



**JEFFREY ALAN SCHECHTER'S**

**STRUCTURING  
THE  
BULLETPROOF  
ONE HOUR  
PILOT**



**[www.mschechters.com](http://www.mschechters.com)**

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# Stuff I've Gotten Paid to Write

## EPISODIC TELEVISION

Written -- 81 1/2 hours  
Story Edited -- 160 1/2 hours



Writers Guild  
of Canada



BRITISH  
ACADEMY  
OF FILM AND  
TELEVISION  
ARTS



## FEATURES & TV MOVIES

7 Family Features  
5 Animated Features  
4 Action Features  
4 Comedy Features  
1 Sci-Fi Action Feature  
3 Family TV Movies  
2 Drama TV Movies  
1 Action TV Movie  
1 Comedy TV Movie  
1 Action/Fantasy Miniseries  
1 Western Miniseries  
1 Sci-Fi Miniseries  
1 Million Dollar Spec Screenplay  
1 Zombie Western TV Movie

The Big Hole In My Resume:

NO 1 HOUR DRAMA

So I  
plugged the  
hole.

**TAPPED**

PILOT EPISODE

"A Stitch In Time"

An Original Pilot by  
Jeffrey Alan ~~Schechter~~

# Three Questions:

Pilot or Spec?

Episodic or Serial?

Broadcast or Cable?

# Why a Pilot (and not a Spec?)

- 1.Excellent TV Sample without pigeonholing
- 2.Not just a TV Sample
- 3.Shorter
- 4.It's all you.
- 5.It's always pilot season
- 6.You might just sell it

# Why Episodic (and not serial?)

- 1.Easier to pitch the series (you're pitching episodes and not complex arcs)
- 2.Pilot script can be a typical episode and not an origin episode.
- 3.Easier to syndicate for broadcasters
- 4.Less headaches for producers

# Why Cable (and not broadcast?)

1. Edgier material (makes it more memorable)
2. More buyers.
3. More liberating to write, take more chances.
4. Advertisers are migrating to cable (however 48 of the top 50 scripted shows are still on broadcast)



# The Smart Plan?

Write a one hour pilot for an  
EDGY, EPISODIC pay-cable  
show that COULD be toned  
down for broadcast!

# Step #1: Know Your Show

1. What genre is your show? Medical, legal, police, political, etc.
2. Is it cable or broadcast?
3. What format is it? Episodic or serial?
4. How do you get 100 episodes?

# How Do You Get to 100 Episodes?

People watch shows about people, not shows about concepts.

Intriguing people +  
interesting concept = YOUR SERIES

# Step #2: Know Your Characters

Who is your Hero?

Who are your supporting characters?

# Your Hero Must Be Empathetic

1. Hero is strong, the best at something
2. Hero suffered or suffers undeserved misfortune.
3. Hero pets the dog (Hero is nice to animals, kids, or old people).
4. Hero is quirky and/or cool.

# Your Supporting Characters Must Be DISTINCT

**Tony:** Well, I told you about the Brains, I told you about the Guts, I told you about the Muscle, the Scientist, the Politician, the Leader, I told you about every member of the team, except myself, the part I play.

