Here he wants to nail down a practical matter. His tactic is a genteel proffering of respect. Rick, the granter, accedes, responding with reassurance.

The beat serves as a **question;** we wonder who's about to be arrested. The development is lateral. We're not worried for Rick. It isn't a dramatic defeat, as Renault's negotiating tactic is carefully calibrated not to encroach upon Rick's emotional power or control over his domain.



28
Rnault Asks Rick to Accept Strasser

28. *Renault doubles down by asking Rick to accept the presence of Major Strasser.*

A new objective ushers in a fresh beat. Louis' goal here is still practical—he needs to kowtow to Strasser to preserve his position, so it's a **procedural** interaction. Renault's tactic has him showing vulnerability—again offering Rick the chance to accede without losing emotional ground. Rick, as granter, deflects him with a wisecrack. By sidestepping the issue with neither agreement nor refusal, Rick ends the beat on an inconclusive note, shown by a lateral arrow.



29
Renault Warns Rick Against Helping Laszlo

29. *Renault warns against helping incoming resistance leader Victor Laszlo.*

Again Louis brings in a new objective, this one also practical. After having carefully preserved Rick's emotional power through his previous tactics, he now introduces a degree of silky threat: "Letters of passage are sold here, but not by you. That's why we allow you to remain open."

By turning it into a bet as to whether Laszlo will escape, the granter, Rick defuses the fraught situation while retaining emotional power. This successful defense yields him a **procedural** victory.

The beat also provides plenty of **pipe** concerning Victor Laszlo.



30
Verbel Duel: Sentiment vs. Cynicism

30. *Renault explains that Laszlo is traveling with a woman he won't leave behind, and thus will need two exit visas. This segues into a verbal duel regarding Rick's hidden sentimentalism and past political commitment.*

The exchange segues midway through from a purely practical matter into a dramatic exchange, in which Louis attempts to establish his right of friendship over Rick by showing that he knows what really makes him tick. Louis' approach seems to say, *I respect and fear you enough to do my homework, so acknowledge me.* Rick defends by attacking his pride, invoking the Gestapo's dominant position over him. Rick achieves a dramatic victory, and the procedural matter goes unaddressed.

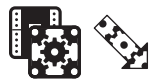
This is the film's hope/fear high point. A series of dramatic victories have left us comfortably assured in the dominance and control of our identification figure. We have yet to discover that the source of his strength is really the weakness that, in the end, we'll hope for him to overcome. From here on in, we'll enter a series of long down swings, punctuated by stretches of relatively even emotional terrain.



31
Renault Fusses Over Strasser

31. *Renault nervously sees to Strasser's comfort at Rick's.*

This suspense beat establishes Strasser's power and makes us fear for what he might do with it. It resolves on a **procedural** down arrow.



32
Ugarte Arrested; Runs For It

32. *Ugarte is arrested, makes a break for it, and fires on the cops.*

In this suspense beat, we fear not for our hero but for a tertiary character. Still, fear is fear, striking a **procedural** down note. The beat also serves as the **reveal** for the question posed in beat 27.



33
Ugarte Begs for Rick's Help

33. *Ugarte begs Rick to help him.*

Petitioner Ugarte begs; granter Rick responds with silence. Begging is a weak tactic, relying on the granter's sense of pity. Silence is a powerful tactic, because there's no way to counter it. Rick scores what seems to be an emotional victory.



34
R. Remorsefully Watches Ugarte Dragged Off

34. *A stricken Rick watches as Ugarte is dragged away.*
We see, from Rick's expression as Ugarte is taken away, the cost of winning the previous exchange. He did feel pity for Ugarte, but suppressed his impulse to act on it. The stakes here would seem to be procedural, but here we focus less on the fate of Ugarte than on this cost of the exchange to Rick. After our long upswing, empowered by his walled-off inaccessibility, we are now called on to question the very quality that made us like and admire him. The beat resolves on an emotional down note.



35
Rick Rebuffs Patron's Approach

35. *A patron reproaches Rick for not helping.*
Here the patron is the petitioner, using reproach as a tactic. Rick, the granter, defends himself by invoking his credo: "I stick my neck out for nobody." He recovers emotional power, winning a dramatic victory. Rick can reproach himself, but nobody else can.



36
Rick Drinks With Renault and Strasser

36. *At Renault's request, Rick joins the Nazis at their table.*
Rick accepts a loss of dominance. We've already been told that Rick never drinks with the patrons, but here he's forced to break his own rule. He's making a practical choice, so this is a **procedural** defeat. This completes the unresolved beat 28, in which Renault asked Rick to make nice with Strasser.



37
Rick Parries Strasser's Questions

37. *Rick parries Strasser's inquiries about his loyalties.*
This recapitulates the Renault and Rick debate from beat 30, but with potentially darker consequences, given that the petitioner is our primary antagonist. The beat lays further **pipe** on both Rick and Laszlo.

Strasser's tactic is to lay out threats beneath a veneer of politesse. He has also done homework on Rick. Strasser establishes himself as a shadow of Renault, in that he repeats many of Renault's tactics, but without Renault's charm. This makes him, twistingly enough, a foil to a character who serves as a foil to our hero.

Rick, the granter, defends by deflecting and stonewalling Strasser. The scene is procedural; neither man shows any great emotional investment in the other.

DRAMATIC FOILS

Foil characters in drama can admire the hero and establish his or her dominance, as they do in the procedural. We find this in *Casablanca* with the admiring, supportive sidekicks Sam and Carl. Even Sam and Carl are opposing figures, as Sam counsels for evasion of trouble while Carl sticks his neck out for others as a member of the underground.

In drama, foils go beyond establishment of dominance to act as thematic counterparts to the hero. They highlight the choices made by the protagonist by making, or at least espousing, contrary actions or philosophies.

A foil embodying a better path than the hero is presently taking might be described as *angelic*. That role is taken in *Casablanca* by Victor Laszlo, who has what Rick wants and acts heroically, the way Rick used to.

Demonic foils tempt the hero or espouse the choices we don't want him to make. Renault acts as an intriguingly contradictory foil. He speaks up enthusiastically for cynicism, but in the end seems to have been testing Rick, hoping he was ready to make a leap he was preparing himself. Ferrari is a more straightforward demonic foil, even if he confuses the issue by cloaking his pursuit of self-interest in the rhetoric of internationalism.

Angelic and demonic foils may appear in procedurals, often as a mentor and antagonist respectively. Obi Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader fill these roles in the original *Star Wars*.

GMs and players can collaborate to highlight PC dramatic arcs by creating foils that throw them into contrast. Player characters might serve as one another's dramatic foils, but this requires a dual focus that may be hard to pull off. Typically a player has a tough enough challenge maintaining his own arc without worrying about how to consistently serve another character's arc.



38
Victor and Ilsa Enter; Sam Apprhensive

38. *Enter Victor and Ilsa; Sam and Ilsa are apprehensive.*
We don't know the cause of the shared distress but can tell that something's wrong. This dramatic down beat begins the film's second act, where we'll explore the downside of the sardonic detachment that buoyed Rick, and us, for most of the first.



39
Victor Here For Ugarte

39. *Victor looks for Ugarte; Ilsa is nervous.*
The dramatic down beat is followed by a suspense down beat. Although we don't know who these people are, out-of-narrative cues, including the fact that one of the characters concerned is played by leading lady Ingrid Bergman, tell us that we should share their apparent fear. We'll soon understand that this beat concerns their external goal and physical jeopardy, and so belongs to the **procedural** sub-plot.



40
Resistance Agent Approaches Victor

40. *A bar patron reveals himself to Victor as a resistance agent.*
The suspense continues; we know that Strasser sits a few tables away. A **procedural** down beat ensues.



41
Victor Covers as Renault Approaches

41. *Laszlo seems to smoothly cover as Renault approaches.*
Laszlo's aplomb under pressure allows us a **procedural** up beat, reducing our fear for him. For much of the rest of the film, its procedural beats will revolve around Laszlo. We'll fear for his physical safety, and for Rick's emotional state.



42
Ilsa Asks Renault About Sam and Rick

42. *Ilsa inquires about Sam and Rick; Renault confesses that if he were a woman, he'd be in love with Rick.*
This beat introduces a **question**; we want to know why she cares. Like any question, it points the arrow down. (The reveal that resolves the question is so slowly doled out that it can't be pinned down to a single beat.)

We've already seen Renault, like everyone this side of Major Strasser, seek Rick's approval, so his effusion isn't much of a reveal.



43
Strasser Comes By to Intimidate

43. *Strasser visits their table for an intimidation session.*
Victor stands up to him, leading Strasser to postpone their interrogation until a police station meeting the next day. This feels like a dramatic impasse, but immediately afterwards Renault ironically praises Strasser for his brilliant tactical retreat. He's clearly tweaking the Major for losing the interaction. As it would be the height of folly to argue with Captain Louis Renault in matters of subtle gamesmanship, we'll score this as a dramatic victory for Laszlo, the secondary character to whom we've momentarily shifted our sense of identification. Although you'd expect exchanges between Laszlo and Strasser to be primarily procedural, since neither seems to want anything emotional from the other, this beat plays as a preliminary game of dominance-seeking chicken. Each seeks a show of weakness from the other, with nothing of practical consequence yet on the table.



44
Victor and Ilsa Exchange a Worried Glance

44. *Victor is left worried by the exchange, but reassures Ilsa when she echoes his anxiety.*
Then the beat reverses itself, increasing the tension right after leavening it. We're back in pure suspense territory again, for the first of several **procedural** downbeats.



45
Flamenco and Nervous Glances

45. *Cops and conspirators exchange nervous glances as a flamenco singer performs.*
More tension equals a downward **procedural** beat.



46
Laszlo Off to Meet Contact

46. *Laszlo departs to meet with the resistance contact; Ilsa urges him to be careful.*
And another tense **procedural** beat pushes the arrow further down. With Bogie suddenly off screen, the arrow has started turning down. When he's been present, we've seen a series of dramatic victories, in which he secures dominance from those around him, usually with ease. Now that Laszlo has momentarily become the focus of the narrative, we're in a suspenseful espionage flick in which he mostly suffers tension-building downbeats.



