

## Act 1

25% of story

Audience must know the genre within the first few pages.

Set up - something starts to happen.

Usually introduce protagonist first.

Introduce other characters.

Create the world of the story (as well as your take on it)

- what are the rules?

- what is emphasized?

- doesn't have to be realistic. Has to be believable

Introduce antagonist.

Set up a conflict at the end of the first act.

Set up the stakes. Why is it worth it to go after the goal?

What is the decision that must be made in order for the protagonist to go after his/her goal?

The Inciting Incident - takes the character in another direction.

Know what your character wants.

“Somewhere in the first five minutes of a well-structured screenplay, someone (usually not the main character) will pose a question, or make a statement (usually to the main character) that is the theme of the movie.

“Be careful what you wish for,” this person will say, or “Pride goeth before a fall” or “Family is more important than money.” It won't be this obvious, it will be conversational, an off-hand remark that the main character doesn't quite get at the moment – but will have far-reaching and meaningful impact later.

This is the movie's thematic premise.”

## Act 2

Two thirds of the story.

Confrontation.

Throw obstacles in the face of your character.

Protagonist must make choices to pursue goal

-these choices must escalate

At the end of the first act, the protagonist knows that they must confront antagonist.

### Act 3

Fulfill the promise of the set up while still maintaining the concept of surprise. Inevitable but surprising.

Answers the central question.

Climax - final beat.

Audience must believe that the character has changed.

Denumont - aftermath.

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Additional notes:

Just when you think you know where your character is going, think of the opposite thing that could happen. TURN IT

You must be able to tell your story in 3 sentences. Spoken out loud. Do this before you can write.

How to reveal character: Think about what's going on emotionally

Treatment:

*Chinatown* is a beautiful snake devouring its own tail.

Jake Gittes, a former L.A policeman, now owns a private detective agency dealing (mainly) with the maritally unfaithful. Among his clients is the beautiful Mrs Mulwray who suspects her husband Hollis is having an affair. He is L.A.'s Chief Engineer in charge of water – an important position in a desert town in the middle of a drought.

Gittes follows Hollis. At first he seems to only be interested in water. Eventually Gittes stumbles upon Hollis's relationship with a much younger woman - photos of whom soon appear in the tabloids. The plot turns in on itself, when another (real) Mrs Mulwray (Evelyn) appears at Gittes' office suing him for slander. *Who was the other Mrs Mulwray?* Before the matter can be resolved, Mulwray is found dead. Evelyn now hires Gittes to cover for the story of her husband's affair. Gittes is now intrigued and implicated in a cover up, and continues to investigate in order to find out what he has become involved in. At this point we meet Lieutenant Luis Escobar – the police officer investigating the death of Mulwray. From him we learn about Gittes' police officer past – and the difficulties he had solving crime in Chinatown – where connections are oblique and conclusions hard to draw.

Gittes is contacted by Ida Sessions, the actress who originally posed as Mrs Mulwray, she phones Gittes to give him a clue about what is going on. He follows a lead to farmland out west, and discovers there's a scam going on in which land is being starved of water, and bought cheaply in fake names.

Then Gittes meets Evelyn's father – her husband's former business partner, Julian Cross. Cross and Mulwray used to own all the water in L.A.

Cross warns Gittes that his daughter is crazy – and offers him more if he can find the girl Mulwray was having an affair with.

Finally, things seem to be coming together when Gittes finds Mulwray's glasses in a small salt water pond at his home. Plainly the man has been drowned.

Gittes summons the police, and confronts Evelyn, who tells him the glasses are not her husband's. Pressed to explain herself, Evelyn reveals a family secret of incest and cover up. Her husband was not having an affair, but helping her to raise her daughter – who is also her sister – in order to protect her from Cross.

Cross soon turns up, and by the use of his bi-focal glasses, confirms that it is he who has drowned Mulwray and disposed of the body – and it is Cross who has engineered this whole situation in order to get access to his (incestuous) daughter / granddaughter.

In a last minute dash – Gittes tries to help Evelyn and her daughter escape, but as fate would have it, all roads lead to Chinatown – where

connections are oblique, and conclusions hard to draw. Too late to save Evelyn, Gittes finally understands everything.

## Structural Analysis

### 1. The Hook (0 min.)

- We start off with a bang, from first frame. A man is groaning as we see photos of lovemaking. Adultery has been captured on film, taken by the detective who is our hero, Jake, and the groans belong to the cheating woman's husband. We are in the thick of a story from the get-go - even though this is *not* the story that is the focus of the film. But we won't know the movie we've actually seen til the end, which is one of the strengths of this gripping tale.

### 2. Complication (17 min.)

- Jake is hired by a Mrs. Mulray to follow her husband, and what Jake learns - that Mr. Mulray, head of LA's water and power department, is having an affair - makes the paper. Then the *real* Mrs. Mulray shows up, ready to sue Jake. She never hired him - and in fact is not the woman who hired Jake under the pretense of being Mrs. Mulray.

