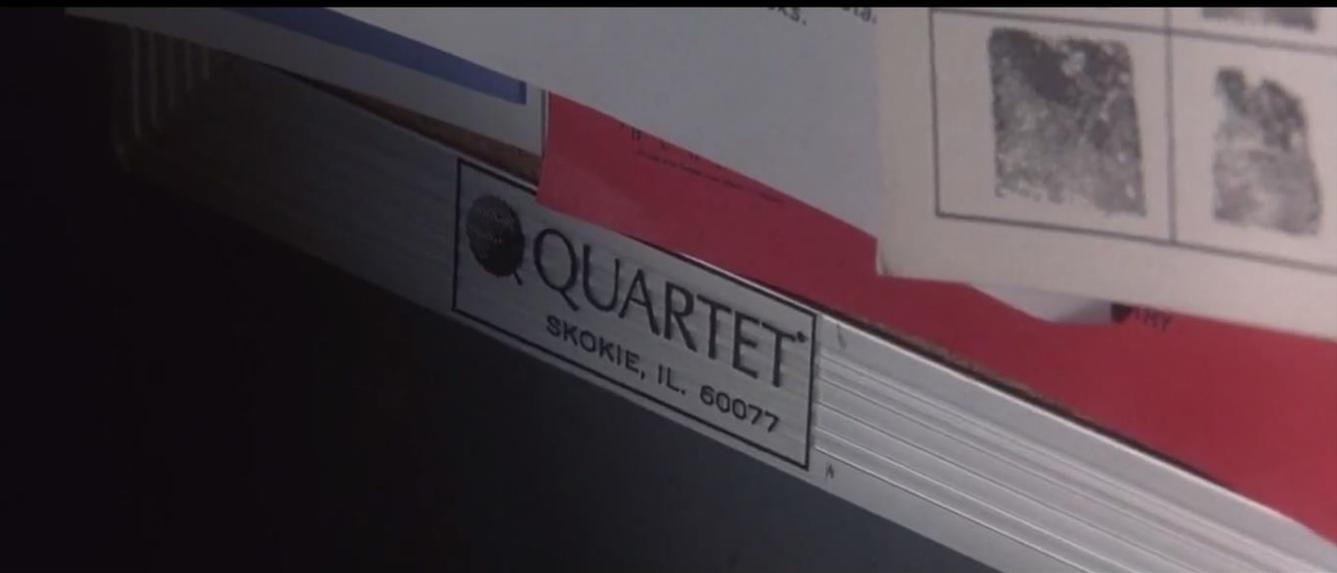
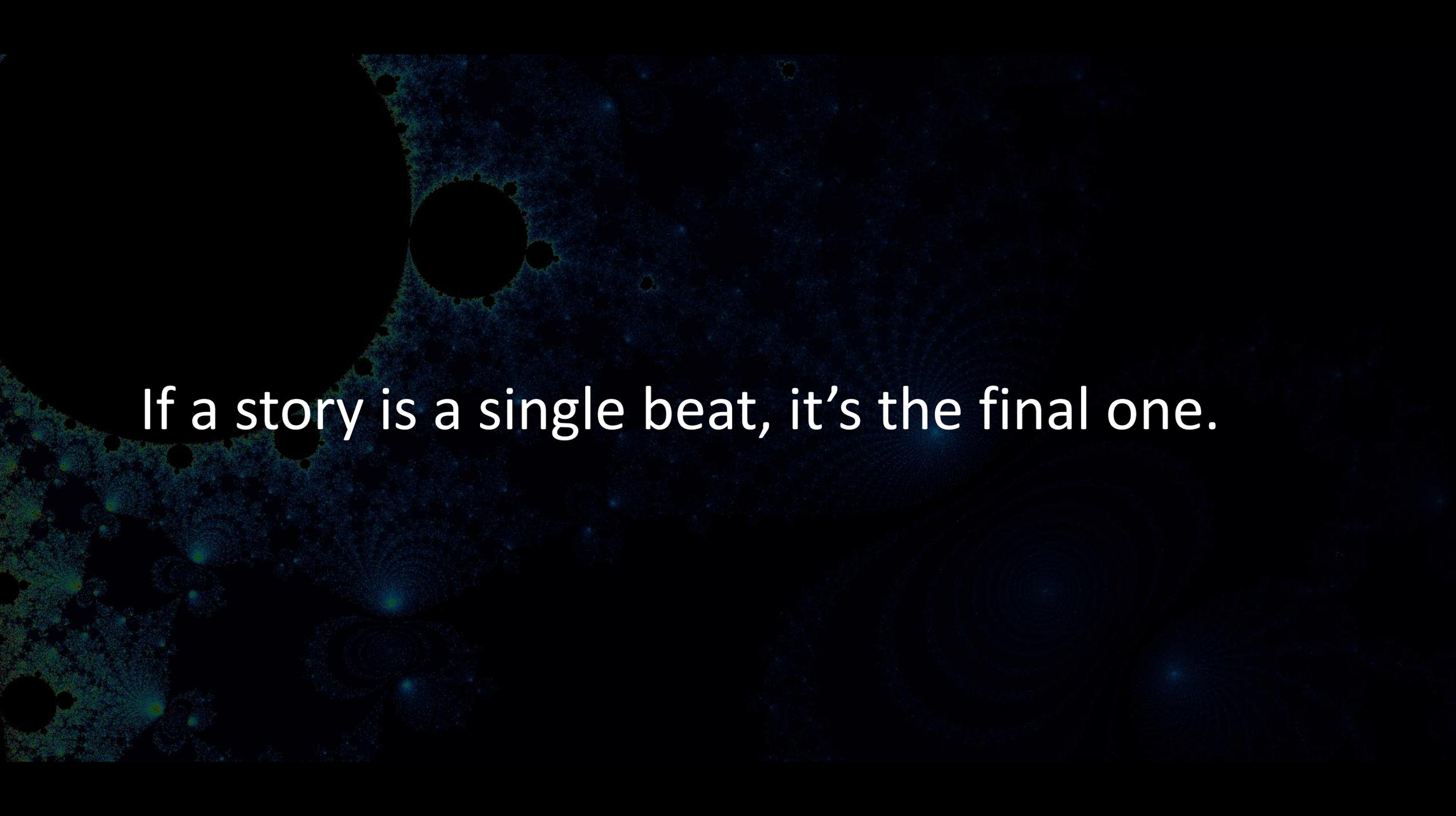