**Saleem:** Which is?

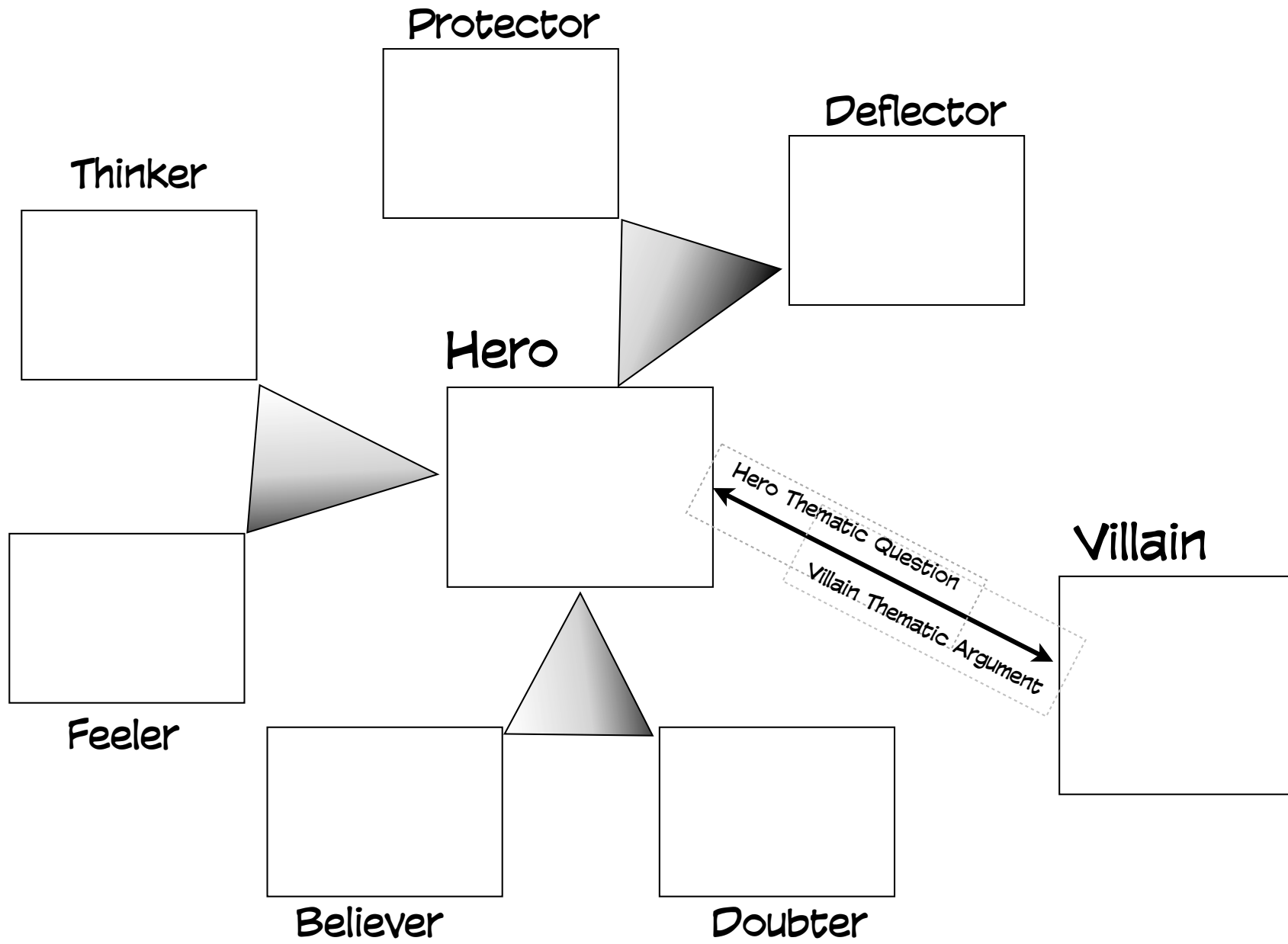
**Tony:** I'm the Wild Card.