47
Ilsa's Glance Seeks Sam's Reassurance

47. *Wordlessly, Ilsa seeks reassurance from Sam, who responds with evident distress.*
In this quicksilver dramatic beat, Ilsa is the petitioner and Sam the granter. He declines to give her the signs of comfort she wants, for a dramatic down arrow.



48
Berger Briefs Laszlo

48. *Victor learns that Ugarte has been arrested, and that there's a meeting of the resistance coming up.*
This **pipe** fills Laszlo in on what we already know, and establishes the upcoming meeting. Although conducted under tense circumstances it leaves his situation unchanged, for a lateral **procedural** arrow.

We see more inconclusive procedural beats here than in either *Hamlet* or *Dr. No*. The suspense angle of the story is a sideshow, and as such doesn't have to constantly modulate our emotional responses.



49
Renault Settles In for Tête-à-tête

49. *Renault, who seems all too familiar with Berger, breaks up his talk with Laszlo. He orders champagne and settles in for a tête-à-tête..*
In this twosome, Renault seems to be the cat to Laszlo's mouse, leaving us worried for him. We don't know anything emotional Louis might want from the resistance leader, so our downbeat is **procedural**.



50
Ilsa Asks Sam for Old Songs

50. *Ilsa approaches Sam, asking him to play the old songs.*
Ilsa is still seeking reassurance and something that might be forgiveness from Sam. She's the petitioner; she seeks it by presenting a wounded dignity. As granter, Sam uses polite detachment in an attempt to deny her. He gives in.

Without enough information to go on, our sympathies are unclear. Ilsa gains the emotional power, but we're not sure if this is a good or bad thing. Sam's response to her indicates that she's bad news for our hero, so we score this with a downward dramatic arrow.



51
Play "As Time Goes By"

51. *She quizzes him on Rick's current status; Sam lies poorly and gives her unpromising news.*
Both participants are petitioning here. Ilsa wants information on Rick. Sam wants to discourage her. His tactic is to show concern for Rick: "You're bad luck to him." She re-

sponds with a dazzling smile, followed by an insistent, tortured sadness. He plays as "Time Goes By," her contained distress engaging our sympathies. This beat is ambiguous not because we see her as a threat to Rick, but because we're now on her side, and don't know whether the victory she achieves here really serves her best interests.



52
Rick Sees Ilsa

52. *Rick appears and sees Ilsa; they exchange tortured glances.* With both our preexisting and our new identification figures in obvious distress, this can only be a dramatic down beat. Neither has time to engage in a full dramatic exchange, however, as...



53
Rick and Laszlo Admire One Another

53. *Renault interrupts, introducing Victor to Rick.* The two men exchange admiring comments, each granting the other emotional power. A dramatic up arrow ensues.

Our worries for Laszlo in beat 48 seem to have been unfounded. We see no evidence that Renault somehow tripped him up.



54
"The Germans Wore Gray. You Wore Blue."

54. *Renault prompts Ilsa to recount her acquaintanceship with Rick, leading to shared reminiscences of their last day in Paris, on the day of the occupation.* Both are petitioning here, though their exchange, in the presence of Renault and Laszlo, is pushed down into the subtext. Rick wants her to feel the hurt he still feels over their parting, using cutting wit as his tactic: "I remember every detail. The Germans wore gray. You wore blue." Ilsa seeks forgiveness from him, while retaining her composure. The exchange ends inconclusively, with neither surrendering power nor granting what the other seeks. It is marked by a lateral arrow.

Although they seem like null results, lateral arrows in dramatic scenes increase our engagement by building our desire for the inevitable resolution, when a rematch occurs. Lateral procedural arrows occasionally work this way, particularly when a resolution is interrupted by an outside force. For example, the hero and villain might duke it out for a while but then have to end their fight prematurely. It's more natural for dramatic situations to be interrupted or end on an impasse than standard action-adventure scenes, where a failure to maintain forward momentum is more likely to induce frustration than heightened engagement.

At any rate, we have now reached the 54th beat of the film, and have passed the thirty minute mark, before the hero's emotional goal has become apparent. Rick Blaine's struggle is to overcome his grief at the loss of his relationship with Ilsa. It will not become fully clear that this is his goal until the moment that he achieves it, and explains his success to Ilsa in his famous monologue at the end of the film, beat 159.

DRAMATIC ARCS

Dramatic protagonists are encountered in a state of crisis or incompletion, often expressible as a conflict between contradictory inner impulses. Through the action of the narrative, they either:

- Resolve the crisis, and are transformed by its outcome
- Fail to resolve the crisis or contradiction, and are destroyed

A character's dramatic arc can be summed up in a sentence that mentions the crisis and, where applicable, the inner conflict:

- Rick Blaine, paralyzed by a sense of loss and betrayal, must resolve his conflict between self-interest and altruism.
- Fanny Brawne, as portrayed in Jane Campion's *Bright Star*, doesn't understand poetry, until she learns to live by loving the dying John Keats.
- Nora of *A Doll's House* must resolve her desire to obey society's expectations for her against her desire to free herself from them, as personified by her smothering, paternalistic husband.
- Daniel Plainview (*There Will Be Blood*) fails to reconcile his desire for family and community with the competition in him, that wants no one else to succeed.
- Mildred Pierce struggles to reconcile her desire to establish herself in the world with her love for her ungrateful daughter.
- Shelley Levene (*Glengarry Glen Ross*) struggles to maintain his dignity and usefulness, but has paradoxically invested it in a system that views both qualities as disposable.

Coming of age stories feature a classic dramatic arc. The character's crisis is simply his or her youth; she must navigate between

innocence and experience. In this time-honored formula, experience almost invariably wins.

When clumsily executed, the dramatic arc takes on a homiletic quality, where the hero learns an obvious life lesson and is improved by it.

A dramatic character's story concludes when his conflict is resolved, successfully or otherwise. For this reason, RPGs, typically driven by serial characters in campaigns of indefinite duration, rarely feature true dramatic characters.

Long-form television serials, which elongate and reiterate a protagonist's central conflict for many seasons before resolving it, may bear a closer resemblance to dramatic characters in an ongoing game campaign. Tony Soprano's conflict between his identities as a family man and a Family man is elliptically resolved, and not in his favor, in the finale of *The Sopranos*. Don Draper's conflict between authenticity and deception will presumably continue until the end of *Mad Men*, whenever that may be.



55
Ilsa's Coded Confession of Love

55. *A departing Ilsa tells Rick, in code, that she still loves him.*

When Renault breaks up the conversation, Ilsa switches to a new objective. She tells Rick, "There's still no one who plays 'As Time Goes By' like Sam," but Bergman plays the line as if she's telling Rick she still loves him. Rick rebuffs her: "He hasn't played it in a long time." Ilsa's face falls, showing the sting of the rejection.

By refusing her proffer of love, Rick wins the exchange and retains the emotional power in the scene. However, our identification is now split and our hopes confused. We find ourselves sympathizing with Ilsa as well, and feel hurt on her behalf. We're not necessarily sure at this point that we want the lovers to reconcile, but the combination of hurt and confusion tips the dramatic arrow downward.



56
Shaken Rick Slumps Into Chair

56. *With Ilsa out of sight, a shaken Rick slumps back into the nearest chair.*

The last positive element of the previous beat—Rick's retention of emotional power—is reversed, as we see that he was putting up a front. The arrow dips again.



57
Ilsa Deceives Laszlo About Past With Rick

57. *Laszlo asks Ilsa about Rick; she gives him a noncommittal answer.*

As a matter of **pipe**, we learn that Laszlo is unaware of the obvious prior relationship between Rick and Ilsa. Given the blazingly clear subtext of the previous scene, we assume that, for all of his heroism, he isn't particularly attuned to his wife's emotional state. He readily accepts her none-too-smooth denial. The success of her lie gives her the emotional power: she has the upper hand over him because she knows more about the situation than he does. Our sympathy rests more with her than with him, so this beat registers as an up arrow.

Later we'll learn that Laszlo is not quite as clued-out as he appears, and that he's granting her the victory by not letting on, but that doesn't change our response to the seeming action in this beat.



58
Renault Sees Something's Up

58. *Renault regards the departing couple with a calculating expression.*

Laszlo might not seem too perceptive, but we saw Renault pick up on the strange effect she had on Rick. Given his connection to the menacing Strasser, Louis' attention implies jeopardy for someone. This suspense beat rings in a procedural down note.



59
Sam Urges Rick to Go to Bed

59. *A wary Sam urges Rick, tortured and hitting the bottle, to go to bed.*

Sam is the petitioner; his tactic is to express hesitant concern. Rick, the granter, rebuffs him with an angry response. He forces Sam to abandon his present tactic but, by giving in to anger, sacrifices his emotional power. The arrow goes down.



60
Sam Urges Rick to Flee

60. *Sam begs Rick to flee.*
Sam ups the ante to a more desperate tactic: outright pleading. He urges Rick to avoid the trouble Ilsa represents. Rick again shuts him down, arguing that Ilsa is coming back. Rick has lost his emotional power to the absent Ilsa. The arrow noses down.



61
"Of All the Gin Joints… She Walks Into Mine"

61. *Rick pounds the table and laments Ilsa's appearance at his place.*
In a soliloquy of despair not unlike Hamlet's "to be or not to be" beat, Rick delivers the classic "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine" speech.

This down beat presents the hero's dramatic goal by showing the condition he's in without having achieved it. Unless he overcomes his sense of longing and betrayal, he'll be mired in this aching state of self-pity.



62
Rick Demands "As Time Goes By"

62. *Rick demands that Sam play "As Time Goes By."*
Rick decides to increase the degree of his self-laceration from the previous beat. In a rare reversal, he assumes the role of petitioner; he resorts to angry barking to get what he wants. Sam adopts a pose of hapless inability, but Rick steamrolls him just as Ilsa did in beat 50. Even in his suffering, Rick has regained a measure of dominance—if only over a concerned and compliant friend—but it's enough to register an up arrow.



63
Rick Lapses Into Wordless Torment

63. *As he listens, he lapses into silent torment.*
The sense of victory quickly fades as we see that it has only intensified his suffering.



64
Flashback Montage: In Love in Paris

64. *Cut to flashback as Rick remembers his time with Ilsa in Paris.*
Joyous music cues a falling-in-love montage. Even though this material is bittersweet, given the origin point of the flashback, it nonetheless moves the emotional arrow up, giving us momentary relief from Rick's present agony.