The End: Inevitable but Unexpected

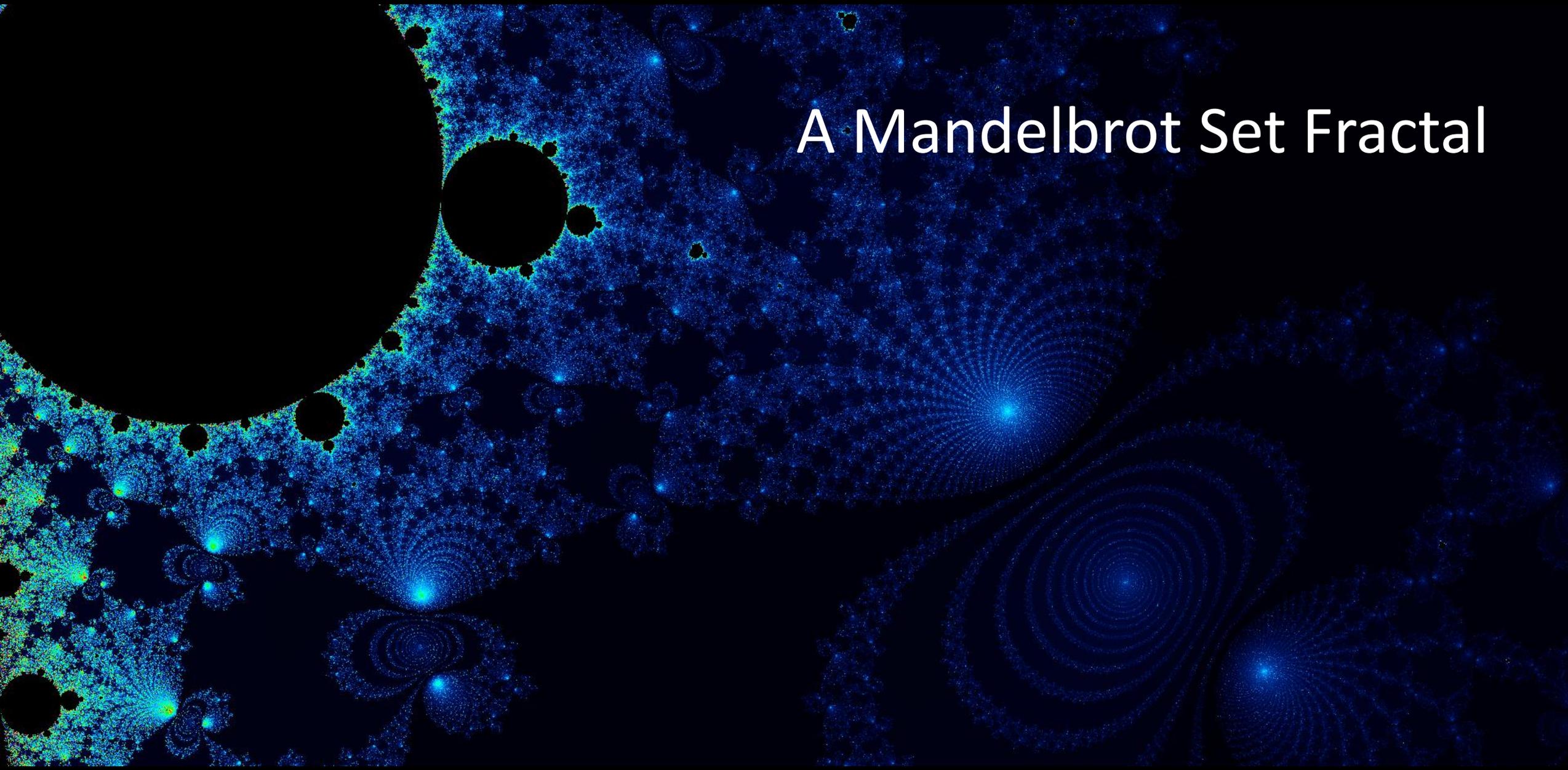


Nic Ransome
LSF September 2018



If a story is a single beat, it's the final one.

A Mandelbrot Set Fractal



A zoomed-in view of the Mandelbrot set, showing a large black circular region on the left and a complex, fractal-like structure of smaller black circles and points extending to the right. The background is a dark blue, textured field of points, with some points appearing as bright blue or yellowish-green spots. The overall appearance is that of a highly detailed, self-similar fractal structure.

CLIP #1

Mandelbrot Set Zoom-In

THE ENDING MUST DELIVER

The Ending is what the audience take away with them.
It's usually the starting point for all subsequent discussion/engagement with a film/TV story.

A great Ending can enhance a mediocre story.

A perfect Ending can make a great story.

A bad Ending can ruin an otherwise great story.

A great Ending can be ruined by a lesser story (or by how long it takes to reach that Ending).

INEVITABLE BUT UNEXPECTED #1

Inevitability should be hardwired into every element of your screenplay.

Unexpectedness is about *how, when* and *the number of times* you turn plot & character.

INEVITABLE BUT UNEXPECTED #2

The seed of your protagonist's entire journey – including their Ending – should be implicit in your Beginning / “Opening Ten” (and restated/reinforced in your Ending in the case of a pilot episode).

In effect, your Beginning must foreshadow your Ending, and...
Your Ending (if Open) must foreshadow what happens next (albeit O.S. in terms of a film).

TERMINOLOGY #1

By “Ending” – for the sake of this session at least – we mean the final-act Climax (usually the Act Three Climax) *plus the Denouement*.

Either can include a “twist” or “Reversal” (or more than one).

TERMINOLOGY #2

Five Acts (story form)

Four Acts (act structure)

Three Acts (form: beginning/middle/end; structure: Acts I, II, III)

The Midpoint is most often in the temporal middle – almost always in films/single episodes with the most elegant structure – which is why Five Acts usually doesn't work as structure.

TERMINOLOGY #3

The screenplay gurus have various different terms also:

The Ancient Greeks/Aristotle: *lusis* (“untying”) and *katharsis*

Syd Field: Climax and Resolution

Michael Hauge: Act Three is “Resolve”, in which the “Stages” are “Final Push” and “Aftermath”. At the end of “Final Push” comes Turning Point #5, which is “Climax”.

TERMINOLOGY #4

McKee: 3rd Major Turning Point followed by “Balance Restored” (for better or worse).

Truby 7 Steps: 5. Battle → 6. Self-Revelation → 7. New Equilibrium.

