

Making a graphic novel with John Knowles

The Beat Board

Okay so first thing, doesn't have to be an actual board, you can just write your ideas down on a bit of paper. Personally, I find it useful how to use sticky notes on a board so that I can see visually how the story is going where the gaps are and where my hero disappears. But find your own way a way that works for you.

Here are the beats in a typical film script and if you think about it a graphic novel is a film on paper.

Act I

Beat One: Opening page, what is our world, where are we and who is our hero, what is his/her place in this world, King, street cleaner, Jet-pilot, school kid. What is the opening image which defines our 'ordinary world'.

Beat Two: Save the cat - in every story we have to like our hero. Traditionally the hero does something that makes us warm to them (literally saving the cat), but it can be a small human moment that makes us think yeah, like them.

Beat Three: Usually by page ten of the script, we should know the world we are in, who our hero is and then something happens, so think The Hobbit, Gandalf leaves a secret mark on Bilbo Baggin's door... the wheels are set in motion. The dwarves arrive and suddenly Bilbo's world is turned upside down, so we call this the Incitement Incident. What happens to knock your heroes day/world of course.

Beat Four: No Going Back. Your hero has to make a decision, turn around, go home forget everything or... go on the journey/the adventure. He/she has to make a decision, remember your hero is not passive, things may happen to them but they have to decide what to do.

Act II

The fun and games section of any film/story, this in a film is where all the car chases happen, the wacky adventures kick in, let rip go wild, but!!!

Beat Five: At the end of Act II ALL HOPE IS LOST. Yep, it's gone bad, all your mates have gone, you are on your own, nobody loves you, the world hates you and some

nutter who can't breathe properly has blown up your home planet. In short life sucks and you should give up.

Act III

Beat Six: Beginning of Act III. We rally round, you pick yourself up, dust yourself down, rescue your mates and are sure as hell going to get the bad guys.

Beat Seven: resolution, so now everything you set in motion on page one onwards has to resolve, you have to wind up your story and no your character can't just wake up from a dream!!! And remember everyones story has to be resolved, your hero, his/her mates and the bad guy

Beat Eight: The final image - speaks for itself but how often do you get to the end of an epic story and go 'WHAT!!!!!! Is that it! Don't even get me started on Game of Thrones! So make sure your last image/moment is a killer.

Finally some tips:

Bad guys are bad, they are BAD, they do not see the error of their ways and they do not change. Most characters have a character arc, that means they start off somewhere and learn lessons, they change, they grow, bad guys are bad, bad, bad and right up until the very last 'I will destroy the world moment' they learn nothing. Look at every Disney film.

Your hero is the person you see the story through, they may not be a muscle bound hero, they might be a nerd, but, they cannot be passive, things happen around them, but they have to decide, 'hell yeah I'm in'. Passive heroes are dull.