NCIS - Season 7, Ep 1

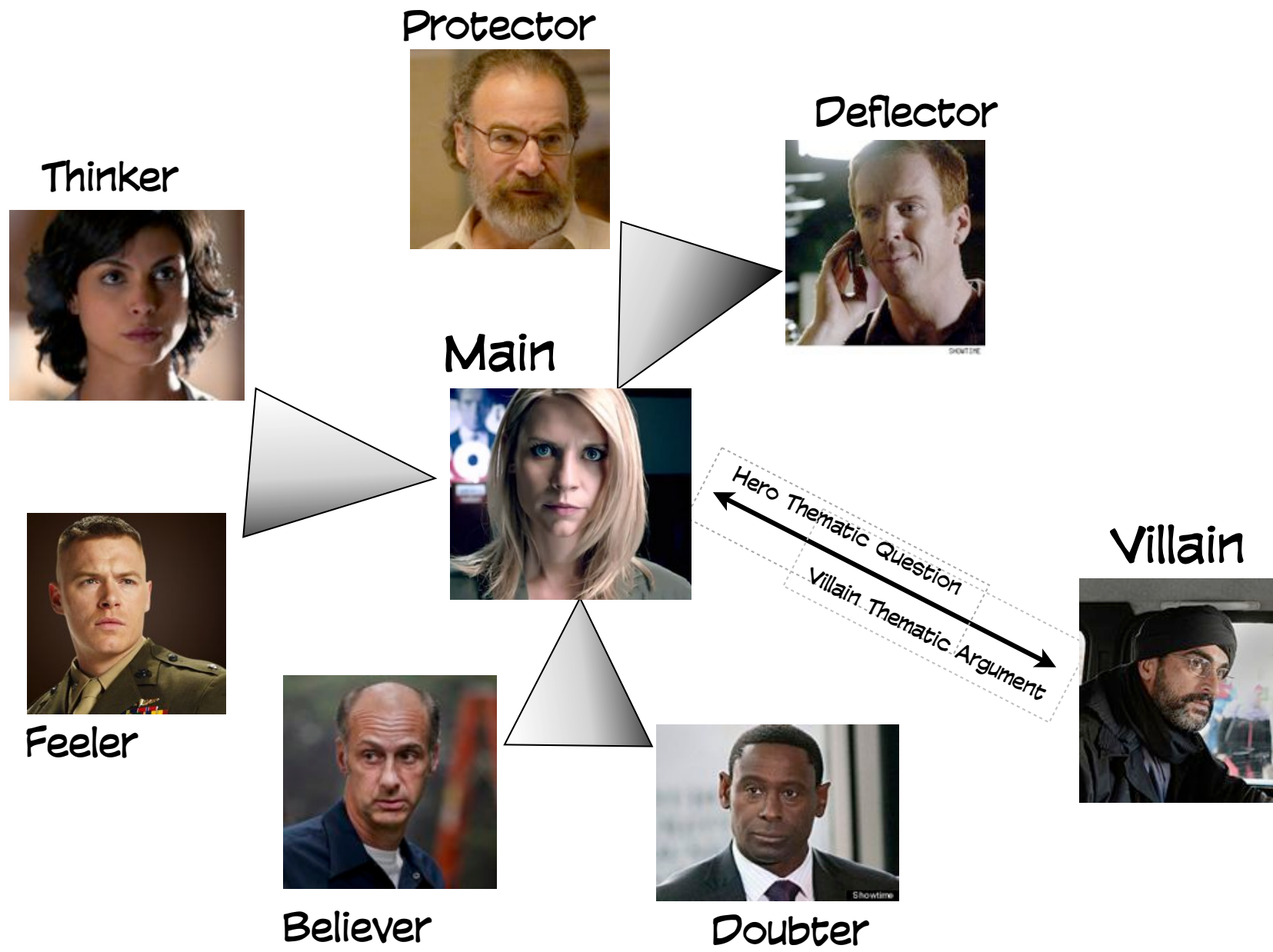
"Truth or Consequences"  
written by Jesse Stern



# Unity of Opposites TV Character Chart



# Unity of Opposites TV Character Chart - HOMELAND Season 1





# Step #3: Know Your Structure

Series

Season

Episode

Your Series, Seasons, and Episodes are  
defined by:

# The Four Archetypes

Orphan

Wanderer

Warrior

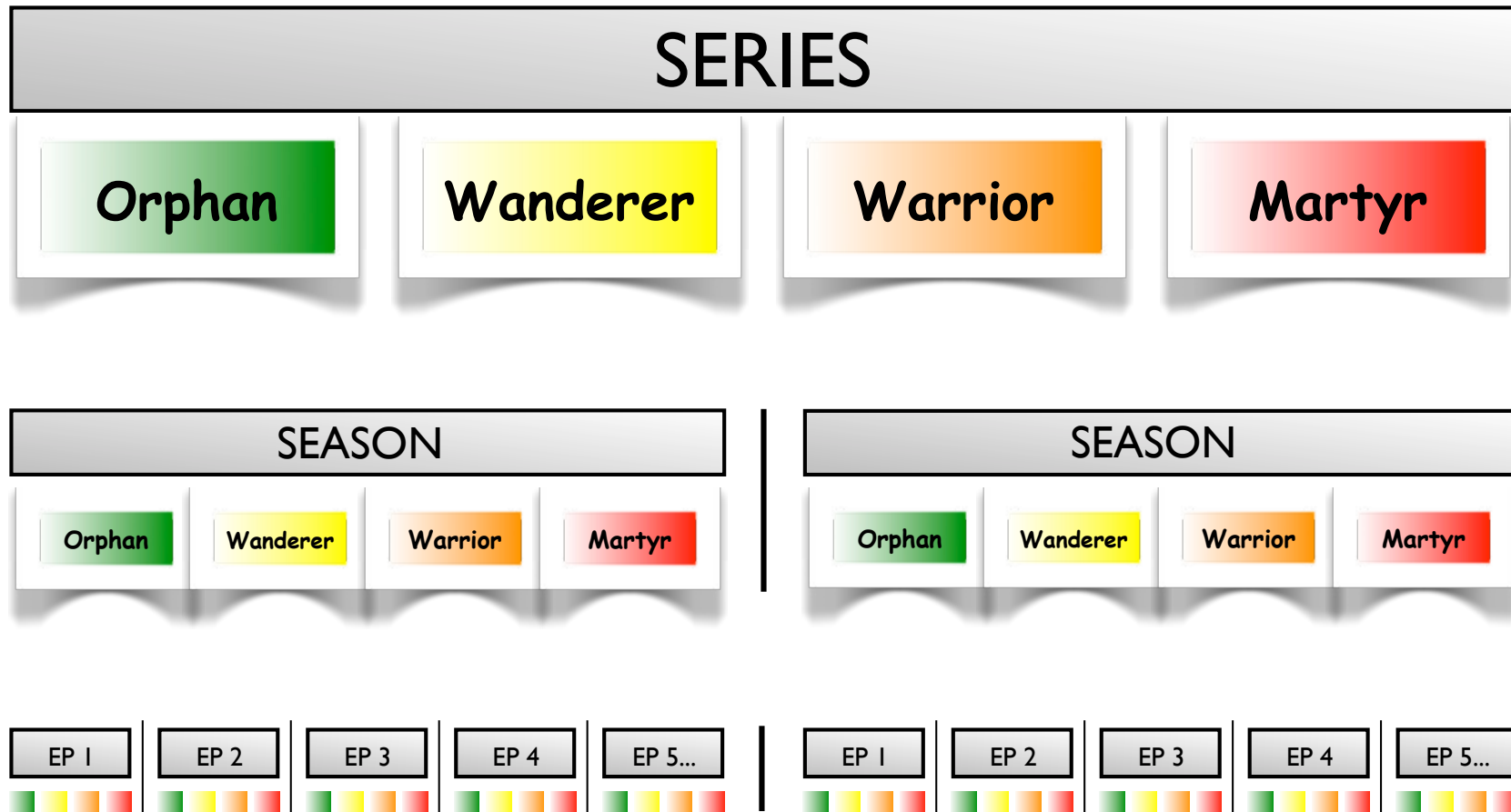
Martyr

# The Four Archetypes

- |             |                                                                    |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Orphan   | Hero is a real or figurative Orphan                                |
| 2. Wanderer | Hero sets out on a journey to resolve Central Question             |
| 3. Warrior  | Hero fights unsuccessfully to resolve Central Question             |
| 4. Martyr   | Hero must be willing to sacrifice self to resolve Central Question |

The **Central Question** is the question that, once it's answered definitively "yes" or "no", the episode, season, or series is over.

# The Four Archetypes



# Step #4: Know Your Series Pitch.

Decode your series with the  
TV QuickPitch.

# The TV QuickPitch Formula

"A flawed or broken person whose life is governed/haunted/plagued by a ghost from the past finds himself or herself involved in an ongoing mission/journey/job only to discover a surprising twist/proficiency that will, with effort and sacrifice, help resolve the ghost from the past.

