

“BREAKING BAD”

57 Page Pilot Script by Vince Gilligan

BS2 Analysis by Tom Reed

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LOGLINE

When Walter White is diagnosed with cancer and given two years to live, the reserved and acquiescent high school chemistry teacher realizes he can use his knowledge (and make tons of money) secretly making methamphetamine, a plan made viable when he discovers ex-student and total loser MARION DUPREE is a meth-head; but when Walt's first awesome batch gets the attention of Dupree's hardcore criminal contacts, Walt realizes the choice he has made, for all its financial upside, is a perilous path.

GENRE

Primary: Dude with a Problem/Domestic Problem.

Secondary: Rite of Passage/Death Passage.

BS2 ANALYSIS

Opening Image / All is Lost – Prologue (Teaser) (pgs 1 – 3)

We are plunged into a world in crisis as a Winnebago careens off-road through cow pastures. Inside are two dead bodies, a wrecked homemade laboratory, a garbage bag of money, an unconscious man and a desperate-looking driver wearing a gas mask. A gas mask? What the hell...? We're on the run, in classic *in media res*, inside some crazy crime gone bad. But there's also an element of the *strange* – the aforementioned gas mask, of course – but also the driver *isn't wearing pants*. He's actually referred to as “Underpants,” a case of the author playfully underscoring the oddness. “Fun & Games” at the outset establishes a story world that's a collision of criminality and the quirkily offbeat. This tone will remain an essential ingredient of the show.

Approaching sirens reveal we're in a police chase. The RV crashes into a ditch. The driver grabs his wallet, a video camera and a chrome 9mm pistol and rushes outside. He trains the camera on himself and records a statement. His first words make it plain he is, surprisingly, not your average criminal: he's educated, articulate, a family man who professes love for his wife, son and unborn child. The school ID visible in his open wallet reveals he is a high school chemistry teacher; in essence, the most unlikely character imaginable to find in a situation like this. Even his name, which we see on the ID, is quintessentially vanilla: WALTER WHITE. The strange has morphed into the absurd. As the sirens grow closer he raises his gun, ready to shoot it out, pants or no pants. An “All is Lost” moment with an unmistakable “whiff of death.” As a story beat it's even more precise than that, though we won't know that until later, when the past catches up with

the present: it's the HIGH TOWER SURPRISE in Blake's Five Point Finale – the black moment at the climax where the hero must take a leap of faith to prevail. It's the point of penultimate tension, and it's exactly where the Teaser ends, in a classic cliffhanger, at the bottom of page 3. Dramatic questions loom: who is this man? How did he get here? Is there any way out? All these questions and many others yet to be posed will be answered by the end of the story.

Opening Image #2 / Set-Up – Main Story (pgs 4 – 13)

A title reads "One Month Earlier." We go back in time in order to discover the chain of events that lead to the Teaser. Now we're inside a dark bedroom at 5:00 AM. SKYLER WHITE, Walt's wife, is sound asleep. Walt lays next to her, wide awake. "Brain churning," reads the script. Here in the past, the very first description of Walt highlights his mind, his most significant attribute. And it's distressed.

According to Blake, the set-up for any story presents the hero's *life before* where Stasis = Death, the status quo of oppression whether the hero is aware of it or not. Walt's mental disquiet is keeping him awake, one of the "six things that need fixing" in his life. The source of Walt's mental distress is answered in a 9 page-long sequence that is textbook Blake Snyder, charting in detail Walt's long list of problems at home, at work, and at play, in exactly that order. The Thesis world.

