

GLADIATOR (2000)

screenplay by David Franzoni and John Logan and William Nicholson
story by David Franzoni
directed by Ridley Scott
running time: 149 minutes

BASIC SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

PROTAGONIST: Maximus, 30s, former General in the Roman army turned slave / gladiator

CHARACTERIZATION/MAIN MISBEHAVIOR: Warrior / Distrust of politicians

EXTERNAL GOAL: To kill Commodus

INTERNAL GOAL: To reunite with his family in the afterlife

MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT: Commodus

THEME(S): Faith in the Afterlife / Democracy / Slavery vs Freedom / Mortality

CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION: Will Maximus kill Commodus, give Rome back to the people, and reunite with his family in the afterlife?

ENDING: Maximus, though suffering a fatal wound prior to battle, kills Commodus at the Colosseum and gives Rome back to the people. He dies and reunites with his family in the afterlife.

ARC: Maximus goes from a general with no interest in politics, to a gladiator who gives Rome back to the people.

STORY ENGINES

ACT I

Leading the Roman army, Maximus slaughters the last of the Germanic tribes. As a reward for his victory, he asks Emperor Marcus Aurelius to return home to his family. Later, Marcus offers to make him Caesar, but Marcus is killed by his son Commodus in a jealous rage. Maximus attempts to overtake Commodus, but is arrested by Praetorian guards before he can act and is informed his family will die. Maximus kills his executioners and races to save his family.

ACT II-A

Maximus finds family murdered before he can arrive to protect them. He's captured by slave traders and turned into a gladiator. He fights so well, popular with the crowds, he earns the opportunity to fight in Rome at the Colosseum.

ACT II-B

At the Colosseum, Maximus leads his fellow gladiators to victory where they were sure to lose. Commodus comes to the arena floor to congratulate him and Maximus is forced to reveal himself. He's so popular, the crowd spares his life. Later, Commodus matches him against the only undefeated gladiator in Roman history, but Maximus wins. On his way out of the battle, Maximus spots his old servant Cicero in the crowd and instructs him to assemble his men. He has Cicero tell Commodus' sister, Lucilla, he will meet with her senator.

ACT III

Lucilla buys Maximus' freedom so he can overtake the Emperorship, but is forced to give away the details when Commodus threatens her son's life. Maximus is arrested by Praetorian guards and Cicero is executed. After being stabbed in the back by Commodus, Maximus is forced to into one last battle at the Colosseum versus Commodus. Maximus kills Commodus, gives Rome back to the people and reunites with his family in the afterlife.

FULL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

ACT I

2 - OPENING: Smoky sepia tones...

Superimpose: At the height of its power the Roman Empire was vast, stretching from the deserts of Africa to the borders of Northern England.

Over one quarter of the world's population lived and died under the rule of the Caesars.

In the winter of 180 A.D., Emperor Marcus Aurelius' twelve year campaign against the barbarian tribes in Germania was drawing to an end.

Just one final stronghold stands in the way of Roman victory and the promise of peace throughout the empire.

2 - OPENING IMAGES: In a wheat field, a soldier -- who we later discover is Maximus -- glides his fingers across the top of wheat. This imagery reflects the afterlife.

3 - MAXIMUS overlooks a scorched battlefield in Germania.

4 - Roman troops assemble for battle against the Germanic tribes. Maximus, commanding General in the Roman army's Felix Regiment, waits for their negotiator.

5 - A Germanic tribe leader appears out of the woods with the head of the negotiator: there will be no negotiating. **QUINTUS**, one of Maximus' lieutenants, laughs...

QUINTUS

People should know when they're conquered.

MAXIMUS

Would you, Quintus?

(beat)

Would I?

6 - Maximus leaves for battle, commanding Quintus to "unleash hell" at his signal.

7 - Buried in the woods, Maximus addresses his troops, positioned to flank the Germanic tribes.

MAXIMUS

Fratres, three weeks from now I will be harvesting my crops. Imagine where you will be, and it will be so. Hold the lines, stay with me. If you find yourself alone, riding in green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled, for you are in Elysium, and you're already dead! Brothers, what we do in life echoes in eternity.

8 - Maximus sends the signal. The catapults and archers send flames, arrows and spears into the tribes positioned on the opposing tree line.