# The TV QuickPitch Formula

## With the Four Archetypes

"A flawed or broken person whose life is governed/haunted/plagued by a ghost from the past (ORPHAN) finds himself or herself involved in an ongoing mission/journey/job (WANDERER) only to discover a surprising twist/proficiency (WARRIOR) that will, with effort and sacrifice, help resolve the ghost from the past (MARTYR).



# The TV QuickPitch Formula

## With the Four Archetypes

"An absentee father whose life is plagued by mistakes (ORPHAN) finds himself sent back in time at random intervals (WANDERER), only to discover he's been sent on a mission to protect the world (WARRIOR), and along the way will be given the opportunity to correct the ills of his past (MARTYR)."

# The TV QuickPitch Formula

## With the Four Archetypes

"An aggressive CIA agent whose life is plagued by bipolar disorder finds herself trying to prove that a war hero is actually a terrorist (ORPHAN) only to discover that the only way to prove it is to get close to him which she does (WANDERER). She is surprised when she develops feelings for him, and now lives a double-life caught between her emotions and her desire to discover the truth (WARRIOR) and is ultimately willing to risk her career to both protect him and stop the impending attack. (MARTYR).

# Step #5: Know Your Episodic Structure

## The Four Act Structure

Teaser - 2-4 pages

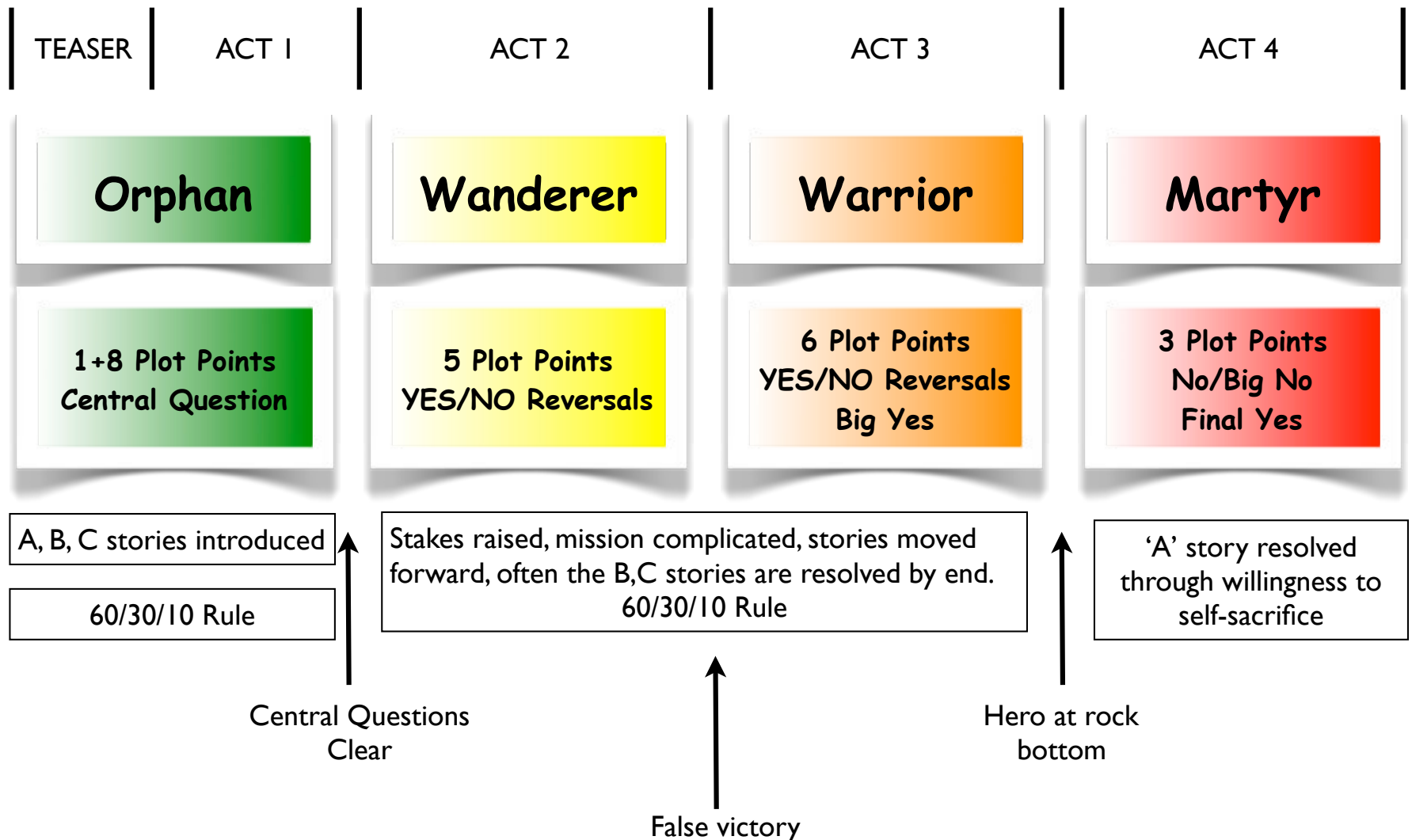
Act 1 - 13 pages

Act 2 - 13 pages

Act 3 - 13 pages

Act 4 - 13 pages

# The 4 Act Structure



# MY STORY CAN BEAT UP YOUR STORY!

One Hour Pilot Template (EPISODIC)

SERIES TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

EPISODE TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

## ***CENTRAL QUESTION(S):***

'A' QUESTION (Main Goal) – \_\_\_\_\_?

'B' QUESTION – \_\_\_\_\_?

'C' QUESTION -- \_\_\_\_\_?

'D' EMOTIONAL/SPIRITUAL -- \_\_\_\_\_?