This sequence proves the eternal truism that you fall in love in montage

and fall out of it in a series of dramatic exchanges.



65
"We Said No Questions, Remember?"

65. *Over champagne, flashback Rick asks flashback Ilsa about her past; she deflects him.*
Rick is the petitioner; he wants to deepen his intimacy with Ilsa beyond what seems to be a carefree fling. Ilsa, the granter, easily deflects him with a charming smile and a reminder of the terms of their affair: "We said no questions." Ilsa maintains the emotional power by keeping the relationship as it is. Even though the beat is an outwardly happy one, it registers as a down arrow for Rick. It hasn't taken long for us to start layering our knowledge of present events over the flashback's sweetness.



66
Dance to "Perfidia"

66. *They dance in a ballroom, to the strains of "Perfidia."*
This **gratification** beat evokes elegance and romance. It engenders positive, hopeful feelings, so the arrow points up. Because it serves the dramatic purpose of the flashback—to show us what Rick has lost—it resolves on a dramatic arrow, rather than the free-floating one reserved for moments of gratification which are less directly wired into the narrative line.



67
The Other Man is Dead

67. *Rick obliquely asks why there isn't another man in her life. She says that there was, but that he's dead.*
This unusual beat is both **reveal** and **question** at once. It provides a partial answer to the question posed by Ilsa's appearance with Laszlo in tow, yet increases our desire to know the full story. Crossed dramatic arrows indicate its effect as it suspends us between satisfaction and curiosity.



68
Germans Invade France

68. *The Germans invade France.*
This intrusion of the external world into the central love affair acts as a classic **bringdown**—the first pure instance we've seen in any of our three story breakdowns. We're not sure how yet, but it somehow impacts on Rick and Ilsa's separation. Its obligatory down arrow is therefore dramatic rather than free-floating.



69
Rick is On the German Blacklist

69. *Ilsa reminds Rick that he's on the German blacklist, and will be in trouble if he's still present when they reach Paris.*
Although the beat is about a practical problem and threatens jeopardy for Rick, it occurs in flashback, and we assume that he got out safely. It therefore registers more as a **reveal** than as a suspense beat. We're assured that Rick comes out safely but suffers a devastating emotional blow. This reveal takes us closer to a feared yet certain outcome, marked by a dramatic down arrow.



70
La Belle Aurore

70. *An establishing shot whisks us to the Belle Aurore, which we know as the last place Rick and Ilsa saw each other in Paris.*
Thanks to pipe laid in beat 53, when the bar was specified as the site of their last meeting, we know that we're headed toward the emotional rocks. Although establishing shots are usually simple pipe beats too basic to note in a beat breakdown, director Curtiz lingers over this one long enough to make it a **bringdown** unto itself. Like its near neighbor, 66, this one swells with dramatic import.



71
Rick Fails to Pick Up on Ilsa's Distress

71. *Ilsa remains silently preoccupied as Rick and Sam keep up their spirits with champagne and pre-occupation bravado.*
This is not a dramatic exchange, but a beat in which both characters pursue their emotional objectives in parallel without challenging the other. Ilsa's aim is to avoid discussing what's worrying her. Rick and Sam, focused on their bubbly morale-building effort, remain oblivious to the distress we see in her expression and body language. It is still a dramatic beat, though, in that we want Rick to notice and are frustrated in this desire. Rick maintains his emotional power falsely, by failing to see the warning signs. Our concern for the coming emotional disaster intensifies, warranting a down arrow.



72
Gestapo Loudspeakers

72. *The Gestapo are in the streets of Paris, using loudspeaker trucks to prepare the city for tomorrow's troop influx.*
This is a reiteration and intensification of beat 68. Note the alternation of dramatic and bringdown beats; it provides rhythmic variation even though all the arrows in this sequence point in the same direction.



73
R. & I. Exchange Details of Their Pasts

73. *Amid the sound of approaching artillery, Rick and Ilsa exchange tentative details of their past.*

Just as we expect to see them torn apart, they come closer together. Rick initiates the exchange, to take their minds of the lousy timing of falling in love on the eve of an invasion. This time Ilsa grants his petition. Fortunately for Rick, his question—about where they were ten years ago—stretches back in time far enough to leave her marriage to Laszlo out of the picture. Both participants gain emotional power from the exchange, giving us a much-needed up note after five consecutive down arrows.



74
Plans to Flee Paris

74. *Rick makes plans to meet up the next day for their flight from Paris; Ilsa changes proposed meeting place from her hotel to the train station.*

Our foreknowledge that this is their last meeting, coupled with her evasiveness about her hotel, remind us that the moment of intimacy we just experienced will come to nothing. The arrow noses down. Though the text concerns Rick's practical plans to escape, it's the subtext of Ilsa's evasion that matters here, keeping this beat within the dramatic realm.



75
Rick Proposes

75. *Rick proposes marriage; Ilsa noncommittally refuses: "That's too far ahead to plan."*

He's the petitioner, making a straightforward play for commitment. She's the granter, using evasion to keep him at bay. She gets him to agree, allowing him to lose without sacrificing his emotional power. Still, we have an idea what her evasion portends, and we don't like it, so the arrow goes down.



76
Ilsa Revealingly Conceals Cause of Her Distress

76. *Rick asks her why she seems strangely upset; she declares her love for him, then obliquely alludes to the obligations preventing her from being with him.*

As if anticipating the desires of the audience, Rick finally spots her disquiet and attempts to bring it to light. There's a new objective—he wants to know what's up, and she wants to conceal it—allowing the tactics to remain the same. He's loving and straightforward. She's evasive without really lying to him, and tells him the truth in a way that prevents him from grasping it. Rick has lost emotional power, and we're headed to our feared and inevitable emotional outcome,

Rick's abandonment. The arrow moves further down.



77
"Kiss Me As If For the Last Time"

77. *They kiss.*
If we were in any doubt that Ilsa already knows she has to leave him, she asks him to "kiss me as if for the last time." Bringing our lovers closer together while reminding us that they will now be torn apart, this is the very essence of a crossed dramatic outcome. The final image of the beat symbolizes this wrenching ambiguity as a champagne glass, an image of pleasure, knocked over as they embrace.



78
Rick Receives Ilsa's Note at the Station

78. *Rick waits for her at the rain-drenched station; Sam brings the note ending their affair.*
This is the horrible moment we've known would come since this flashback sequence began, back at beat 64. Although it retains the internal contradictions of the previous beats—the note tells Rick that she loves him even though they can never see each other again—the final effect takes us a point we dreaded reaching. The arrow moves downward.

The beat serves as a key dramatic moment while intensifying our central unanswered **question.:** Ilsa's letter alludes to her circumstances without explaining them.



79
Back to the Woeful Present

79. *In the present, Rick drops sorrowfully out of reverie.*
Rhyming the action from the end of beat 77, Rick knocks over a whiskey glass. This down beat mirrors the last one, a shared emotional response providing the connection between two moments separated by time.



80
Ilsa Wants to Explain Herself

80. *Ilsa returns, hoping to explain herself.*
This exchange echoes the one from beat 54, but with a variation: now that Laszlo and Renault are no longer present, it can be conducted overtly and not through subtext. She petitions for understanding with apologetic words and body language. He, the granter, counters with bitter reproaches which, in their own angry way, paradoxically serve as declarations of love. By withholding what she seeks, Rick retains the emotional power. But now we're identifying with both characters and wanting them to be together. Rick gets what he wants but we now want him to seek something else. This contradic-

tion ends the beat on a crossed note.



81
She Tells It in Fairy Tale Form

81. *Ilsa describes her past with Laszlo as a sort of fairy tale.*
Having failed in the previous beat, Ilsa keeps the exchange alive by switching tactics. She depersonalizes her story by casting it in the second person. In doing so, she supplies the **reveal** we've been waiting for ever since beat 54. Ilsa describes her relationship to Laszlo as one of mentor and protégé. She explains that she mistook her worship for him as romantic love.

Rick's counter contemptuously parodies her storytelling conceit, but he abandons this tactic, hanging his head midway through. He has shut her out again, repeating the crossed resolution of the previous beat.



82
Rick Flings Out a Hurtful Insinuation

82. *Rick asks if there were other lovers in between Laszlo and him.*
Rick has now become petitioner; he seeks to hurt her, flinging out nasty insinuations. She doesn't defend herself, and leaves the table. Again he's maintained the power in the scene in pursuit of a goal we don't want him to win, for a third consecutive crossed outcome.



83
Rick's Head Drops in Defeat

83. *As soon as she goes, his head drops in defeat.*
In an exact echo of beat 56, we see that any emotional victory from the previous beat is really a self-inflicted wound. This resolves the ambiguity of beats 80–82 by recasting them as defeats for our hero, with the attendant down arrow.



84
Renault Deflects Strasser's Raid Request

84. *Strasser seeks a search of Rick's place; Renault uses Rick's cleverness as an argument to deflect action against him.*
After twenty-five uninterrupted dramatic beats, we now return to the **procedural** storyline and two of our secondary characters. Their polite dispute is primarily tactical in nature. Strasser wants the letters of transit and Renault, for the moment, wants Strasser to be happy. At the same time, he seems to want Strasser to share his admiration for Rick. As always with this slippery character, the sincerity of his argument against raiding Rick's is impossible to determine. He may believe what he says, or may be protecting the man he'd be in love with if he were a woman.

Rick is in less jeopardy than he was before, but then we'd temporarily forgot-

ten the danger posed by Strasser, and here it is again. This is a lightly sounded beat, and hence a tough call. Let's score it as a down beat, on the grounds that the reintroduction of the principal antagonist augurs ill for somebody.

This beat also supplies a piece of **pipe**: prefiguring Renault's later loyalty shift. He amusingly tweaks Strasser by revealing that he was with the Americans when they took Berlin in 1918.



85
Strasser Offers Laszlo a Visa to Turn Traitor

85. *Renault and Strasser run a good cop-Nazi cop routine on Laszlo. Strasser offers him a visa in exchange for the names and whereabouts of Europe's resistance leaders.*
In this **procedural** beat, Laszlo retains dominance by remaining steadfast in the face of Strasser's various threats and inducements. He's our hero for the purposes of this sub-plot, so his victory registers as an up arrow.