9-13 - Maximus and his troops attack from the rear flank and slaughter the Germanic tribes.

13 - **EMPEROR MARCUS AURELIUS** observes his army from the distance.

14 - **COMMODUS** and his sister, **LUCILLA**, travel to visit their father, Marcus Aurelius, in Germania. Commodus believes his father may be dying and will name him the new Caesar.

16 - INCITING INCIDENT: After the battle has ended, Marcus Aurelius approaches Maximus, proud of his victory. He asks Maximus what reward he wishes to have and Maximus replies, "to go home."

19 - Commodus introduces Maximus to **SENATOR GAUIS** and **SENATOR FALCO**. Commodus laughs at the thought of Rome as a republic.

SENATOR FALCO

Where do you stand, General? Emperor or Senate?

MAXIMUS

A soldier has the advantage of being able to look his enemy in the eye, Senator.

SENATOR GAUIS

Well, with an army behind you, you could be extremely political.

20 - Commodus approaches Maximus, requesting allegiance against saving Rome from the politicians. Maximus offends Commodus, claiming he intends to return home to his family once the Emperor releases him.

22 - Marcus Aurelius approaches Lucilla regarding Commodus, saying only that he will need her now more than ever (hints at Marcus appointing Maximus as the new Caesar).

25 - Maximus and Marcus Aurelius talk candidly about Rome's conquests.

MARCUS AURELIUS

How will the world speak my name in years to come? Will I be known as the philosopher? The warrior?

(beat)

The tyrant?

(beat)

Or will I be the Emperor who gave Rome back her true self?

27 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD: Marcus Aurelius asks one last duty of Maximus before he returns home:

MARCUS AURELIUS

I want you to become the protector of Rome after I die.
I will empower you to one end alone: to give power back
to the people of Rome and end the corruption that has
crippled it.

(beat)

Do you accept this great honor that I have offered you?

MAXIMUS

With all my heart, no.

MARCUS AURELIUS

Maximus, that is why it must be you.

28 - When Maximus asks about Commodus, Marcus insists he should not rule, as he is not a moral man. He further states that Maximus is the son he should have had.

30 - Lucilla approaches Maximus as he leaves her father's tent, commenting on how her father favors him. Subtext reflects they had a relationship that ended badly.

31 - Maximus prays for his family.

32 - Maximus informs his servant they may not be able to go home after all.

34 - Marcus informs Commodus that Maximus will become the new Emperor and receive his powers, insisting Rome will become a republic again. Commodus is devastated.

COMMODOUS

You wrote to me once, listing the four chief virtues: wisdom,
justice, fortitude, and temperance. As I read the list, I knew
I had none of them. But I have other virtues, Father: ambition,
that can be a virtue when it drives us to excel; resourcefulness;
courage, perhaps not on the battlefield, but there are many
forms of courage; devotion, to my family, to you. But none of
my virtues were on your list. Even then it was as if you didn't
want me for your son.

36 - Marcus believes all of Commodus' faults are a result of his failure as a father. He seeks his son's embrace. In turn, Commodus suffocates his father.

38 - END OF ACT ONE TURN (external): Maximus is called to the Emperor. When he arrives, he discovers Marcus Aurelius dead and Commodus has assumed power as the new Caesar. Commodus asks for Maximus' hand as sign of loyalty, but Maximus refuses.

39 - Lucilla slaps Commodus. A beat and she kisses his hand, accepting him as the new Caesar.

40 - DECISION: Maximus alerts his trusted servant, **CICERO**, to wake the senators, as he needs their counsel regarding the slain Emperor. A brief moment later, Quintus appears and arrests Maximus, ordering the Praetorian guards to ride until dawn and execute him.

40 - TURN (internal): Maximus begs Quintus to look after his family, but Quintus contends his family will meet him in the afterlife.

41 - DECISION (internal): Maximus kills his executioners and races to save his family in Spain.

ACT II-A

42-44 - Maximus races to Spain to save his family.

44 - Roman soldiers appear, trampling Maximus' son with their horses.

45 - Maximus returns home to find his wife and child crucified and burnt, his servants killed, and his fields burned to the ground.

46 - Maximus buries his wife and child. Passed out at their graves, he is captured by slave traders.

47 - In a caged transport, Maximus comes to, finding maggots in his open wound. **JUBA**, a Numidian slave, instructs him to leave the maggots alone, as they will clean his wound.