Walt exercises in the dark so as not to disturb his family, plodding up and down on his Stair Stepper "like he's marching to Bataan." As a metaphor for Walt's life this could hardly be more grim. Soon after he attempts to masturbate, but fails, which indicates either erectile dysfunction or a complete loss of interest. Either way it's a primal problem for Walt. It just keeps getting grimmer and we haven't even reached the bottom of the first page of Act I (page 4 of the script). On page 5, at breakfast, we discover Walt's seventeen year-old son WALTER, JR. has cerebral palsy. It's also clear that Walt's wife Skyler is the more assertive presence in the home. We can guess that Walt abdicated Alpha status long ago. Piling on grim details creates audience sympathy for the hero, not by showing him doing something likeable or heroic (i.e., "Saving the Cat"), but its opposite – in effect, "killing the cat." "KTC" moments will soon pile up like scat in a kitty box rendering Walt the consummate "undercat."

Theme Stated (pg 7)

In the midst of the Set-Up comes the Theme Stated. From home we move to Walt at work where he parks his totally lame car (an embarrassment) in a handicapped space (an embarrassment) due to his son's condition. Father and son part and begin their respective school days. In the classroom we find Walt teaching chemistry to apathetic high school kids. They barely listen as he explains that chemistry is "the study of change." He seems to be commenting abstractly on his own painful existence when he says, "That's all of life, right? The constant... the cycle. Solution, dissolution, over and over." But his next comment is totally unconscious foreshadowing: "Growth, decay. Transformation." Here we have Blake's **Transformation Machine** made explicit in

dialogue. We've already seen what those words "growth," "decay" and "transformation" mean – Walt will end up with a 9mm in his hand ready to shoot it out with the police. From what we've seen of him thus far in the flashback that's nearly inconceivable, but part of the brilliance of this script is how carefully it charts Walt's surreal trajectory from law abiding citizen to outlaw and makes it all seem utterly plausible. This is also part of the "Fun & Games" of the premise, allowing the audience to connect the dots of the process of a good man "breaking bad."

More foreshadowing in the next scene as Walt, still at work, corrects papers in the faculty room. The script comments how this is "a lonely tableau" (KTC sympathy). A fellow teacher enters, MARGARET, a sexy redhead. She lights up a cigarette, saying "Don't narc." She's doing something vaguely against the rules and her quip invokes the world of drugs – both subtle foreshadowings of events to come. Referring to the cigarette, Walt says, "Those things will kill you." She responds, "Something always does." More foreshadowing, of death, and randomness. Walt doesn't smoke but soon he'll be diagnosed with cancer out of the blue. And of course he might be killed by something else entirely, like a policeman's bullet out there in that cow pasture where we left him one month from now.

One more story beat at the workplace follows as we find Walt manning a cash register at a car wash. Walt needs this second job badly enough that he allows the owner, who's shorthanded, to coerce him into helping hand dry cars outside, a humiliation made complete when he discovers himself polishing the BWM of the student he reprimanded in class earlier that day. The student makes a snide remark but Walt swallows his pride and keeps polishing. His grim march to Bataan continues as the things that need fixing continue to accumulate.

We next see Walt "at play;" that is, socializing: dinner at Applebee's with Skyler's sister and her husband HANK, a loud, crass, egotistical and slightly buffoonish DEA agent. Walt's polar opposite. Through Hank, who thinks highly of Walt, we learn that Walt's IQ is off the charts (the hero's "special gift", i.e., his brain), though it's also clear that Walt can barely stand being near Hank and resents Walter, Jr.'s easy rapport with his "fire pisser uncle." Hank takes center stage at the restaurant when the local news – displayed on various TVs about the place – shows him interviewed earlier that day after a successful drug bust. The patrons in the restaurant applaud; public accolades for Hank contrast with Walt's public humiliation at the car wash in the scene before. Walt tries to tune everyone out, his go-to coping strategy, as his world implodes into the black hole of grimness.

Catalyst (pg 13)

But something in the news footage catches Walt's eye: police and DEA remove shoeboxes filled with cash, a considerable amount. Walt asks Hank how much? Seven hundred thousand dollars. Hank, pleased by Walt's interest (this may well be the first time Walt has ever asked Hank a direct question), offers to take him on a ride-along.