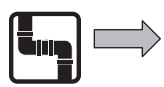
86
Renault Rattles Laszlo with Ugarte's Death

86. *Renault rattles Laszlo by revealing that Ugarte has been killed in custody.*
With his smooth cynicism, Renault scores a **procedural** victory denied to the more overtly sinister Strasser. He takes power at Laszlo's expense, ending the beat on a down note.



87
Renault Trades Visas for Sex

87. *We discover that Renault trades visas for sex.*
A set-up and punchline disguise this bit of **pipe**, which will come into play in beat 109. The exposition appears in the form of a joke and thus resolves on a free-floating up arrow.



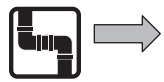
88
Visa Seeker Directed to Ferrari

88. *A bazaar merchant directs a visa-seeker to Signor Ferrari at the Blue Parrot.*
These unnamed walk-on characters kindly remind us who Sidney Greenstreet is in this movie. Depending on how sharp our recollections are, their memory-jogging **pipe** may come in handy, as we haven't seen him since beat 22. The brief scene activates neither our hopes or our fears, warranting a lateral free-floating arrow.



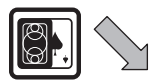
89
Rick Heads Into Blue Parrot

89. *Rick heads into the Blue Parrot.*
Rick gave Ferrari the brush-off the last time we saw him. His presence invites us to wonder what his purpose might be. We aren't sure whether his purpose is emotional or external, so the nagging down arrow that accompanies an unanswered question registers as free-floating.



90
Ferrari Doing Business With Émigré Couple

90. *Ferrari is seen consoling Annina and Jan, the so-far unnamed émigré couple last seen in beat* **7.** *"Perhaps you can come to terms with Captain Renault," he suggests.*
This tossed-off beat lays pipe which will pay off in beat 109. We barely process it, much less form a hope/fear reaction to it, so this too leads out on a lateral free-floating arrow.



91
Rick Wants Shipment Without Shrinkage

91. *Rick's business turns out to be less than mysterious—he's trying to get a shipment out of Ferrari without being shorted.*
This **reveal** may register as disappointing. If we were hoping that Rick was about to take the initiative and do something to achieve some greater goal, we've now been briskly disabused. Unlike most reveals, this resolves on a down arrow, if a mild one. It is as neutral and free-floating as the question it so flatly resolves.



92
Ferrari Offers to Buy Letters of Transit

92. *Ferrari, who believes Rick is in possession of the letters of transit, offers to buy them from him. Rick reveals that he's come to the Blue Parrot to give Strasser and Renault time to ransack his place.*
In a **procedural** interaction over a practical matter, Ferrari is the petitioner and Rick the granter. He deflects Ferrari's offer—and Ferrari's guess that Rick has the letters in his possession—and retains the power in the scene. Also, we learn that our earlier disappointment over the last beat's weak reveal turns out to be unwarranted. Rick is up to something clever after all. This satisfying **reveal** reverses that feeling, pointing the arrow up.



93
Rick Knows Laszlo's Looking for Ferrari

93. *Rick, leaving the Blue Parrot to head toward Ilsa, who he has seen in the bazaar, passes Laszlo, headed in. He startles Laszlo by correctly presuming that he's looking for Ferrari.*
In this quick scene, Rick gains emotional power over his rival for Ilsa's affections by demonstrating his deductive wit. The arrow points up.



94
Rick Apologizes; Ilsa Diminishes

94. *Rick and Ilsa reverse roles as he seeks forgiveness for his behavior the previous night.*
He's the petitioner, excusing himself in formal language and alluding to his drunkenness. She rejects his entreaties by diminishing the stakes of the interaction: "It doesn't matter," she says. Ilsa takes the emotional power as the scene withholds our hoped-for reconciliation. The dramatic arrow points down.

This sequence plays out in counterpoint to the haggling shtick of a comically unscrupulous bazaar vendor, which supplies some contrapuntal **gratification**. A free-floating arrow crosses the dramatic arrow.



95
Rick Wants the Explanation; She Declines

95. *Rick asks her to provide the explanation she wanted to give him last night. She declines.*
Rick switches to a new goal, getting information from her. He adopts the tactic of aiming his cutting wit at himself. She gently plunges the knife in, saying that she could have explained to the Rick she knew in Paris, but not the man he's become. Instead, she proposes to drop the whole matter, so they'll remember their time in Paris and not their meeting in Casablanca.

The scene's objective and tactic have changed, but the outcome remains the same: she holds the power, and takes us further from our hopes.



96
Rick Asks If She Ran Out to Avoid Life of Flight

96. *Rick guesses that she left him because she feared a life of flight and argues that he's settled and well-established now. Ilsa declines to correct him.*
Rick lovesickness has taken the edge off his cleverness. We know that she's opted for a life of flight and risk by being with Laszlo. Our cool and dominant identification figure is making an obvious blunder. By telling him that he's free to believe this, Ilsa pulls back even further from him. Though hurt and unwilling to defend herself, she's still a refusing granter. The downward emotional trajectory continues, with the party keeping them apart holding the emotional power.



97
Ilsa: Laszlo Is and Was My Husband

97. *He invites her to come see him, confident that she'll lie to Laszlo to do it. She reveals that he's her husband, and was even when they knew each other in Paris.*

Losing the emotional power struggle, Rick ups the ante by challenging her. He forces her to drop her bombshell, by finally and harshly **revealing** the true status of her relationship to Laszlo. She emerges victorious and our hopes recede even further, for another down arrow.

See how these four consecutive dramatic down beats are cushioned by their context in the story. Rick gets a couple of minor up beats before heading into this second devastating sequence with Ilsa. Comic relief is interwoven into beat 94, for additional emotional variation.



98
Ferrari Might Get Visa For Ilsa, But Not Laszlo

98. *Ferrari explains to Laszlo and Ilsa that he might be able to secure a visa for her, but not for him.*

This piece of **pipe** sets up the next beat. It presents sympathetic characters with bad practical news and registers as a procedural down beat.



99
Ilsa Turns Down Chance to Go Without Laszlo

99. *Laszlo suggests that Ilsa go without her; she declines, citing his prior refusals to go ahead when she was the one who was trapped.*

Laszlo is the petitioner, Ilsa the granter. He uses rational argument; she easily overcomes him with emotional logic. The moment is an ambiguous one on the hope/fear axis. We are touched by the warmth of their relationship, and to see them brought closer together at the end of the exchange. On the other hand, we see that their love is based on loyalty and shared adversity and not so much on romantic passion. The greater the bond between these two, the less chance we have of seeing our hope, the union of Rick and Ilsa, come to pass. A crossed dramatic arrow marks these contradictions.



100
Ferrari Tells Them Rick Has the Letters

100. *Ferrari tells them that Rick probably has the letters of transit.*

This **pipe** beat gives Ilsa a reason to talk to Rick again after conclusively breaking with him just a few beats ago. As such, it renews our hope of their getting together, and points the dramatic arrow up.



101
Pickpocket Comic Relief

101. *The pickpocket from beat 7 engages in some comic business inside Rick's, involving a customer and the maitre d', Carl.*
As straight-up comic relief, this beat is a **gratification** resolving on a free-floating up arrow.



102
Carl and Renault Note Rick's Drinking

102. *Carl and then Renault remark on Rick's drinking.*
This lightly delivered double reminder of our hero's declining emotional state does not develop into a dramatic exchange. It nonetheless increases our worry for him, and thus rates a down arrow.



103
Rick and Renault in a Duel of Wits

103. *Rick and Renault trade verbal volleys over the letters of transit.*
In a series of quick lobs back and forth:

Rick complains about the trashing Renault's men gave his bar.

Renault deflects with a quip at the expense of the Germans, then presses the question of transit papers.

Rick asks him where his loyalties lie.

Renault surrenders.

You could break this down into a couple of mini-beats, but ultimately it's a duel of wits to establish dominance, with Rick winning by playing a reliable trump card. He winds up with the emotional power, for a dramatic up beat.



104
French and German Officers Fight

104. *A fight breaks out between a German and a French officer when the latter has harsh words for Yvonne, who has appeared on the former's arm.*
We can tell that this is bad, but for whom and in what way is not yet apparent. This is a **bringdown**, followed by its characteristic down arrow.



105
Rick Breaks It Up

105. *Rick breaks up the fight, invoking his anti-politics policy.*
Rick shows dominance and gains emotional power while reiterating his personal credo. At the same time, we sense a heightening of tensions in his bar that he has not entirely defused, presaging further trouble ahead. The beat resolves on crossed arrows: **dramatic** up, **procedural** down.



106
Strasser Presses Renault's Loyalties

106. *Strasser uses the incident to pressure Renault for a definite show of loyalty.*

Strasser is the petitioner, Renault the granter. Renault deftly parries him as always. We're not sure whose side he's on—as he cheerfully admits in this scene, he goes where the wind blows him—but we're sure we don't like Strasser, so we respond to this as a dramatic victory.



107
Strasser May Have to Rub Out Laszlo

107. *Strasser muses that Laszlo may be too dangerous either in or out of Casablanca.*

This beat increases our worry for Laszlo, focus of our **procedural** sub-plot, and earns a down arrow. At the same time, it lays **pipe** for the idea that scattered resisters through French North Africa are crying out for a charismatic leader—this will pay off at the very end, with the suggestion that, between the tough-minded Rick and wily Louis, they'll get two of them.



108
Good Brandy for Departing Refugees

108. *Carl brings out the good brandy for an elderly German couple who have finally gained permission to emigrate to America.*

This moment of warmth and humor serves as **gratification** and **commentary**. In the latter role, it serves a social purpose outside the film, encouraging the American audience of the time to proudly accept their role as protectors of foreign refugees. This was not an uncontroversial point to make at the time, especially given the unspoken implication that these particular émigrés are Jews. Thematically the beat contrasts with Rick and Renault's recent declarations of neutrality. It encourages the audience to come down on the side of engagement. Although it might seem detached from the narrative, this thematic connection ties into the drama, as we're about to see in the next beat. Its arrow is not free-floating but dramatic.