Truby 22 Steps: 18. Gate → 19. Battle → 20. Self-Revelation → 21. Moral Decision → 22. New Equilibrium.

Vogler: The Road Back → Resurrection → Return With The Elixir.

THE DENOUEMENT #1

Denouement follows the Act Three Climax and can also itself contain a single or even a double Reversal.

Tip #1: Think of the Denouement as an additional mini-act (e.g. Act Three Part II). Try to a) add a denouement if you don't currently have one and b) see how you can add *at least* one Reversal to your Denouement.

THE DENOUEMENT #2

Horror / Supernatural / Thriller / Psychodrama screenplays often place their final Reversal in the Denouement – the so-called “sting in the tail”.

Screenplays that have these in effect have an additional Turning Point at the end.

Both *lusis* and *denouement* literally mean “unknotting” / “untying”, so you could say that a denouement with a twist or Reversal and/or an Open ending is, in fact, a *renouement*.

ACT STRUCTURE #1

Here's the main point (if you only take one thing away with you!)

End Act Two Part I (aka the Midpoint) – Break into Act Two Part II

End Act Two Part II – Break into Act Three

End Act Three Part I – Break into Act Three Part II (aka the Denouement) [or Break into “lights up” if no Denouement]

ACT STRUCTURE #2

Denouement – usually no more than 5pp; 2pp is the optimum.

End Act Three Part II (aka the Denouement) – Break into "lights up"

So, the Denouement, if you have one, should have at least one Reversal (i.e. the Break into "lights up").

A more sophisticated Denouement has at least one additional Reversal before the Break into "lights up".

BALANCE & SYMMETRY #1

Mirror-balance or symmetry

Contrast-balance or asymmetry









BALANCE & SYMMETRY #2

Recent research from a team led by Ganna Pogrebna, a professor of behavioural economics and data science at the University of Birmingham, tried to determine the six most successful story types.

What these six story types all have in common is they are either symmetrical or asymmetrical. They are all mirror-balanced or contrast-balanced.

BALANCE & SYMMETRY #3

Rise → Fall – less story traction / tragic (multiple genres / story types within each of these e.g. Horror / Sci-Fi – hubris)

Fall → Rise – less story traction / comic (chaos in the middle)
Comedy / RomCom / Drama / Cop Thriller

Fall → Rise → Fall – more story traction / tragic

Rise → Fall → Rise – more story traction / comic

BALANCE & SYMMETRY #4

Rags to riches – an ongoing emotional rise (THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION)

Riches to rags – an ongoing emotional fall (PSYCHO)

Man in a hole – a fall followed by a rise (THE GODFATHER)

Icarus – a rise followed by a fall (ON THE WATERFRONT)

Cinderella – a rise followed by a fall followed by a rise (BABE)

Oedipus – a fall followed by a rise followed by a fall (ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER)

“Man in a hole” is the most successful apparently.

BALANCE & SYMMETRY #5

Mirror-balance is where the entire story is symmetrical like *THE GODFATHER* and *ON THE WATERFRONT*.

Any two adjacent end-of-act Turning Points will almost always be asymmetrical / contrast-balanced (giving a natural rise and fall or fall and rise).

Double Reversals (within a single Turning Point) are always symmetrical / mirror-balanced (e.g. usually UP → DOWN → UP in a comedy or DOWN → UP → DOWN in a horror film).

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #1

In his book *Archetype: A Natural History of the Self* (1982) and in the 2002 revised edition *Archetype Revisited: An Updated Natural History of the Self*, Jungian psychoanalyst and writer Dr. Anthony Stevens theorised the idea of “archetypal intent” which can be either frustrated or fulfilled.

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #2

If an Ending is satisfying, it's because archetypal intent is fulfilled.

If an Ending isn't satisfying, it's usually because archetypal intent is frustrated (*unless this is deliberately the intent*).

“I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it. And... I was... really... I was alive.” – Walter White



SERIES FINALE **amc**

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #3

Do you need to know the Ending when you start writing?

Yes, because the Ending must be implicit in the Beginning, just as the Beginning must be implicit in the Ending.

“In my beginning is my end... In my end is my beginning.”

~ East Coker, T.S. Eliot

(There are, of course, always exceptions!).

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #4

What can provide a framework for archetypal intent in terms of Endings by genre?