48 Juba places poultice in Maximus' wound.

JUBA

Don't die. They'll feed you to the lions. They're worth more than we are.

48 - The slave traders, along with Maximus, arrive in the Zucchabar, a Roman province.

50 - **PROXIMO** buys Maximus, plus many others, from the slave trader.

51 - Proximo addresses his slaves, informing them they are to be gladiators.

PROXIMO

I am Proximo. I shall be closer to you for the next few days, which will be the last of your miserable lives, than the bitch of a mother that brought you screaming into this world. I did not pay good money for you for your company, I paid it so that I could profit from your death. And as your mother was there at your beginning, so shall I be there at your end. And when you die, your transition shall be to the sound of...Gladiators, I salute you.

53 - Maximus refuses to train.

54 - Juba asks Maximus why he refuses to fight. Maximus smiles; scraping the Legion Mark (SPQR) from his arm with a sharp stone.

55 - Below the arena, Proximo addresses his slaves turned gladiators for their first fight.

PROXIMO

Ultimately, we're all dead men. Sadly, we cannot chose how, but we can decide how we meet that end in order that we are remembered as men.

56-59 - FIRST TRIAL: In his first match as a gladiator, Maximus teams with Juba and the men are victorious.

61 - Commodus enters Rome like conquering hero. The senators inform him of many matters that need his attention.

63 - Commodus meets with the senators on the Senate floor. They challenge his ability to rule. Lucilla steps in before things get out of hand, insisting Commodus will do "all that Rome requires."

64 - Commodus meets in private with Lucilla, furious over his treatment in the Senate. He criticizes his father, insisting that his wars achieved nothing, but the people still loved him. Commodus wishes to win over the people.

Commodus will give Rome a vision of greatness and they will love him for it.

66 - Senators Gaius and **SENATOR GRACCHUS** are critical of Commodus and his 150 days of games.

GRACCHUS

I think he knows what Rome is. Rome is the mob. He will conjure magic for them and they will be distracted. He will take away their freedom and they still they'll roar. The beating heart of Rome is not the marble floor of the Senate, it is the sand of the Colosseum. He will bring them death, and they will love him for it.

68 - The crowd cheers, calling Maximus "Spaniard." In the arena, Maximus defeats five opponents at once. He shouts to the crowd, "are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?" Spitting on the ground, he leaves the arena and the crowd still cheers, "Spaniard, Spaniard, Spaniard..."

70 - MIDPOINT: Proximo tells Maximus they will be traveling to Rome to compete at the Colosseum. Holding a wooden sword, Proximo reveals he was once a gladiator who won his freedom from Marcus Aurelius...

PROXIMO

Long time ago, the old Emperor Marcus Aurelius presented me with a RADIUS. It's just a wooden sword, a symbol for your freedom. He touched me on the shoulder once, and I was free.

MAXIMUS

You knew Marcus Aurelius?

Maximus asks loudly, laughing as he speaks, doubting that Proximo could have known such a man.

PROXIMO

I did not say that I knew him. I said he touched me on the shoulder.

Maximus comes closer to Proximo, lowering his voice as he speaks.

MAXIMUS

You asked me what I want. I, too, want to stand in front of the Emperor, as you did.

73 - Juda talks about his home and family with Maximus. Realistic about his mortality, Juda insists he will meet them in the afterlife, but they will not die for many years. Maximus believes his wife and son are already waiting for him.

Maximus has nothing to lose and does not fear death.

ACT II-B

75 - In Rome, Maximus arrives at the Colosseum with Proximo and the gladiators. Proximo instructs Maximus to "win the crowd."

78 - Commodus seeks Lucilla's opinion regarding his announcement on the dissolution of the Senate. Dodging the question, she instructs him to rest. He asks her to sleep with him, but she refuses.

79 - Proximo discovers his gladiators were chosen for the battle of Carthage -- a massacre. He attempts to negotiate another game, telling them to use beggars and thieves, but gets nowhere.

81 - Lucius approaches Maximus. He's a fan of The Spaniard. Maximus discovers his identity as Lucius leaves with a servant.

84 - As **CASSIUS**, the announcer, introduces the game's setup, Maximus speaks to his fellow gladiators:

MAXIMUS

Whatever comes out of these gates, we have a better chance of survival if we work together. Do you understand? We stay together, we survive.