109
Annina Seeks Reassurance From Rick

109. *The refugee Annina asks Rick if Renault is trustworthy—asking if he'll make good on his sex for visa trade. He answers, uncomfortably, in the affirmative. Then she asks him if her husband will forgive her for going through with it.*

This dramatic beat establishes Annina and Jan as foils for the main Rick-Ilsa pairing. Rick is wounded by her question, which she puts in the second person: "If someone loved you very much... and

she did a bad thing... could you ever forgive her?" Unlike Carl before him, it seems like he's sticking to his neutralist stance: "Everyone in Casablanca has problems." He wishes her luck and bolts from the table.

Annina is the petitioner, with distraught sincerity as her manner of approach. Rick denies her the assurance she seeks with detached withdrawal. However, since she's struck a nerve and reminded him of his own pain, it's a lose-lose dramatic exchange. The arrow points down.



110
Rick Greets Ilsa With Needling Remarks

110. *Rick greets Ilsa and Victor as they enter, needling her with references to Sam's playing "As Time Goes By."*
This beat shows that the relationship between them has returned to unhappy form, with Rick, the petitioner, trying to hurt her and her, the granter, curtly parrying his gibes. Neither emerges a clear winner, and we are moved toward our fear that they will never reconcile. The arrow dips further.



111
Rick Rigs Roulette for Annina and Jan

111. *Rick rigs the roulette game in favor of Annina's husband.*
Our hero can't forgive Ilsa, but he can arrange matters so that Jan doesn't have to forgive Annina. His change of heart, seen with adoration by Carl and dismay by Renault, has clearly been triggered by Ilsa's appearance. We are happy to see him perform this act of altruism and to move toward engagement. This is what he will do at the end of the story, satisfying our hopes for him in a way that trumps our competing desire to see him with Ilsa. The dramatic arrow points up.



112
Annina Grateful; Rick Unfulfilled

112. *Overcome by gratitude, Annina hugs and kisses Rick, who unhappily peels her away.*
Rick has only dealt with his problem symbolically, and so neither he nor we get lasting relief. Annina's sweet gesture reminds us only that we want to see Ilsa embracing him instead of her. The illusory nature of Rick's victory is revealed, reversing the previous up beat.



113
Renault Reacts to Rick's Generosity

113. *Annina and Jan make arrangements with Renault to buy the visa with Jan's gambling winnings.*
This beat is all about Renault's reaction to Rick's action. As Rick's foil in the move from neutrality to commitment, his amused, admiring reaction gives us hope. The resolution

of the Annina subplot has introduced a new element to our hope/fear axis. Where before we were hoping for him to unite with Ilsa, or at least recover from the pain of losing her, now we're hoping for him to recommit to the world around him. These two strands dovetail symbolically here and will dovetail literally at the film's climax.



114
Rick Praised by Carl and Sascha

114. *Sascha and Carl reward him with, respectively, overly effusive and quietly understanding gratitude.*

In case we hadn't noticed this new element of our hope/fear axis, we get an immediately subsequent hit of positive reinforcement from two of our chorus characters. Another dramatic up arrow.



115
Renault Expects Tomorrow's Blond to Lose

115. *Renault tweaks him over his sudden display of altruism, then lets him know that he'll brook no repeat when tomorrow night's target shows up.*

Though his intervention is gentle, Renault's speaking up for selfishness over commitment reminds us that Rick has a ways to go in fulfilling our burgeoning hope for him. It also serves as a reminder of the practical, if not the emotional, power Louis holds over Rick. The arrow moves down.



116
Seeking Letters, Laszlo Invokes Rick's Past

116. *Laszlo seeks the letters of transit from Rick, by invoking his past.*

This interaction is procedural from Laszlo's point of view as the petitioner. He attempts to achieve a practical goal by pushing the granter's emotional buttons. As it becomes a pitch for Rick to resume his known habit of fighting for the underdog, we see that it is dramatic on Rick's part. He has withdrawn from the world after losing Ilsa. By asking him to return to action, Laszlo is unwittingly asking Rick to forgive Ilsa and move on.

Rick shuts down Laszlo's impassioned political argument with cool disinterest. He maintains his emotional power, resolving the beat ambiguously. On one hand, we now want Rick to engage. On the other, we relate to Rick's flawed humanity over Laszlo's lofty heroism. We're not happy to see Laszlo pressing Rick emotionally when he's part of his predicament.



117
Laszlo Offers Money; Rick: "Ask Your Wife"

117. *Laszlo offers money for the letters. Rick refuses, telling him that his wife can explain.*

Victor switches from an emotional to a practical argument; Rick completes the reversal by pressing Laszlo's buttons instead. Rick has regained the emotional power, but in a way that makes him a heel. His jab at Laszlo lowers our hopes both for his reconciliation with Ilsa and for his re-enagement with the world. A down arrow marks this self-defeating victory. (We may feel some degree of satisfaction to see Laszlo punished for his ignorant presumption, but it's not the beat's dominant note.)



118
Singing Nazis

118. *Rick emerges from his office to find Germans singing a nationalistic song down in the bar.*

First Rick takes a tiny step toward engagement. Then Laszlo pushes him back to self-pitying selfishness with his bid for the transit papers. Now, as if in thematic rebuke, the Nazis are singing in his bar. The thematic connection makes this a dramatic beat. Singing Nazis always push the arrow down.



119
Renault's Challenging Glance

119. *Renault shoots Rick a loaded glance, either encouraging or daring him to act.*

Renault, ever attentive to the direction of the wind, challenges Rick to stake out a claim. Is he the neutralist he claims to be, or the sentimentalist Louis sees beneath the facade? This quick beat extends and heightens Rick's internal conflict without resolving it, and earns a lateral arrow.



120
Laszlo Requests Marseillaise

120. *Laszlo tells the band to play the French anthem, "La Marseillaise."*

Now Laszlo heightens the challenge, taking action as we would expect him to do. We're happy that someone's standing up to the Nazis, even if it's the expected party, and score this with an up arrow.



121
Rick Gives the Nod

121. *The band looks to Rick; he nods his approval.*

Despite his cruel turn with Laszlo moments ago, the beat resolves toward hope as Rick chooses engagement over self-interest. An up arrow.



122
Strasser's Men Drowned Out

122. *After attempting to out-sing the other patrons, Strasser gives up in disgust.*
Unhappy Nazis are always an up arrow.



123
Tearful Yvonne Joins In

123. *A tearful Yvonne, who a short while ago came in on a German officer's arm, tearfully sings the French anthem.*
Yvonne is now revealed as another foil figure for Rick. She has completed the leap we want him to make, choosing engagement over self-interest. The arrow moves up again. (And if you're like me, you get choked up by this beat every time you see it.)



124
Ilsa Gazes Lovingly at Laszlo

124. *Ilsa gazes with moved admiration at her husband.*
And this beat delivers the gut punch, in which our hopes are exposed as contradictory. We want engagement over self-interest, but we don't want Ilsa gazing lovingly at Laszlo! We want her with Rick! The moment's profound ambiguity requires crossed dramatic arrows.



125
Strasser Demands Bar Closure

125. *Strasser demands that Renault close the bar.*
This beat shows us that the problem with acting against your self-interest is that it's against your self-interest. The bar, the source of Rick's emotional power, is now under threat. Rick is about to pay for his nod, evoking concern on his behalf. If this were a story about a man struggling to maintain a nightclub in the difficult environment of wartime Casablanca, this would be a procedural defeat. Here it's a symbol of an internal tug of war between retreat and engagement. The practical problem of the threat to the bar is nonetheless scored as a dramatic downturn. (Ultimately we want Rick to lose his attachment to the Café Americain, as it represents his disengagement. But the film hasn't taken us to that point yet, and here the score cues us to be concerned.)



126
Renault Shocked! Gambling!

126. *When Rick protests the closure, Renault voices his shock to discover gambling, then collects his winnings.*
This classic moment of comic relief serves as **gratification**, and a lighter up beat, after the stirring emotions of the previous sequence. It also hints that maybe the loss of the bar isn't

the worst thing that could happen.



127
Strasser: It's France or Death for Laszlo

127. *Strasser gives Ilsa two choices: Laszlo can return to an uncertain fate in occupied France, or be murdered in Casablanca.*

This beat returns us to the **procedural** sub-plot concerning Victor's attempt to escape the Nazis, and increases our concern for him. The arrow points down.



128
Ilsa Urges Laszlo Not To Go to Meeting

128. *Ilsa urges Victor not to go to the planned underground meeting.*

The film continues its variations on its basic themes: here Ilsa presses Laszlo to opt for self-interest over engagement. She's the imploring petitioner. He deflects her with a joke that ironically undermines the very basis of their relationship: "It's not often that a man has a chance to display heroics before his wife." The problem is that she is bound to him by his heroism, even though her real passion is for Rick.

The beat resolves on paired down arrows. **Procedurally**, the beat makes us worry for Laszlo's physical safety. Dramatically, it engages our pity for him, showing how completely in the dark he is about the love between Ilsa and Rick.



129
"He Said, 'Ask Your Wife'"

129. *Ilsa asks him to explain what happened with Rick. He asks her what "ask your wife" might mean, and if she was with anyone else while he was in a concentration camp. She denies it explicitly, then obliquely asks for forgiveness.*

Victor is the petitioner, seeking information he suspects he doesn't want the answer to. The text of the scene is her denial; subtextually he acknowledges what has happened and she asks for forgiveness. When he tells her he loves her, she says, "I know"—among the worst possible responses one can get or give to that statement. The beat highlights that Ilsa too is torn between self-interest and engagement. Our hopes are pulled in contradictory directions, feeling for Laszlo but still wanting her to somehow resolve this mess and be with Rick. Our arrows cross again.



130
The Bar is Ok For a Couple of Weeks

130. *Carl tells Rick that he can stay afloat for a couple of weeks.*

This piece of **pipe** lets us know that the situation with the bar closing represents a setback but is not our main concern. As previously noted, we're not watching a movie about a man struggling to run a successful nightclub in Casablanca. The relaxation of concern over this practical matter warrants a procedural up arrow.



131
Ilsa Asks Rick For the Letters

131. *A desperate Ilsa asks Rick for the transit papers; he rebuffs her with his usual cruel disdain.*

Ilsa, imploring petitioner, directly evokes Rick's central internal conflict, asking him to put aside the personal in favor of something greater. In harshly rejecting her, he's now acting against both of our paradoxical hopes for him. He's neither getting closer to her, or moving from disengagement to engagement. The arrow points down.