The primary frameworks (by genre) are provided by:

Thriller: Justice (provided by the system, or if the system is incompetent, compromised or corrupt then by the protagonist/s, whose idea of justice will usually significantly diverge from that of the system). See also: “relative morality”.

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #5

Horror: Morality / Religion / Philosophy

Drama: Society / relative morality (often with characters at the conservative or radical extremes, as this creates conflict)

Comedy: “Fairness” / social conventions (often with characters at the conservative or radical extremes, as this creates conflict and comedy)

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #6

Sci-Fi: Ethics / Science / Philosophy

Romance: “Aptness” / “Suitability” (i.e. character and characterization)

Coming-of-Age & Personal Drama: Society / Psychology

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #7

If a plot should pull inexorably toward its singularity, then so should a character.

Ideally, these two core elements – plot and character – should intertwine like a Double Helix.

These intertwined strands that together pull inexorably toward the singularity of your Ending comprise your screenplay's spine.

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #8

Your Ending should fulfil the archetypal intent of this spine and of the natural momentum toward it.

(Unless your aim is *deliberately to frustrate archetypal intent* for reasons of theme and tone).

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #9

Archetypal Intent of character by genre:

Horror – initiation / transformation or redemption (often both if an adult character)

Comedy – redemption or (usually, delayed) self-revelation / growing-up (initiation)

Drama – redemption or self-revelation

ARCHETYPAL INTENT #9

Romance – redemption or self-revelation / growing-up (or all of these if a Drama-Romance)

RomCom – as Comedy above, plus reward is the final love match.

Sci-Fi – initiation / transformation or redemption or self-revelation (often two or three of these if an adult character)

Coming of Age – initiation (plus self-revelation if more dramatic in tone; plus redemption if particularly dark)

ENANTIODROMIA #1

Another Jungian concept (sourced from the Ancient Greeks):

enantiodromia (from the Ancient Greek *enantios* – opposite, and *dromos* – running course)

The innate tendency of something to transform into its opposite.

This archetypal psychological process governs the deep patterns at the core of story.

ENANTIODROMIA #2

From immediate plot Reversal, through UP → DOWN and RISE → FALL to your protagonist's overall character arc.

This is the change that so many script gurus talk about, whatever language or terminology they use.

This is one reason why those successful genres in the study are centred on protagonists who go through so much change.

ENANTIODROMIA #3

This doesn't necessarily mean a good person breaks bad – or vice versa – it usually just means that a key element of your protagonist's psychology must change across the story, *and be clearly transformed by the end.*

Walter White is – of course – the apotheosis of this idea.

ENANTIODROMIA #4

It is essential! (Unless you are making a deliberate thematic point by everything – or at least some elements – not changing, i.e. *if you are frustrating archetypal intent deliberately.*)

Tip #4: Write out all the ways your protagonist/s change over the course of your story. Is it enough? Notwithstanding any external changes (justice, money, fame, romance, peer recognition etc.) is there a genuine transformation of at least one key psychological element?

SO WHAT IS OUR INTENT?

Might seem obvious, but the aim of the Ending is to resolve the plot and to deliver the essence of the story in microcosm.

So the Ending should highlight plot, theme, tone, character arcs and any recurrent visual imagery / metaphors.

(Indeed, you could argue that *the climax should be the entire story up to that point in microcosm*. Then the Denouement can *surprise*.)

CLIP #3

DIE HARD
Climax & Denouement

DIE HARD

DIE HARD has a perfect Ending which encapsulates the entire story in microcosm.

It follows the rules in terms of everything coalescing in the Ending. Justice is served unilaterally, but we trust the characters and their motives, so we feel that this is moral.

(Notice how throughout the film the system is shown to be incompetent and corrupt, thus laying the groundwork for moral justice to be meted out by the heroes.)

DIE HARD

Plot – Good guys triumph over bad guys.

Theme – love, forgiveness and courage triumph over greed and vengeance (but only if the good guys stand up).

Tone – deadly serious with innate humour (like life).

Character Arcs – vanquishing the bad guys / Redemption x 2; Self-Revelation / atonement x 1; Self-Revelation / healing x 1).

DIE HARD

Visual symbolism – the rich / powerful have further to fall (contrast with the opening: McClane in the plane has literally been “up in the air” – over Holly and his / their future).

Holly is similarly “up in the air” – on the 32nd floor.