### 3. Hero's call to action (27 min.)

- Jake turns up many fishy things linking Mulray and LA's water issue. Mrs. Mulray is willing to drop the suit but Jake won't let this case go. He needs to know who set him up and why. It's a matter of professional pride.

### 4. Plot Point: Act I (31 min.)

- Mr. Mulray turns up dead, a victim of drowning.

### 5. Plot Point: midpoint (64 min., 82 min.)

- There are two midpoints, it seems to me - a "professional" one regarding the plot at hand but also a "personal" one which gets Jake involved in his investigation at a personal level:
  - Professional (64 min.): Jake gets hired by Mrs. Mulray's father to find the girl that Mulray was having an affair with;
  - Personal (82 min.): Jake becomes romantically involved with Mrs. Mulray.

### 6. Plot Point: Act II (109 min.)

- Mrs. Mulray reveals that "the other woman" is both her sister and her daughter - the child she had by her father.
7. Climax & Resolution (127 min.)
- Trying to help Mrs. Mulray escape with her daughter, Jake only manages to get her killed - just like what happened to him before in Chinatown when he got too personally involved.
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyhs8dKMTN4>

Treatment

## **Sample Treatment**

Now let's take a look at a sample treatment for *Spider*.

### **SPIDER**

#### **Treatment**

"It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye."

- Mum

#### **ACT I**

Along an Australian thoroughfare, traffic moves at a brisk pace on a warm and sunny afternoon. Inside one of the cars, JILL, 20s, sexy in an earthy way, is behind the wheel, while her good-looking but scruffy boyfriend JACK rides shotgun.

As they ride in silence, Jack can't get Jill to even look at him. She maintains an icy gaze straight ahead, making it clear to Jack just how upset she is with him. Trying to break the tension, Jack turns on the radio. But as soon as he does, Jill immediately turns it back off.

Rather than apologizing, Jack tries to get Jill to understand that it was all just a joke. But Jill doesn't want to hear about it. Unable to get her to let go of her anger, Jack opens the door a crack and asks Jill if she wants him out of the car. Jill thinks Jack is just being silly. She lets him know that he always takes things too far – always one step too far.

Jill pulls into a gas station. While she fills up the tank, Jack walks into the station's mini-mart, looking for something to buy – anything that will say "I'm sorry". He buys flowers, a card, some chocolates...and a rubber spider – unable to resist his prankster urges.

While Jill is in the bathroom, Jack gets back in the car, takes the flowers out of the cellophane wrap and haphazardly arranges them on the dashboard and driver's seat. He tapes the card to the rearview mirror, then quickly hides the rubber spider above the driver's side visor.

#### **ACT II**

As Jill leaves the bathroom and returns to the car, Jack waits eagerly, hoping he'll be forgiven. But when Jill gets in the car, she simply tosses the flowers off the driver's seat and removes the card from the rearview mirror without looking at it.

Still pissed at Jack, Jill pulls out of the station as they continue on their way.



Back on the road, Jack keeps trying to get back in Jill's good graces. He unwraps a piece of chocolate and puts it on the dashboard. After a beat, Jill snatches it and pops it in her mouth. But she's still as pissed as ever.

Jack unwraps another piece of chocolate and sets it on the dash. Again, Jill quickly snaps it up and eats it. As much as she wants to stay angry, she finally gives in. It's her love of chocolate that changes her mood.

Things now get playful between them. Jack tempts Jill with another piece of chocolate, but pulls it away just before she can take a bite. Again, he tempts her – and again she snaps at it and misses. This time, a bit of the chocolate rubs off on the tip of her nose.

Jill lowers the visor to check her nose in the vanity mirror, and the rubber spider falls right into her lap. She completely freaks out, causing her to swerve directly toward an oncoming car.

Jack lunges for the wheel and battles to regain control of the car. At the last second, Jack manages to turn the wheel enough to avoid getting into a head-on collision.

### ACT III

Desperate to get away from the spider, Jill screeches on the brakes, pulls over to the side of the road and jumps out of the car. She frantically wipes at her clothes, making sure the spider isn't still on her.

Jack tries to calm her down, telling her the spider isn't real – that it's just a rubber toy. He tosses the spider to Jill to show her. Terrified and still thinking it's real, Jill jumps back, directly into traffic, where she immediately gets hit by a car going full speed.

Jill lies motionless in the street and appears to be dead. The DRIVER who hit Jill jumps out of his car and rushes over to check on her, while Jack stays in his car, too stunned to move.

A concerned PEDESTRIAN runs over and tends to Jill while the driver calls for an ambulance.

Sirens blare as a police car and ambulance arrive on the scene. A COP takes a report from the driver. And while PARAMEDICS treat Jill and give her oxygen, Jack hovers, in a quiet state of panic. One of the paramedics tells Jack to stay back and let them do their job.

Another paramedic holds a syringe and is about to give Jill an injection...when he sees the fake spider. Startled, he jumps back and accidentally stabs Jack right in the eye with the syringe.

Jack, the incorrigible practical joker, finally gets his comeuppance.