85 - Their competition comes out of the gates in chariots. Maximus has his men hold their ground and huddle in the center of the arena.

86 - Maximus and his men overturn a chariot and the game turns in their favor.

86-89 - Maximus and his men work together and defeat their competitors.

89 - Pleasantly surprised with the game, Commodus informs Cassius he wishes to speak with the one they call The Spaniard.

90 - Praetorian guards surround the gladiators and command they drop their weapons. Commodus appears with Lucius, congratulating the Spaniard on his victory.

91 - Turning his back, Maximus offends Commodus. When prompted to reveal himself, he does...

MAXIMUS

My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius. Commander of the armies of the North, vernal of the Felix Legions, loyal secant to the true Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife, and I will have my vengeance in this life or the next.

92 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER: Commodus is in shock. Praetorian guards assume attack positions, but the crowd roars, "Live, Live, Live!"

Maximus wins the crowd.

93 - Commodus, needing the approval of the people, spares Maximus' life.

96 - Commodus asks Lucilla for her opinion on the situation with Maximus.

COMMODUS

They lied to me in Germania. They told me he was dead. If they life to me, they don't respect me. If they don't respect me, then how can they ever love me?

LUCILLA

Then you must let the legions know that treachery will not go unpunished.

COMMODUS

Sister, I wouldn't want to be your enemy.

98 - Lucilla meets in secrecy with Maximus. He questions her allegiance to Commodus, but soon discovers she lives in fear for her son. She attempts to setup a meeting for Maximus and the senators, but he doesn't believe he can make a difference, as he is nothing more than a slave that can die at any moment.

101 - Maximus eats with Juba and Hagen. Maximus, fearing his food has been poisoned, hesitates before tasting, but Hagen eats it. They share a laugh when Hagan pretends to be poisoned.

JUBA

You have a great name. He must kill your name before he kills you.

103 - Marking the 64th day of games, Commodus brings Tigris of Gaul out of retirement -- the only undefeated gladiator in Roman history -- to kill Maximus.

104 - Maximus enters the arena to thunderous applause. Commodus sits with Lucilla, displeased at the crowd's reaction.

COMMODUS

They embrace him as one of their own.

LUCILLA

The mob is fickle, brother. He'll be forgotten in a month.

COMMODUS

No, much sooner than that. It has been arranged.

106 - Maximus begins his one-on-one match with Tigris of Gaul. As extra spectacle, chained tigers appear on the arena floor, waiting for a gladiator to get within striking distance.

107 - Maximus impales a tiger with his sword, but falls to the ground with the tiger on top of him. From the ground, he manages to grab Tigris's own hatchet and spike him in the foot.

108 - Maximus has Tigris on his back, defeated. The crowd shouts for blood, but Commodus overrules it. The crowd dubs him "Maximus the merciful." Infuriated, Commodus leaves his box.

110 - Roman guards surround Maximus on the arena floor. Commodus appears, antagonizing Maximus.

COMMODUS

They tell me your son squealed like a girl when they nailed him to the cross. And your wife, moaned like a whore when they ravaged her again, and again, and again.

MAXIMUS

(exhibiting restraint)

The time for honoring yourself will soon be at end, Highness.

111 - END OF ACT TWO TURN: Maximus leaves the arena. On his way out, he spots his old servant, Cicero. They talk briefly and Maximus instructs him to tell his men that he is alive. Cicero hands him a leather pouch.

Conscious of his mortality, Maximus knows he can use his troops for political purposes to buy his freedom and take down Commodus.

112 - Back at the gladiator school, Maximus opens the pouch and finds figurines of his wife and son. Juba consoles him, lifting his spirits.

114 - Commodus is furious with the crowd's loyalty to Maximus. He and Senator Falco conspire to kill Maximus. They have every senator followed. Lucilla overhears their plans.

FALCO

I have told of a certain sea snake which has a very unusual method of attracting its prey. It will lie at the bottom of the ocean as if wounded, then its enemies will approach and yet it will lie quite still and then its enemies will take little bites of it and yet it remains still.

116 - DECISION: Under Maximus' orders, Cicero poses as a beggar and informs Lucilla that Maximus will meet with her senator.