McClane and Holly both “come back down to earth”.

DIE HARD

But DIE HARD also breaks the rules, which it's earned the right to do.

Sub-plots by convention resolve *before* the master plot, but here, Sergeant Powell's plot resolves *after* the master plot.

This creates a genuine surprise, providing satisfaction, but also the unexpected.

Tip #5: Follows the rules to create comfort and the sense that the reader / audience are in safe hands – then break one.

CLOSED → OPEN ENDINGS #1

The secret of a *truly* great ending appears to be...

...a Closed Climax *plus* an Open Denouement.

There are simple (one reversal between Climax and “lights up”) and sophisticated (multiple reversals between Climax and “lights up”) versions.

CLOSED → OPEN ENDINGS #2

UP → UP

Climax of THE MATRIX: Vanquishes the story's major antagonist and gets the girl.

The Denouement of THE MATRIX, so archetypally pregnant with possibility (but so utterly ruined by the sequels!).

The background is a dark blue, almost black, space filled with a complex fractal pattern. This pattern consists of numerous small, glowing blue and green particles scattered throughout, along with several larger, solid black circular shapes of varying sizes. The overall effect is reminiscent of a microscopic view of a complex material or a digital simulation of a natural phenomenon.

CLIP #4

THE MATRIX
Denouement

CLOSED → OPEN ENDINGS #3

“UP” → “UP”

Climax of MEMENTO: “Vanquishes the antagonist (and finds another). Avenges the girl’s death.”

MEMENTO’s Denouement is the tonal inverse of THE MATRIX; pregnant with negative possibility, and with a bitterly ironic tone because Lenny is locked in a nihilistic loop. This is the “Living Death” ending on steroids.