Walt is non-committal.

Debate (pgs 14 – 24)

Given Walt's taciturn nature and the fact that he's sleepwalking through life, it's perfectly fitting, and an actual expression of character, that the debate sequence is particularly long: ten pages in a 57 page script. Walt has been so ensnared by his life of quiet desperation that he barely knows anything else. It's going to take a lot to wake him up. So the script keeps piling on problems, that is, killing cats. The day comes full circle back at the White house as Walt and Skyler prepare for bed. Skyler is busy selling bric-a-brac on eBay to earn money, an insight into their dire financial picture, and when Walt reaches for her she reminds him about "the baby" (she's pregnant) and her hand moves into his pants to give him a handjob while she simultaneously continues her online auction. Walt gamely tries to do his part but can't get it up. Walt's typical day ends with an inadvertent domestic humiliation when Skyler shows more interest in her eBay sale than her husband's arousal (she screams in glee when her paltry sale is successful). Nothing is right in this man's life.

The next day Walt takes a drive to the CalTech Campus in Pasadena (the script is set in Ontario, California, though this was changed to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the show) and finds an honorary plaque with his name on it, proof that as a grad student he had won a prestigious research grant. He was once a rising star in the field of organic chemistry. Now his life is nothing but the long march of failed promise. King of the Undercats.

At a campus coffee stand, Walt notices his hand trembling. Nearby sounds are unnaturally loud, his breath comes in short bursts. Then his inexorable downward trajectory is made literal. On page 17, the end of Act I, Walt collapses.

Act II begins with Walt in a doctor's office. Walt thinks the collapse was due to low blood sugar until the doctor advises him to see an oncologist. This gets his attention.

The Debate sequence in a script often concerns the hero gathering information in order to make a decision, and here Walt learns about his health in a cinematically expressive montage of medical tests ending in a crushing diagnosis: he has stage 3 multiple myeloma. He has two years to live. Stasis = death for Walt, literally, and he's a dude with a problem that's as Primal as they come. This is also an excellent example of what Blake calls the "double bump," the story beat where a reluctant hero needs an extra shove after The Catalyst in order to Break Into Two. But Walt is so benumbed by life that even this mayday fails to spur him into action, so the Debate continues for another 3 pages. To be fair, he does take the step of walking away from his car wash job, but this is nearly an unconscious act. When he comes home unexpectedly early he divulges nothing to Skyler, keeping his troubles to himself, per usual. But she has no difficulty sharing troubles, like their money troubles, as she reminds him never to use the MasterCard, another example of their colossal shortfall in achieving the American Dream.

Then, hearing loud gunfire coming from the living room, Skyler nearly orders Walt to “go talk to him!”

Walt discovers Walter, Jr. watching the film SCARFACE. It’s the moment where Pacino loads his grenade launcher and says “Say hello to my li’l fren!” When asked where he got the movie, Walter, Jr. reveals that Uncle Hank gave it to him. We can assume that his son’s obvious enjoyment of a gift from Hank irks Walt to no end (another cat slain), but the foreshadowing masterstroke of this scene, on page 23 of the pilot, is that it depicts the absolute worst-case scenario (and perhaps the inevitable endpoint) of the life of a drug kingpin in the most iconic imagery possible – a slippery slope upon which Walt is soon to take the first perilous step.

But Walt STILL postpones the decision to act. Not until the next morning when he’s exercising so hard on his Stair-Stepper that it breaks (a literal “breaking point”) does he come out of his daze. “Two years,” he mutters to himself, thus announcing in dialogue the ticking clock for season one of the series.