132
Ilsa Invokes Paris

132. *She moves from a political to a personal argument, invoking their time in Paris, offering to finally explain. He shuts her down, saying he can't trust what she says.*

The objective and positions of petitioner and granter remain the same. Ilsa shifts tactics and makes the stakes more personal, so Rick does the same and makes his most hurtful accusation yet. The arrow still points down.



133
Ilsa Lashes Out at Rick

133. *Ilsa goes on the attack, calling him a coward and a weakling.*

Ilsa's objective shifts—now she wants to hurt Rick, retaliating for his lashing out at her. This exchange remains one-sided, as she relents and changes course before Rick has a chance to respond. Still, it's easy to see where the arrow points—both of our leads are in pain, and neither of our paradoxical hopes for Rick are coming any closer to fruition.



134
Ilsa Begs For Laszlo's Life

134. *Catching herself, she switches back to her original objective—getting the letters.*
Ilsa's tactic is tearful begging; he responds with callous disregard. She tells him that Victor will die in Casablanca without their help. He replies that he'll die there too: "It's a good spot for it." Although tactics (and, to a lesser extent, objectives) keep changing, the trajectory of the scene remains the same: downward.



135
Ilsa Pulls a Gun

135. *She pulls a gun on him.*
Ilsa has now shifted modes of interaction, from the dramatic to the procedural. If she can't get what she needs through emotional argument, she'll threaten him physically. "I tried everything. Now I want those letters." He successfully calls her bluff, refusing to produce them. Like singing Nazis, one lover pulling a firearm on another is pretty much always a down arrow.

Although her mode of persuasion has shifted to a procedural footing, any fear we might have for Rick's physical safety are quickly dispelled. Our concern is still more for their relationship; the down arrow remains dramatic.



136
Ilsa Breaks Down; Rick Embraces Her

136. *She breaks down; he melts, they embrace and kiss. Fade to black.*
Intensified anguish turns suddenly into hope as our separated lovers finally reunite—an up arrow.



137
Ilsa Explains Laszlo, and Why She Left Rick

137. *Ilsa explains her relationship with Laszlo, including her belief that he was dead, and the reasons for her abandoning Rick in Paris.*
After finally getting the reconciliation we've been hoping for, we get the long-delayed reveal. Long-desired information leads to an up arrow.



138
Rick and Ilsa Talk of a Future Together

138. *Rick asks what happens now; she's torn but says she won't have the strength to leave him again.*
We seem to be getting what we want here, as our lovers seem to have a future together. The beat resolves on an up arrow.



139
Rick Sees Cost of Separating Ilsa and Laszlo

139. *She asks him to help Victor; he realizes that Laszlo will have everything he needs to keep up the struggle—except for her.*

Having achieved his apparent goal—reuniting with Ilsa—Rick undergoes a shift in understanding. Now he's the one to see the conflict between engagement and self-interest. Our contradictory hopes rise to the surface again, bringing back the crossed dramatic arrows.

Ilsa tells him, "You have to think for both of us. For all of us." Which is another way of saying, "As protagonist, the outcome of the narrative revolves around your choices."



140
Carl and Laszlo Evade the Police

140. *Underground figures Laszlo and Carl evade police pursuit.*

In a repeat of a familiar pattern, a major development in the Rick-Ilsa dramatic plot is followed by a return to the Laszlo **procedural** sub-plot. This beat is also ambiguous: although he and Carl get away, the beat mostly serves to remind us of the continuing danger Victor faces.



141
Carl Brings Laszlo Into the Bar

141. *Carl brings Laszlo into the bar. Rick and Ilsa hear someone downstairs.*

A new fear arises—that Victor's presence will shatter the new-found reconciliation between Rick and Ilsa. The dramatic arrow turns down.



142
Rick Gets Carl to his Office to Take Ilsa Home

142. *Rick summons Carl to his office under false pretenses, then asks him to escort Ilsa home.*

This beat counters the dramatic threat from the previous one. Our sense of relief tips the arrow back up.



143
Rick and Laszlo Debate Cynicism and Altruism

143. *As Laszlo tends to a minor injury, Rick asks him if he ever wonders whether self-sacrifice is worth it.*

Here we have a reversed reflection of beat 30—a debate about cynicism versus altruism. This time Rick's counterpart is not Renault, spokesman for the former, but Laszlo, paragon of the latter. Laszlo argues that Rick is trying to escape his true nature. His words, and Rick's less than forceful pushback, edge us

toward one of our hopes—that Rick will re-engage with the world. The arrow moves up.



144
Laszlo Knows, Asks Rick to Get Ilsa Out

144. *Laszlo reveals that he knows about Rick's love for Ilsa. He asks Rick to get her, if not him, away from Casablanca.*
Victor toughens our choice between our two paradoxical hopes by declaring his love for Ilsa. This reminder that we can't have it both ways pulls the arrow down.



145
Laszlo Arrested

145. *The police burst in to arrest Laszlo.*
Our procedural fears for him reactivate, lodging a down arrow.



146
"Destiny Has Taken a Hand"

146. *"It seems like destiny has taken a hand," says an sphinx-like Rick.*
We're left to wonder what Rick is thinking, but his expression suggests a look of unseemly triumph. It makes us fear that he's about to act the heel, cheaply achieving one of our hopes (being with Ilsa) at the expense of the other (that he embrace altruism). Not knowing our hero's intentions at this crucial juncture counts as a **question** and is enough to point the arrow down. The chance that he's about to do something terrible makes it all the more certain.



147
Rick Argues Laszlo's Case to Renault

147. *Rick argues to Renault for Laszlo's release. Renault warns him not to assist Victor's escape.*
Rick is the petitioner; Renault the granter. Rick doesn't want an emotional concession from Renault, but a practical result. Their negotiation consists of logical arguments about actions and their consequences. This is a procedural rather than a dramatic interaction. After our reflection of beat 30's cynicism vs. altruism debate in beat 143, we get a straight-up recapitulation of it here, complete with a reminder of the bet Rick and Louis placed in that scene.

Although clearly their exchange concerns externals, the beat mixes elements of drama and procedural. Rick has entered Laszlo's procedural subplot, but has failed to advance it. On the other hand, he is acting with apparent altruism, satisfying one of our hopes for him. A dramatic upswing crosses a procedural downtick.



148
Rick Claims to be Escaping with Ilsa

148. *Rick admits he has the transit papers but insists that he's planning to use them to escape with Ilsa.*

If we didn't suspect that Rick is attempting to pull one over on Renault, Renault certainly does. By claiming unconvincingly to be doing the wrong thing, we figure he's doing the right thing, and start to root for him. The dramatic arrow goes up.



149
Rick Offers to Entrap Laszlo

149. *Rick offers to help entrap Laszlo on a more serious charge.*

Just as Bond's procedural goal (stop Dr. No) dovetails in the late stages of the plot with a dramatic one (win over Honey), Rick must pursue a procedural scheme in order to achieve his dramatic goal.

His plan's objective is currently withheld from us. Later we'll look back on this beat and realize that he has already completed his inner transformation from wounded neutralist to self-sacrificing activist. The rest of the film concerns his demonstration of the change.

By blocking our understanding of Rick's actions, the script not only heightens suspense, but postpones the moment where we recognize Rick's transformation to a point much closer to the ending of the film.

Rick is petitioner, again seeking a practical rather than emotional benefit from Renault. The scene cuts before we see Renault agree, but we presume that he's been successful. He wins by casting himself as a Renault-like figure, underhandedly using the power of the state to get a woman he wants. Thus his history as a cynic arms him with the weapon he needs to act altruistically. At any rate, he seems to have gotten the upper hand after encountering initial resistance. The procedural arrow points up.

The dramatic arrow depends on whether we really fear that Rick will betray Laszlo. This ambiguity is expressed as a crossed arrow. We wind up with two up arrows, one dramatic and one procedural, crossed with a downward dramatic arrow—our most fraught and laden beat in any of our three narratives.



150
Scheme Begins With Renault at Rick's

150. *Renault appears at Rick's, ready to execute the scheme.*
This beat offers up a series of small **reveals** and a larger **question**. On the first front, we learn where Rick hid the letters during Renault's earlier search, and that Ferrari will be taking over the club. The question concerns the real nature of Rick's plan. And to top it all off, the soundtrack cues us to feel tension at the prospect of the unexplained scheme going awry. All of these disparate threads add up to a crossed set of procedural arrows.



151
Ilsa Seeks Reassurance From Rick

151. *Ilsa, distraught, seeks reassurance from Rick: Laszlo still thinks she's leaving with him.*
Each is petitioner and granter. She wants reassurance. He needs her to be calm and play along. Her tactic is to freely express her dismay; his is to exude calm and invoke her trust for him. These two goals prove compatible, and both get what they want. Rick, as the dispenser of calm, maintains the power in the scene. Yet, paradoxically, our trust in Rick is now thrown into question—if he's scheming on Laszlo's behalf, why is he in the dark? He gets his procedural goal but our dramatic fears are stoked.

The crossed arrows are coming thick and fast as the film hurtles toward its conclusion.



152
Renault Arrests Laszlo

152. *Laszlo appears to complete the transaction for the papers. Renault appears to arrest him. Ilsa reacts with horror.*
Our dramatic fear swells as we worry that Rick has indeed betrayed Laszlo. Even if we trust him, we're made to feel dismay through Ilsa. The arrow drops twice—once for the dramatic impact of Rick's betrayal, once for Laszlo's setback in his procedural subplot.



153
Renault Exults: Desire Beats Heroism

153. *Renault crows on Rick's behalf, announcing that he betrayed Laszlo for love of Ilsa.*
The dramatic arrow dips further as our mouthpiece for cynicism exults in its victory.



154
Renault Shocked: Rick Has Gun on Him

154. *But wait—Renault's face falls as he sees that Rick has him at gunpoint.*
The dramatic arrow reverses as our hopes are realized. It's not our paragon of altruism who Rick is deceiving but our ambassador for self-interest.



155
Ruffled Renault Complies

155. *An offended Renault retains some of his customary aplomb as he follows Rick's instructions.*
The brilliance of Claude Rains' performance shines here as he keeps Renault funny, likeable and menacing all at the same time. (He needs all of these qualities to execute his famous final turn at the end.) We take **gratification** from the humor of the scene at the same time as we worry about the **procedural** consequences for Rick.



