

# Arc of Suspence

How to build a captivating story

# What is an "arc of suspense"

- A structural progression in epic stories
- Often used when analysing a story, but authors also think about it when structuring their stories
- It is an effective way of building tension towards an escalation point



# How to build the arc

Stages that a story goes through

# 1-Establishing and foreshadowing

- Setting the stage
- Hinting at problems to come



## 2-Suspense begins

- Conflict starts
- Action starts

# 3-Tension escalates

- Danger looms
- Then loosens
  - Slight reprieve, breather



## 4- Point of no return

- Critical point
  - Can increase or release tension

# 5-Sometimes a false payoff

- False alarm



# 6-Payoff

- Good or bad
  - Resolved
  - Moves to the next level or “to be continued”

# Where is the arc used

Examples of the arc



# Used everywhere

- Novels
- Short stories
- Comics
- Animation
- Film
- TV-series
- Documentaries (sometimes)
- Video advertisement
- Games
- And much, much more

# Novels and short stories

- *Lord of the Rings - Fellowship of the Ring book 1*

1. Establishing and foreshadowing - The Shire
2. Suspense begins - The flight from the Shire
3. Tension escalates - The inn in Bree
4. Point of no return- Frodo is stabbed by a dark rider
5. Payoff - Frodo is drowning in the river near Rivendell but the dark riders cannot follow

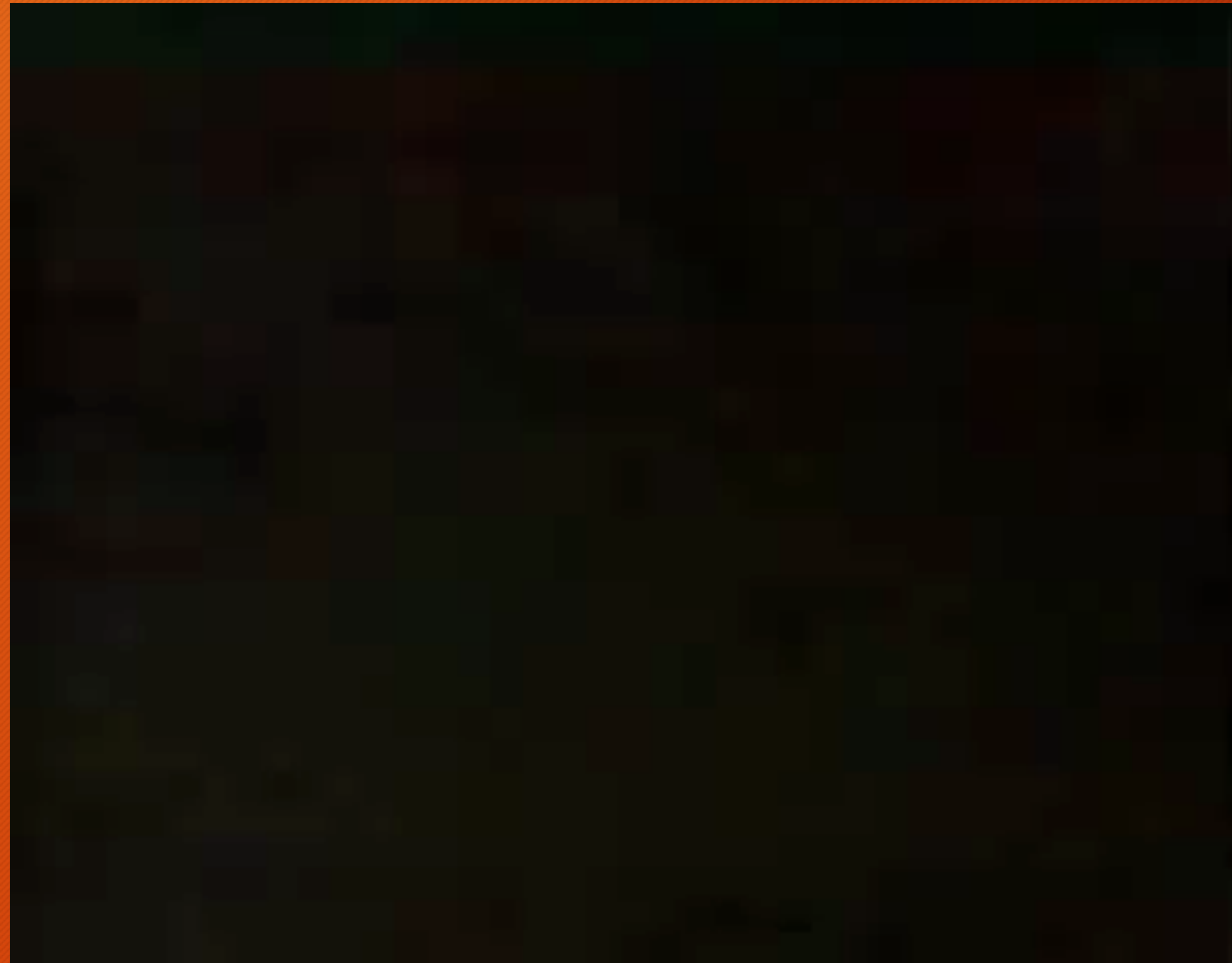


# Comics



- Establishing and foreshadowing
- Turning point
- Payoff

# Video advertisement





# Games

- *Final Fantasy VII*

1. Establishing and foreshadowing - The Mako reactor
2. Suspense begins - Mission for the resistance
3. Tension escalates - The Shinra president is killed
4. Point of no return - Aerith is killed
5. Sometimes a false payoff - Fight against Sephiroth
6. Payoff - The planet pushes Meteor back

# Film - Exercise

- View the animated film *Ghost in the Shell* and place the "arc steps" on scenes in the film on the handout (can also be found on Fronter if you do not come to the lesson and want to do this at home)



# Assignment for next time

- Describe how chosen books, films etc. follow the arc
- You may work in groups (2-3 persons)

# Assignment for next time

- Make the script for a short advertisement video (max 2min) for a company making shoes.
- The script must fulfill (most of) the arc steps.
  - You should be able to argue why it does.
- You may work in groups (2-3 persons)



# Sources

- **Theory**

- <https://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com/2012/03/08/guest-blogger-jodie-renner-heightening-the-suspense-part-i/>
- <http://www.url-der.org/xer-arc.html>

- **Scripts**

- <http://www.ffcompendium.com/h/ff7story.shtml>
- [http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie\\_scripts/g/ghost-in-the-shell-script.html](http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/g/ghost-in-the-shell-script.html)