	ORPHAN	TEASER
1	<i>'A' question introduced</i>	
		END ON A STRONG BUTTON

	<b>ORPHAN (cont)</b>	<b>ACT ONE</b>
2	<i>First lead. (A)</i>	
3	<i>First discovery (A)</i>	
4	<i>Mystery and/or Encounter (B, C)</i>	
5	<i>Emotional component (D)</i>	
6	<i>Mystery escalates (C)</i>	
7	<i>'A' question connects to mystery (A, B)</i>	
8	<i>Investigation complication (A, B)</i>	
9	<i>Solving 'A' question more complicated than it appeared. (A)</i>	
	<b>CENTRAL QUESTION(S)</b>	
		<b>END ON A STRONG BUTTON</b>

	<b>WANDERER</b>	<b>ACT TWO</b>
10	<i>Yes (A)</i>	
11	<i>No (A)</i>	
12	<i>Yes (A,B)</i>	
13	<i>No (B)</i>	
	<b>WARRIOR</b>	
14	<i>Yes (C)</i>	
		<b>END ON A STRONG BUTTON</b>

	<b>WARRIOR (cont)</b>	<b>ACT THREE</b>
15	<i>No (A or B)</i>	
16	<i>Yes (A, B)</i>	
17	<i>No (A)</i>	
18	<i>Yes (A, B, or B, C)</i>	
19	<i>No (A) (Investigation in peril)</i>	
20	<i>Big Yes (A, B resolved, C resolved)</i>	
		<b>END ON A STRONG BUTTON</b>



	<b>MARTYR</b>	<b>ACT FOUR</b>
21	<i>No (A)</i>	
22	<i>Big No (A)</i>	
23	<i>Act four solution</i>  <i>Final Yes (A resolved)</i>	
		<b>END ON A STRONG BUTTON THAT RESETS THE SERIES</b>



# The Big Secret

(not for the faint of heart)

Write something unproduceable.

Make it the most extreme expression of  
whatever it is.

**“What piece of ground do you stand on that  
nobody else stands on? Write about that.”**

***Carl Reiner***

# Pre-Write Checklist

- ✓ Is my concept original? Have I done my research?
- ✓ Is my Hero sympathetic?
- ✓ Are there a critical mass of interesting, supporting characters?
- ✓ Are the characters connected through the Unity of Opposites.
- ✓ Do I have a clear Central Question for the series? The season?  
The pilot?
- ✓ Can I pitch the series quickly and cleanly with the Four Archetypes?
- ✓ Have I role-modeled a successful show?



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