156
Renault Calls Strasser Instead of Airport

156. *Renault cleverly throws a spanner into Rick's plans by calling Strasser instead of the airport. Strasser orders a squad of police to the airport.*
This increases our fears for Rick's **procedural** success, for a down arrow.



157
Flight Departs in Ten Minutes

157. *An airport traffic controller announces that the flight for Lisbon leaves in ten minutes.*
Placing the action under a time limit is a classic way of increasing our worry for the hero. The procedural arrow dips down.



158
Rick Wants Ilsa and Laszlo on Letters of Transit

158. *Rick and company arrive at the airport, with Renault still apparently compliant. Rick reveals that it's Ilsa and Victor's names he wants Renault to fill out on the letters of transit.*
Finally we see that Rick is doing what we hoped he'd do—put altruism over self. The dramatic arrow goes up. But at the same time, we realize that he and Ilsa will be parted. A down arrow crosses the up arrow.



159
Rick Explains to Ilsa: They Must Part

159. *Rick explains to Ilsa that they have to part, for the greater good.*

In one of cinema's most famous pieces of dialogue, Rick lays out the conclusive argument for altruism over selfishness, revealing the completion of his character arc. We thought we wanted him to get Ilsa back, but now the real goal stands revealed—to recover from the shock of losing her. He even casts their parting as an act of love, granting us a partial fulfillment of our other dramatic desire. Still, it's a bittersweet moment, merging sadness and triumph, and registers as a crossed dramatic arrow.



160
Strasser's Coming

160. *Strasser roars onto the scene in a speeding car.*

The main dramatic arc has concluded, but, as this down arrow reminds us, there are still some **procedural** worries to resolve.



161
Renault is Up To Something

161. *Renault seems to be pulling something as Rick and Laszlo confer.*

A second **procedural** suspense beat, with down arrow.



162
R. Convinces L.: Nothing Between Rick and Ilsa

162. *Rick convinces Laszlo that there's nothing between him and Ilsa.*

We want Rick to succeed in this deception, which is necessary so that his sacrifice isn't in vain. He does, granting us a **dramatic** up arrow. The beat also contains a moment of patriotic **gratification** as Laszlo assures Rick, and us, that we're going to win the war.



163
Final Departing Glances

163. *Final longing glances are exchanged; Laszlo and Ilsa depart.*

The bittersweet romanticism of beat 159 is briefly reprised, to the same crossed effect.



164
Renault Identifies Rick's Sentimentalism

164. *With grudging admiration, Renault accuses Rick of sentimentalism.*
The film's spokesman for altruism might not know what's going on, but our resident cynic does. In doing so, we get to enjoy a beat of admiration for our hero without the previous countervailing sadness.



165
Renault Will Have To Arrest Rick

165. *Renault says he'll have to arrest Rick.*
We accept Rick's sacrifice of his chance to be with Ilsa, but now we worry that he'll lose his freedom, too. The **procedural** subplot that for the bulk of the film revolved around Laszlo has now been taken on by our protagonist. The arrow dips.



166
Strasser Appears

166. *Strasser appears, is informed by Renault that Laszlo has left, and heads for the phone.*
The jeopardy intensifies—another **procedural** down arrow.



167
Rick Threatens To Shoot Strasser

167. *Rick threatens to shoot him, but he takes the phone in an attempt to stop the plane.*
The external expression of Rick's dramatic arc, Victor and Ilsa's escape, remains in play. Strasser threatens to undo the benefit of his painful sacrifice. This suspense note folds together our worries for the dramatic and **procedural** threads of the story.



168
Rick Shoots Strasser

168. *Rick shoots him.*
Rick dispatches the main antagonist, protecting his sacrifice. Both arrows move up.

This beat satisfies the secondary hope of the audience, established in beat 6, that someone will pay for the crimes of the Germans and their collaborators, as symbolically represented by the death of the resistance agent. Strasser becomes a stand-in for a greater evil, one which, in 1942, was still very much extant. The film gratifies the audience by giving them a measure of justice, while encouraging them to bring a positive attitude toward the real-life continuing struggle.



169
The Police Arrive

169. *The cops roll up.*
The **procedural** threat shifts back to the prospect of Rick's arrest. The arrow moves down.



170
"Major Strasser Has Been Shot"

170. *Renault tells them that Major Strasser has been shot.*
With his expert control of pacing, Curtiz teases out the suspense, for another **procedural** down arrow.



171
Round Up the Usual Suspects

171. *Renault orders his men to round up the usual suspects.*
Rains' pause between the previous beat and this one is timed to exquisite perfection.

In a hallmark display of narrative symmetry, the tension is released with a callback to the beginning of the film. As such it serves as both **gratification** and the positive resolution of a procedural threat.



172
Renault Pivots to Patriotism

172. *Renault executes his pivot to patriotism, throwing out a bottle of Vichy water.*
Rick's dramatic arc may be complete, but here we see its continuing effect on the storyline—his transformation has brought about a similar one in his primary foil.



173
Plane Takes Off for Lisbon

173. *The plane takes off.*
The practical fruits of Rick's dramatic transformation are confirmed, for another up arrow.



174
Renault Offers Rick Passage

174. *Louis offers Rick passage to a Free French garrison.*
This beat fosters the hope that Rick's move toward altruism will continue.



175
Renault Will Come As Well

175. *Louis announces that he's coming along as well.* The hero and foil-turned-ally walk off into the foggy distance together, ending the film on an unusual note of anticipation. We're left to imagine the wily havoc they'll wreak on the Germans in their new roles as resistance fighters. If we were to see them again, it would be as iconic procedural heroes in a wartime espionage flick.

Summing Up

Like our beat maps for *Hamlet* and *Dr. No*, *Casablanca* modulates continually while also moving slowly downward over time. Like *Hamlet*, it avoids clusters of beats that resolve in the same direction. It longest streak is five consecutive down arrows. Notably, they occur as prelude to the longed-for reunion of Rick and Ilsa in beat 136.

The film's hope/fear high point occurs early, at beat 30, in the first of the Rick-Louis verbal duels pitting altruism against cynicism. The narrative line slides downward from there to beat 99 (Ferrari with Jan and Annina), enters a plateau until beat 110, undergoes an up-and-down curve with Renault's shock at gambling in the casino as a high point and Ilsa's pulling a gun on Rick as its low point. The rest of the film modulates tightly, maintaining a more or less straight line, until its conclusion. The lowest point occurs during the climax, at beat 170, with Renault's "Major Strasser has been shot."

Revolving around the protagonist's internal struggle, in which he frequently acts against our hopes for him, *Casablanca* features many more ambiguous beats than either *Dr. No* or *Hamlet*. It presents twenty-two of them, as opposed to their seven crossed beats apiece.

Applying the System

Now that we've put beat analysis through our three example workouts, it's time to conclude with a quick look at its practical applications in your gaming life, and beyond.

Analyzing Existing Works

The beat analysis system exists not as an end in itself, but as a way of helping gamers to identify, understand, and internalize basic narrative techniques. Reading the breakdowns given here serves as a first step. To really get story technique into your metaphorical bloodstream, perform a similar analysis or two yourself.

Start by picking a work that you like and respect. Choosing a piece you already know well will help you to spot the information beats, identify protagonists, and zero in on dramatic characters' arcs and contradictions. Poorly constructed stories don't teach us as much as strong ones: you're looking for tricks to emulate rather than mistakes to avoid.

If you're basing an upcoming game on a particular work, choose that. If you want to evoke a broader style, select your favorite or most exemplary piece in that mode.

Analyzing a work you haven't seen before is like watching a DVD in commentary mode before checking out its main audio track.

To separate the moments in a work into beats, start by looking for emotional shifts. Each time your sense of hope or fear fluctuates, the creator has introduced a new beat.

Identify beat types by first asking yourself:

If the moment primarily concerns an inner state or emotional conflict
or
Revolves around a practical dilemma or depends on
the character's actions in physical space

In the first instance, you've got a dramatic beat; in the second, a procedural beat.

Whether it conforms to one of these types or not, go through the list of secondary beat types to see if it matches any of them.

If it concerns a piece of information, it's either a question, a reveal, or a pipe beat. Questions make you want to know more. Reveals satisfy a previously established mystery. Pipe gives you information you need later on, without creating a hunger for it first.

If the beat promises a gratifying result later on, it's an anticipation.

If it hasn't done any of these things, including furthering a dramatic or procedural plot or sub-plot, but it nonetheless changes the emotional temperature, it's a gratification if it makes you feel good, or a bringdown if it makes you feel bad.

If you've gone through the whole list and still not identified it, it's probably an instance of commentary. In a well-constructed work, the author's editorializing at least sheds some light on the theme. Even Shakespeare's knowing breaks to complain about child acting companies and actors who ignore the intent of the text also relate to the play's theme of the confusion between reality and outward appearance.

If your beat fits none of these purposes, it's probably still a gratification or bringdown. But let us know—maybe you've discovered a new type that requires an addition to the system.

Beat analysis can be time-consuming, so if pressed for time you might prefer to select a favorite sequence and break it down first. If you find this process informative, you can then go back and break down the entire piece at your leisure.

Once you've done this a time or two, you'll start to notice the types and resolutions at work in other media. With prolonged thought, the system's categories will slosh around in your consciousness until you find yourself ready to apply it to your own storymaking.

One worry surrounding any analysis of story technique is that you might not be able to turn it off on command. No one wants to be distracted by

seeing the gears and pulleys at work when sitting down in front of a movie or cracking open a book by a favorite author. While it's possible that your prefrontal cortex might be so overactive that any whiff of critical analysis forever damages your ability to consume entertainment, this is not a likely fear for most. Compelling narratives pull you out of your conscious thought, and require effort to analyze. You may, however, find yourself thinking about the building blocks of a story after it has already bored you and allowed your mind to wander. You may notice that the pipe doesn't pay off or is too obviously laid. Or that the rhythmic variance typical of an involving story isn't quite present. Or that the creator has failed to devise situations that activate your hopes or fears.