ACT III

117 - Lucilla brings Senator Gracchus to Maximus at the gladiator school. Maximus requests Gracchus buy his freedom so he can assemble his men to overtake Commodus.

118 - Gracchus questions whether Maximus will give Rome to people once he assumes power.

GRACCHUS

So, once all of Rome is yours, you'll just give it back to the people? Tell me why.

MAXIMUS

Because that was the last wish of a dying man. I will kill Commodus. The fate of Rome, I leave to you.

GRACCHUS

Marcus Aurelius trusted you. His daughter trusts you. I will trust you. But we have little time. Give me two days and I will buy your freedom. And you, you stay alive or I'll be dead.

120 - Maximus asks Proximo for his freedom, insisting he will be paid, but Proximo won't take the risk. Maximus reminds Proximo that Commodus killed the man who set him free.

120 - Gracchus is arrested by Roman troops.

123 - Commodus tells Lucilla of Gracchus' arrest.

125 - With Gracchus' arrest, Lucilla meets Maximus, telling him she has bought his freedom from Proximo and arranged for him to reunite with Cicero.

MAXIMUS

You risk too much.

LUCILLA

I have much to pay for.

MAXIMUS

You have nothing to pay for. You love your son. You are strong for him.

LUCILLA

I am tired of being strong. My brother hates all the world. You, most of all.

MAXIMUS

Because your father chose me.

LUCILLA

No, because my father loved you. And because I love you.

126 - Lucilla kisses Maximus.

127 - Commodus wakes to the sound of Lucius play sword fighting with his servants. Commodus approaches and Lucius proclaims he is pretending to be "Maximus, the savior of Rome." Commodus asks who told him such a thing. Lucius whispers in his ear.

127 - Lucilla does not find Lucius in his bedroom at night. Lucius's servant informs Lucilla that Lucius is with Commodus.

129 - Lucilla finds Commodus telling stories to Lucius. He asks Lucilla to join them and continues...

COMMODUS

If you're very good, tomorrow night I'll tell you the story of Emperor Claudius. He was betrayed by those closest to him. By his own blood. They whispered in the dark corners and went out late at night and conspired and conspired...

129 - Lucilla knows...

COMMODUS

But the Emperor knew they were up to something. He knew they were busy little bees. And one night he sat down with one of them and he looked at her and he said, 'tell me what you have been doing, busy little bee, or I shall strike down those dearest to you. You shall watch as I bathe in their blood.' And the Emperor was heartbroken. The little bee had wounded him more deeply than anyone had ever done. And what do you think happened then, Lucius?

LUCIUS

I don't know, uncle.

COMMODUS

(looking at Lucilla)

The little bee told him everything.

Tears of fear slowly roll down Lucilla's face.

130 - An assassin releases a red coral snake into the bed of Senator Gaius.

131 - Outside the gladiator school, Praetorian guards order Proximo to open the gates. Proximo walks past them and hands Maximus the keys to get away.

131 - The Praetorian guards break down the gates of the gladiator school.

131 - Maximus assembles the gladiators. They agree to fight the guards to allow his escape.

132 - POINT OF NO RETURN: Maximus escapes; finds his sword and shield.

133 - Proximo and Hagen are killed.

134 - Maximus arrives at the gates of the city and finds Cicero on horseback. When Cicero sees Maximus, he screams a warning. The horse bolts and Cicero is hanged by the rope around his neck. Maximus attempts to save him, but archers shoot arrows into Cicero's chest. Maximus is surrounded by Praetorian guards. There is no escape.

135 - Senator Falco informs Commodus their plan has worked.

COMMODUS

And what of my nephew and what of his mother? Shall they share her lover's fate, or should I be merciful? Commodus the merciful. Lucius will stay with me now and if his mother so much as looks at me in a manner that displeases me, he will die. And if she decides to be noble and take her own life, he will die. And, as for you...

(looking at Lucilla)

you will love me as I have loved you. You will provide me with an heir of pure blood so that Commodus and his progeny will rule for 1,000 years.

136 - The Colosseum crowd shouts "Maximus." Below the arena floor, Maximus is chained. His conspirators are in cells behind him.

137 - Commodus enters; approaches Maximus...

COMMODUS

They call for you. The general who became a slave. The slave who became a gladiator. The gladiator who defied an Emperor. A striking story. Now the people want to know how the story ends. Only a famous death will do. What could be more glorious than to challenge the Emperor himself in the great arena?