CLIP #5

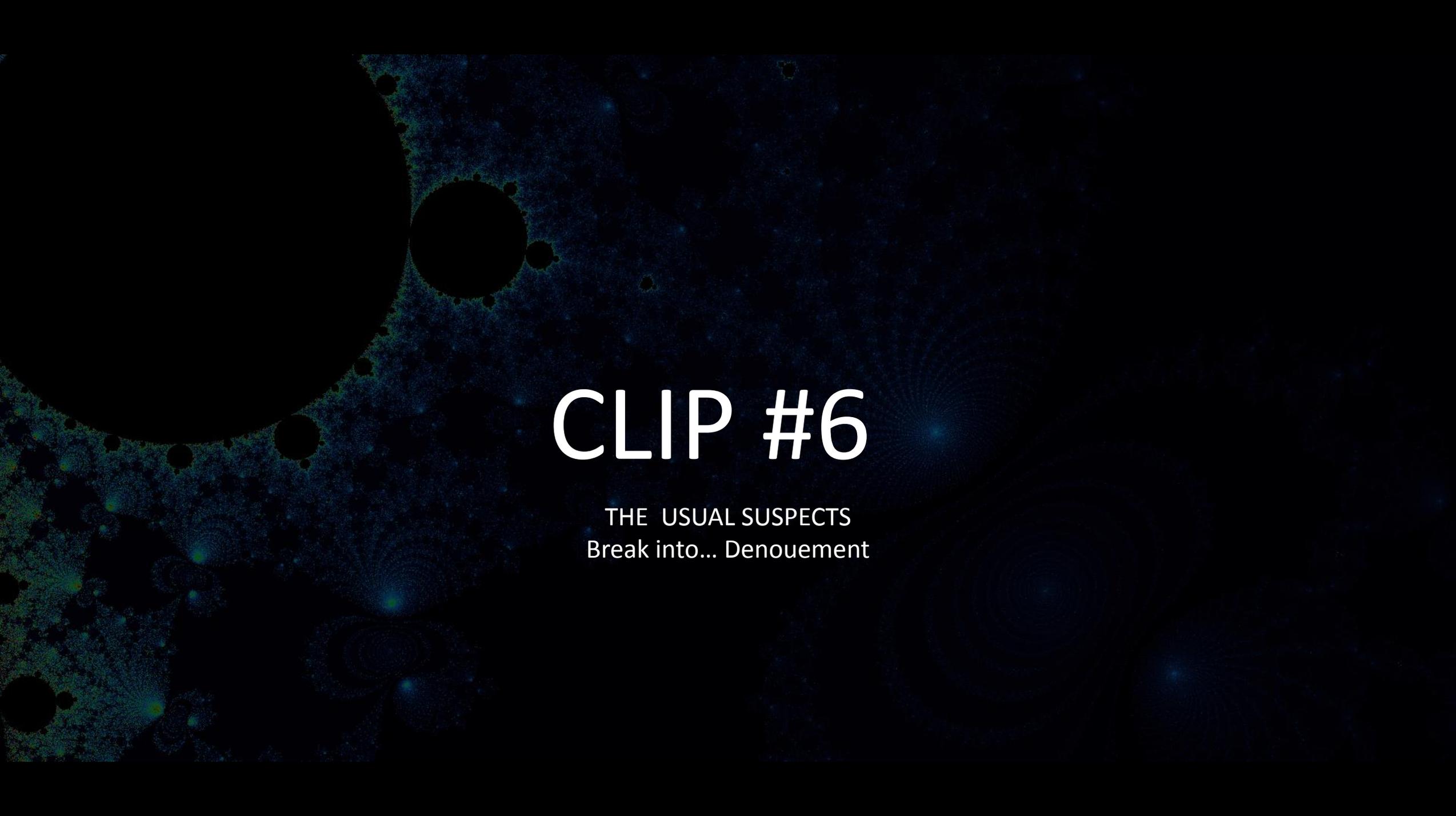
MEMENTO
Denouement

CLOSED → OPEN ENDINGS #4

UP → DOWN

Climax of *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*: Case closed (enough). Kujan lets the “innocent” Verbal Kint go free.

The Denouement Reverses the end of the Climax (indeed the Climax breaks straight into the Denouement with a fabulously clever slow-burn Self-Revelation that has become something of a benchmark for such a Reversal).



CLIP #6

THE USUAL SUSPECTS
Break into... Denouement

CLOSED → OPEN ENDINGS

Climax of THE SHIELD (7x13): The anti-heroes are vanquished. Lem is already dead. Shane has killed himself. Ronnie and Vic are screwed.

The Climax has a Double Reversal (including privileging Vic with information we don't have *aka* reverse dramatic irony). Ronnie thinks they're both free, but Vic has already sold-out Ronnie in order to go free himself. Then there's a Reversal for Vic breaking into the Denouement, which appears to be the "Living Death" Ending, *but then it Reverses again...*



CLIP #7

THE SHIELD

Denouement and break into... lights up

RECAP #1

Ensure your Ending encapsulates your entire story.

In your structure, use FALL → RISE, UP → DOWN, mirror-balance (symmetry) and contrast-balance (asymmetry).

Escalate pace into your Climax.

Hit (and reinforce / magnify) every screenplay element in your Ending: genre, tone, theme, story, plot, character arcs and visual elements.

RECAP #2

Utilise Reversals across your Climax *and Denouement*.

Fulfil (or frustrate!) archetypal intent for your genre, tone, theme, story, characters and visual imagery.