Break Into Two (pg 24)

Walt immediately calls Hank and asks if he can go on a ride-along, and then we cut to him in the back seat of Hank’s car as Hank orchestrates a bust. Walt has chosen to enter the special, upside-down world of drug trafficking and law enforcement – of crime – even if (for now) only as an observer. At this point we don’t know to what extent Walt has committed to his journey – his plan, whatever it is, may still be only half-baked. He’s still information gathering, a process that befits a man of the mind (and so The Debate – motivated by character – overlaps with Break Into Two). But the sights, sounds and energy of this new funhouse mirror world announces itself with a fanfare as a truck roars passed, screeches to a halt and dispenses a team of heavily armed agents in hazmat suits who force their entry into a suburban home. Here in the heart of suburbia is a meth lab, a location you’d least expect, mirroring Walt’s own ‘least likely to be involved’ status and foreshadowing his ultimate involvement.

Despite the unremarkable exterior of the house, the interior is the “Antithesis World” of meth lab squalor. A Latino meth cook named EMILIO is apprehended, bust successful. Walt asks if he can see the lab, and Hank agrees once he deems it safe. Walt is momentarily left alone in the car.

B Story (pg 27)

Walt’s attention is diverted by some dude, half-dressed, climbing out of a second story window in a nearby house, a naked woman helping him along, a spectacle visible only to Walt. The dude is only a kid, late teens, and as he approaches Walt recognizes him as a former student. “Dupree..?” They share eye contact as the dude hops into his beat-up clunker and drives away without being detected by the D.E.A.

Hank arrives with a shoebox full of cash and asks Walt, “Do you want to meet a bad

guy?” – an irony-laden question if ever there was one considering the premise and the probable destination of the series. Walt nods, but significantly keeps his sighting of Dupree to himself. A fateful decision.

The appearance of Dupree, or JESSE PINKMAN as the show will rename him, marks the arrival of the B Story. Though we don't know it yet, these two characters, Walt and Jesse, will form a partnership that will be the cornerstone of the show. This is the relationship through which each character will be most tested, challenged, and transformed. The essential themes will be delivered through their interaction, and much of the conflict. Like any love story, Jesse is indeed Walt's primary Opponent, his "Buddy Love."

Fun & Games (pgs 27 – 34)

Walt's relationship with Jesse is the "Fun & Games" at the very center of the premise: this oddest of couples going into the meth-making business together; former teacher and student, the mature intellect and the immature libido; discipline and recklessness, rationality and drug-addled unpredictability. It's a recipe for total disaster and part of the genius of the story world design. The "Promise of the Premise" isn't Walt choosing to cook meth; it's Walt choosing to do it with Jesse!

This relationship is formally initiated in the very next scene when Walt shows up at Jesse's place. Jesse is suspicious, but Walt makes a short speech: "You know the business, and I know the chemistry. I'm thinking, maybe you and I... partner up." In case anybody in the audience missed it, the author reiterates the premise of the show, and Walt's master plan, in dialogue with Jesse's response: "You – wanna cook crystal meth. You. You and me." And Walt counters with the most emphatic (and confrontational) thing he has said in the script thus far: "Either that, or I turn you in." Act II ends on this note of character change for Walt.

Act III begins with a short scene between Skyler and her sister Marie (Hank's wife) where they talk about money (not enough) and sex (not enough), reminders of some of the many things that need fixing. Marie comments that Walt seems "quieter than usual," but Skyler replies, "That's how Walt is... quiet." Perhaps he's blessed with the perfect personality for a life of crime? In any case, the "Fun & Games" sequence always constitutes the hero's PLAN put into action, which is what happens next. Walt begins by gathering supplies at school, raiding the cabinets in his chemistry room. He's caught by Margaret, the sexy redhead, but improvises a plausible explanation about taking inventory, demonstrating his adeptness at lying under pressure. She invites him out for a drink, but he answers with a sly, ironic truth: "Can't. My other job." Here is another case of the author having fun through his characters. Margaret doesn't know that Walt quit his car wash job (if she ever knew he had it), so the "other job" he's referring to could only be cooking up meth – which she doesn't know about, either, but the audience does. So it's a wind at the audience. As for her proposition, maybe he'll take her up on that (and perhaps more besides) once he slides a bit further down that slippery moral slope. But for now Walt is too on-task to go there.