AVENUES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Hamlet, *Dr. No,* and *Casablanca* may be three classic narratives of high interest to the gamer tribe, but they're just a drop in the statistical bucket when you consider the incalculable number of stories available to the modern reader/viewer. Other types of stories will consist of the same basic building blocks, but may show strikingly different narrative lines. A Lovecraftian horror story may be a long slide downwards, with few if any up notes—or it could surprise us by displaying a steadily but modestly declining line pattern similar to the works we've looked at here. I suspect comedies bear a shockingly similar pattern to tragedies, even if we're laughing when dreadful things happen to their protagonists. Since this volume is already gristly enough, given its theoretical nature, we'll have to make those inquiries elsewhere. Contact us at gameplaywright.net to share your discoveries and insights as you widen beat analysis to the further reaches of the narrative tradition.

Scenario Beats

When creating a scenario, use beat analysis to create a hypothetical map of its essential turning points. You can likewise use it to better prepare a scenario written by someone else. Be careful that this process doesn't lock you into a single conception of what might happen when the players get involved

and set to work determining the direction of the story. You're not mapping what must happen, but one or more of the likeliest outcomes. To ensure the possibility of meaningful branching, you might want to create a non-linear arrangement of possible scenes, and allow events as they occur in-game to connect the dots between them. Resolutions don't appear on this sort of provisional map, as you can't predict which obstacles the PCs will overcome and which will set them back.

You can, however, plan for a variety of beat types. By thinking about information as separate question and reveal beats, you can unveil it to your players in a way that maximizes their impact. You might look for ways to fold pipe into other beats, to avoid telegraphing its significance. Look for ways to build the players' sense of dominance and competence by finding anticipations allowing them to savor in advance the occasional easy victory.

If you spot a comparatively large number of the non-central gratification, bringdown, and commentary beats on your preliminary breakdown, cut them or find ways to fold them into your procedural or dramatic storylines. For example, your adventure notes may consist of reams of detail on a cool place, culture or historical event. Matching these elements up with beat types helps you to turn them from passive narration into active events the players can shape through their decisions and die rolls.

Session Beats

Tracking actual events in your game sessions will help to sharpen your game's pacing and vary its emotional rhythm. During play, jot down major beats, indicating their emotional impact with up or down arrows. Player disengagement may be explained by too many up arrows or, more likely, too many down arrows in a row. Even on your rough sheet, you'll be able to spot this. Equipped with the sense of narrative rhythm you've internalized from studying other works, you can then throw in new moments of gratification, dominance and victory as needed. In the unlikely event you're making matters too easy for the heroes, foreshadow danger, increase difficulties, and pump up the capabilities of the opposition.

Players may add down arrows of their own, even to a carefully balanced set of scenario beats. In many groups, conflict between player characters typically registers as a procedural and/or dramatic down note. When these start to cluster together, you may need to compensate, getting the up arrows rolling again. This might entail acting as a mediator to help reach a decision, or removing the point they're stuck on with a sudden change of situation.

In games built around inter-PC dramatic conflict, you can use your map to identify the evolving nature of their disputes. By isolating the beats, you can tailor upcoming events under your control so that they reflect and intensify the beats your players are laying down for you.

Post-session, you may learn more to enhance your game by formally mapping out your jotted-down beat descriptors and resolutions. You might find that you're missing your reveals, that players aren't picking up on questions, or that the players keep constructing unexpected impediments for themselves.

You might also expand your map's purpose beyond straight beat analysis to identify other stumbling blocks. For example, you might find it useful to add symbols representing each of your players to the major beats. From this you might discover that certain players are dominating the plot while others languish on the periphery. Assuming that players haven't sidelined themselves on purpose because they prefer a supporting role, you can use this as a hint that you need to engage them more, while making an effort to curb your resident spotlight hogs.

If you find yourself layering multiple orders of information into your session beat maps, you may find it useful to use a graphics package that enables layers, which can be switched on and off. Beat types may appear on one layer, player icons on another. The rough versions of the diagrams for this book were created on Profantasy's *Campaign Cartographer*. It handles the task splendidly, even if it's like using chess-playing supercomputer Deep Blue to calculate a restaurant tip.

MOVING THE ARROWS AS A PLAYER

Keeping a beat map of another GM's game would constitute a massive feat of passive-aggressiveness. Short of this appalling step, you can remain mindful of emotional rhythm as a player, and step up to your responsibility as a collaborator to aid in varying it.

Players do this instinctively as it is, most notably by joking and kibitzing to reduce tension during tough moments. This traditional method of lightening the mood brings its own problems, by distracting the group and breaking the fictional illusion. Challenge yourself to find in-character comments and asides that move the arrow up at crucial moments without sidetracking the story.

When tactical disagreements bog you down, use your understanding of the petitioner-granter structure to move the discussion

on and clarify what everyone wants. Identify the other PCs' objectives and think of ways to realize them while also securing the concessions you seek. Grant strategic concessions to others to move past the logjam and back onto a cooperative footing.

Some of the most useful work in building for engaging narrative rhythms occurs before you start play, during character generation. Build in an engaging inner conflict giving the GM grist for drama. Create a supporting cast around your PC, which you can draw on when you need to reestablish sympathy or dominance.

In a heroic campaign, envision yourself as an iconic character. Venture boldly into situations with a Bondian suavity, confident that the GM's universe will conspire with you to present you with solvable problems.

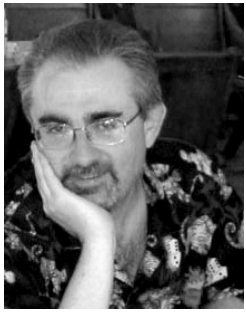
Outlining Traditional Narratives

Although largely beyond the purview of this book, beat analysis also allows you to create a useful visual aid when outlining stories for traditional media. It allows you to quickly pinpoint and adjust sections of the story that occur on the same emotional level. Watch out for clusters of all kinds. Consecutive pipe beats are bad news: your audience can only absorb so much information at once. Reveals are more effective if separated from the questions they satisfy, but not so much that the audience has forgotten to hanker for the information. A succession of secondary beat types suggests that you've lost track of your main story threads.

In the case of stories featuring multiple protagonists, you might want to add character tracking, as suggested above, to your beat map. You can then see when major characters go missing from your narrative. Sometimes you'll want them to, but this should be a choice you're aware of and not a failure to keep all of your juggled objects airborne.

Your story isn't guaranteed to have the impact of *Hamlet, Dr. No* or *Casablanca* just because your beat analysis map looks like theirs, but it can't hurt.

The beat icons and arrows used in Hamlet's Hit Points *are available for use under a Creative Commons license. Visit gameplaywright.net/hamlets-hit-points to download them.*



Writer and game designer **Robin D. Laws** is the eponymous force behind *Robin's Laws Of Good Game Mastering*, acclaimed as a seminal work on the running of tabletop roleplaying games. His practical design contributions to the field appear in such games as *Feng Shui, The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game, HeroQuest, The Esoterrorists,* and *Skulduggery*. *D&D* players know his work on various supplements, including sections of the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* for both the third and fourth editions of that game. His fiction chops can be seen in his six novels and various serials and short stories. The analysis found in *Hamlet's Hit Points* first surfaced in his blog, a cavalcade of hobby games, film, culture, narrative structure, and gun-toting avians.

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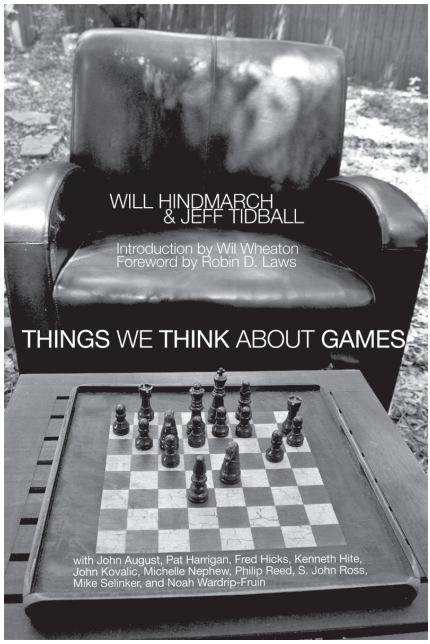

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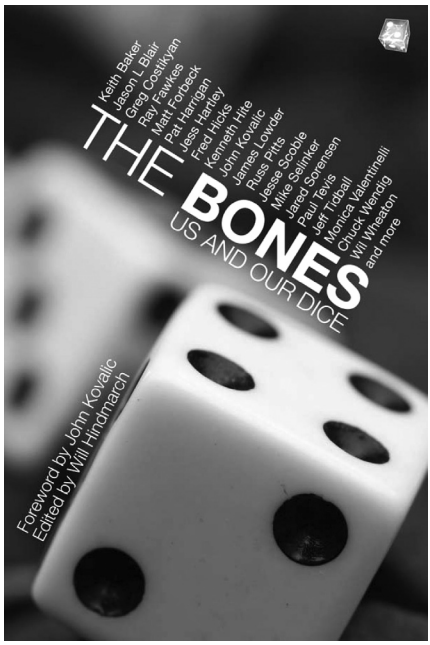

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"Robin Laws cannot see a game-box without thinking outside it."
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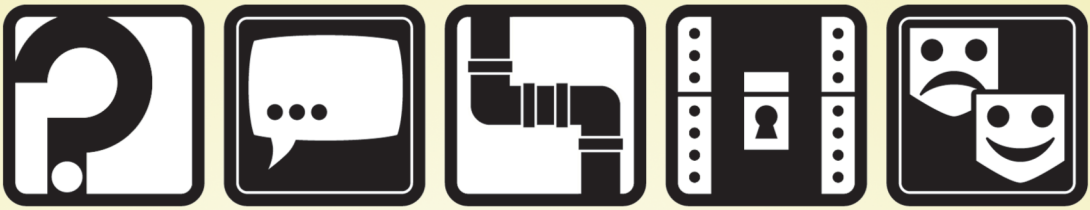

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Written with roleplayers in mind, *Hamlet's Hit Points* is an indispensable tool for understanding stories, in games and everywhere else.





Robin D. Laws wrote *Robin's Laws Of Good Game Mastering*; designed *Feng Shui, The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game, HeroQuest, The Esoterrorists*, and *Skulduggery*; and contributed to both the third and fourth editions of the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*.

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