MAXIMUS

You would fight me?

COMMODUS

Why not? Do you think I am afraid?

MAXIMUS

I think you have been afraid all your life.

COMMODUS

Unlike Maximus the invincible, who knows no fear?

MAXIMUS

(laughing)

I knew a man once who said, 'death smiles at us all. All that man can do is smile back.'

COMMODUS

I wonder. Did your friend smile at his own death?

MAXIMUS

You must know. He was your father.

139 - Commodus embraces Maximus and stabs him in the back. He instructs Quintus to strap on Maximus' armor and conceal the wound.

140 - Maximus and Commodus rise through the arena floor for battle.

140-142 - Surrounded by Praetorian guards, Maximus and Commodus fight.

142 - Maximus disarms Commodus, but is too weak for the kill shot. Commodus instructs Quintus to give him a sword, but Quintus refuses, instructing the guards to sheath their swords.

142 - Maximus drops his sword and drifts into the afterlife. Commodus pulls a dagger and attacks Maximus. At the last possible second, Maximus comes back and fights...

143 - CLIMAX (external): Using Commodus' own hand, Maximus stabs Commodus in the neck with the dagger. Commodus falls to the ground, dead.

144 - Maximus drifts into the afterlife again, walking toward his family's home...

145 - Quintus speaks to Maximus, bringing him out of the afterlife. Maximus uses all his remaining energy to speak...

MAXIMUS

Quintus, free my men. Senator Gracchus is to be reinstated.
There was once a dream that was Rome. It shall be realized.
These are the wishes of Marcus Aurelius.

145 - Quintus orders the guards to free the prisoners.

146 - Lucilla runs to Maximus as he falls to the ground.

MAXIMUS

Lucius is safe.

LUCILLA

Go to them. You are home.

146 - Maximus dies.

146 - CLIMAX (internal): In the afterlife, Maximus is back in the wheat field, his fingers glide across the top of wheat. There, he is reunited with his wife and son.

147 - All the prisoners have gathered around Maximus' dead body. Lucilla speaks to Gracchus...

LUCILLA

Is Rome worth one good man's life? We believed it once.
Make us believe it again. He was a soldier of Rome. Honor
him.

147 - Gracchus helps carry Maximus' body out of the arena. Commodus lays alone, dead in the sand.

148 - In the empty Colosseum, Juba buries Maximus' wife and child figurines in the sand of the arena floor.

JUBA

Now we are free. I will see you again. But not yet, not yet...

149 - THE END.

A note from the author:

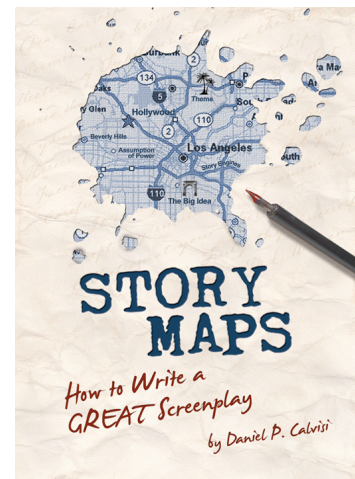
Written analysis of film is a crucial step for any screenwriter. I've found no better way to learn the craft than breaking down my favorite films and discovering what makes them tick. If you've never completed analysis of a film and/or screenplay, I recommend using this method with your favorites. Get detailed. Put in the hours. You'll be glad you did.

The analysis you've just read is based on Daniel P. Calvisi's *Story Maps: How to Write a GREAT Screenplay*. After reading a great number of books on screenwriting, Dan's *Story Maps* method helped bring it all together. With thorough commentary on concept and theme, his structure paradigm is easy to understand and apply. *Story Maps* is an insightful look at the craft of screenwriting, a must read for the aspiring screenwriter.

About the book:

Learn the secrets to writing a GREAT screenplay from a major movie studio Story Analyst who will show you how to BLOW AWAY THE READER! Master the structure and principles used by 95% of commercial movies by studying detailed breakdowns, or "Story Maps," of several recent hit movies in all different genres, including *The Dark Knight*, *The Wrestler*, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, *Drag Me To Hell* and the classics *As Good As It Gets* and *Sunset Boulevard*.

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~Mark Twain