Give your audience something to think / talk about on the way home (and hopefully for much longer than that), but don't confuse them!

CLOSED → OPEN ENDINGS

Climax of TIME BANDITS: The Supreme Being defeats Evil, restores order and forgives the Time Bandits (Redemption). Then the Climax Reverses as it breaks into the Denouement...

So, to conclude...

...enjoy the multiple Reversals here...



CLIP #8

TIME BANDITS
Climax & Denouement

EXERCISES

Exercise #1: Take a story / Ending you hate – change it and use that as the basis for a new story.

Exercise #2: Take an Ending you love and shift story type/genre (e.g. TIME BANDITS becomes THE USUAL SUSPECTS).

Exercise #3: Create a denouement for your current screenplay with zero dialogue (arguably the best kind and certainly the most cinematic).

EXERCISES

Exercise #4: For whatever you're writing, challenge yourself over whether your Ending talks to all of: theme, plot, character, tone and genre, repeated visual imagery, microcosm of the story as a whole.

Exercise #5: Create and write the diametrically opposite ending from what you currently have to see what this reveals.

EXERCISES

Exercise #6: Write your full-length screenplay as a short with *only* plot-linked versions of the Beginning / Midpoint / Ending scenes. Does it still make sense without the rest of it? Are theme, plot, character, tone and genre all 100% clear?

Exercise #7: Write the essence of your story out backwards. Is it as satisfying as when it runs forwards? It should be.