Midpoint (pgs 35 – 39)

Walt arrives back at Jesse's with all the supplies they need to kick-start the operation. We see a different Walt here: energized, engaged, excited even, as he expounds to Jesse about chemistry and his vision for their methodology: a safe and responsible manufacturing process that results in the highest grade meth possible. But Jesse, resentful of Walt's take-charge attitude and trampling over what Jesse considers his personal turf (not to mention still angry at Walt for giving him an "F" in chemistry class), is hardly agreeable. This is the hero's new problem, the "false defeat" at the Midpoint, "the unforeseen complication that is the inevitable consequence of the Act I choice." Jesse is an uncooperative partner. It's a basic power struggle: the partnership is Walt's idea and he thought he'd be running the show. Here he finds out things aren't so simple. Then there's an example of what Blake called "a road apple on the journey, a bump in the road of the hero's learning." Walt had bought all of his ingredients at a single location, and Jesse shreds Walt for making such a rookie blunder. Walt realizes he doesn't know it all and Jesse actually has something to offer. Jesse then takes charge, telling Walt they can't cook at his place, another unanticipated problem. The best thing to do, according to Jesse, is buy an old RV, and Jesse knows somebody who's selling one. But Walt's going to have pay for it. Yet another problem (KTC!)! Walt has already quit his car wash job, but even more is required of him, more sacrifice. He's now challenged to "full commitment," the hallmark of a powerful Midpoint. And Walt meets the challenge: he promptly withdraws the last of his retirement savings and gives it to Jesse to buy the RV. Now Jesse is the one challenged to take this operation seriously. He's momentarily thrown, reflective, suspicious, and asks Walt why he's doing all this. Is he crazy or something? – because Jesse isn't going into business with a crazy person (more unconscious foreshadowing?). Walt responds by restating the theme in dialogue, right here where Blake says it belongs in the context of the B Story. Walt says simply, "I am... awake" (decay/ growth/ transformation in process). Jesse doesn't get it, but it hardly matters. This is the new Walt. He may have awoken earlier, but now he *knows* he's awake. More character growth, and another step towards Transformation. He tells Jesse to "Buy the RV. We start tomorrow." Now Walt's giving orders. More character change as another ticking clock is put into motion.

Bad Guys Close In / All is Lost #1 (pgs 40 – 43)

Walt is back with his family at a discount department store. Walter, Jr. is trying on pants and, in a heartbreaking but unsentimental scene, he struggles to get them on himself before finally asking his Dad for help. Walt obliges without comment or judgment. As the series progresses Walt may turn into a monster, but here at the beginning, especially right now, he is at his most sympathetic, a mature, sensitive, and helpful father. Then Walter, Jr. is heckled by some idiot jocks just out of high school (the "Bad Guys" of the scene). Walter, Jr. and Skyler are mortified. Skyler is about to give them a piece of her

mind but Walt stops her, which she resents because she thinks it's another demonstration of his inability to handle confrontation. She couldn't be more wrong. Walt sneaks up behind the leader of the pack and drops him with a kick to the back of the knee. Then Walt puts his full weight on the jock's ankle. As the boy screams, Walt calmly taunts him with the very words the jock himself used heckling Walter, Jr. Here is a massive leap forward in the Transformation Machine. It's also a "public display," a total reversal of expectation and frankly a wish-fulfillment fantasy for all the fathers in the audience. Walt is standing up for his son, his family, and for himself – perhaps for the first time. It's impossible not to root for our Undercat against these jerks, especially when the jock weighs 240 and towers over Walt once he gets to his feet. Walt stands his ground, "looking slightly crazy" (hmmm, perhaps Jesse wasn't too far off base?). Spooked, the jock and his posse leave, and Skyler looks at her husband, barely recognizing him: "Walt...?" This is the first appearance of "Internal opposition," that is, a family divided. But we hold on Walt, not only awake, but feeling a new power, as the author explains, "one brought on by the absence of fear." This is another aspect to the "Fun & Games" ("F&G") of this script, and its premise: watching a disempowered man discover his strength and begin to fulfill his potential. This is a transformational moment; emotional and powerful. But it's also essentially negative, another example of watching a good man "break bad." It's both empowering and disturbing. There's euphoria to it, but embedded in that rush is a "whiff of death" – the death of the Old Walt, of the good man. Spiritually, Walt is on the cusp of All is Lost and significantly he has absolutely no idea because he's enjoying the first rush of power. Goodbye Loser, hello criminal. Act III ends on an emotional spike that's morally ambiguous.

More Fun & Games (pgs 44 – 47)

Though Blake never specified this particular beat here, he allowed for – and actively advocated – looseness when using the BS2 template. His mantra was 'stay flexible and do what works.' In my own experience applying his template to writing and story analysis I have noticed there is almost always a "Fun & Games" section at precisely this point in the most successful stories, as I have noticed there is nearly always two distinct beats (at least) of "Bad Guys Close In / All is Lost." Such is the case here. The "F&G" that opens Act IV occurs on a number of levels: first, the past begins to catch up to the present as we find the Winnebago, familiar from the Teaser, parked in the woods. The author is having fun with "story time." Second, Walt takes off his trousers and hangs them on the RV's awning. He's in his underpants. Jesse is dismayed, but we take pleasure in Walt's explanation that he doesn't want his clothes smelling like a meth lab, just as we will take pleasure in all the details that account for the crazy circumstances of the Teaser we've already seen. The author is having fun with "story logic," with cause and effect. Third, as Walt prepares to cook, Jesse picks up a camcorder and starts filming him, and we see what Jesse sees, so now the author is having fun with the visual look of the scene, in addition to establishing the camera that Walt uses to tape his confession which therefore also makes it part of the cause and effect checklist. Fifth, Jesse zooms in on Walt's underpants, seen through the back of his lab apron, and snickers, which is the character in the scene itself engaged in F&G. Sixth, Walt finally realizes what's going on and they tussle over the camera, which ends the scene in comic combat; literal slapstick; F&G.

And that's not all. From there we cut to Walt actually cooking meth, and here is another level of F&G: the fun of detailing a process (the "procedural" of this episode), and seeing Walt do, as Blake would say, "his thang." And he's damn good at it. This is actually a quasi-public display of the hero's "special power" made specific (public insofar as Jesse is an audience, and specific in regards to Walt's expert knowledge of chemistry) which Blake says often happens at the Midpoint, but again, stay flexible, so here it is a little later. Emotionally this is the perfect thing to happen now because Walt's life as we have seen thus far has been such a total bummer that we're thrilled to witness any seeming change for the better, like finding his courage at the end of Act III followed directly by this sequence of watching the hero do what he does best. Walt is on an upward trajectory, but again, the dramatic effect is complicated for the audience because he's "breaking bad." But Jesse has no such qualms. In fact, he's so impressed with Walt's prowess that he expresses a begrudging respect, suggestive of the beat where "the team comes together." When Jesse actually sees the final result, there is F&G in his over-the-top worshipful reaction, proclaiming to Walt, "You're a goddamned artist. You're Michelangelo!" And because it highlights their contrasting personal styles, Walt's low key response that "It's just basic chemistry" is amusing, too.

The team comes together, but differences loom: Jesse wants to take a hit of the meth but Walt refuses. "We sell it, we don't smoke it." The power struggle resumes. There may be new respect, but this fragile partnership could get torn apart over any one of a number of things. Jesse is a meth-head, after all. It's another beat of "internal opposition." As Walt grows more forceful he'll encounter pushback from Skyler and Jesse, both. "Bad Guys Close In" *from within*, and it's the end of the Fun & Games of the B story.

Bad Guys Close In / All is Lost #2 (pgs 48 – 50)

Jesse takes Walt's meth to his drug contact KRAZY-8 but his excitement and confidence reverse when he finds EMILIO there, his old partner who got busted by Hank but is now out on bail. Krazy-8 and Emilio (who are cousins) comprise the real "Bad Guys" of this pilot episode, and they're pretty bad. Emilio thinks Jesse set him up and wants to kill him ("whiff of death"!), but Krazy-8 is so intrigued by Walt's meth that he wants to know where it came from. This is probably the only thing that saves Jesse's life. Though characteristically, Jesse is clueless.

Dark Night of the Soul (pgs 50 – 52)

My own definition for this beat is slightly more specific than Blake's. The way I see it, this is where "the opposition gathers and aggressively confronts the hero." Another way of looking at it is that it's the "Fun & Games of the Worst-Case Scenario." Whereas the F&G that follows Break Into Two is usually an uptick in the hero's fortunes, a period of success and creativity, or at least humor, here we have its opposite: total disaster, and/or catastrophe averted by the most narrow margin imaginable. Both are essential to delivering on "the Promise of the Premise." By the way, the opposition has already

gathered and confronted Jesse; all that's left is to confront Walt. And that's what happens next as the cousins arrive in the woods where Walt's cooking in the RV. Immediately there is some F&G dialogue as Krazy-8 addresses Walt as "Nature Boy" (due to his lack of pants), some validation for Walt when Krazy-8 offers him a job ("You wanna come work for me?"), more character growth for Walt as he coolly parleys with the drug dealers ("I'd be happy to sell to you if the price is right"), and more F&G connecting 'the cause and effect dots' as Krazy-8 ("K8") holds up a trash bag full of cash (the money we see swirling in the RV during the Teaser). Even K8's response is F&G as he says, "Price is Right.' Yeah man... COME ON DOWN!" – but this bonhomie is chilling because we strongly suspect these guys are killers. Things go sour the moment Emilio recognizes Walt from Hank's drug bust (something that happened off screen but is nevertheless effortless to follow) and immediately suspects him of being connected to the D.E.A. Fearing the jig is up, Jesse runs for it, screaming "RUN, MR. WHITE! RUN!" and promptly plows headlong into a tree – which is an F&G pratfall of the highest order. I say highest order because it's completely plausible that this drug-addled doofus could do just that. The cousins pull out pistols and point them at Walt. But no DEA agents swarm from the surrounding trees, which is what the cousins expected. Still, Emilio wants to "Cap 'em both." It's a nightmare situation for Walt; the obligatory worst-case scenario. But faced with almost certain death, Walt is stoic, and this intrigues K8, along with Walt's meth-making prowess. K8 unknowingly quotes Jesse by saying "You'an artist."

Break Into Three (pg 52)

Blake's definition of Break Into Three reads "thanks to a fresh idea, new inspiration, or last-minute action or advice from the love interest in the B story, the hero chooses to fight." And here we see the new Walt in action. The old Walt might have crumbled, begged for his life, or given into despair. But the new Walt has a secret weapon: his newly-minted absence of fear. Remembering this is his de facto Moment of Clarity. He also has the special power of his IQ and his knowledge of chemistry. In masterful synthesis of all these attributes, we enter the world of Act III ("The Synthesis World.") Walt initiates a new plan: he bargains. He offers to teach his meth-making secrets to them if they let him live. This simple gambit works. They follow him into the RV, but keep their guns trained on his back.

Five Point Finale (pgs 52 – 55)

There's no GATHERING OF THE TEAM, the first step in the five point finale. Jesse is still out cold and Walt is on his own, which makes the situation claustrophobic and perilous, especially with Emilio urging Walt to "Step to it, snitch" as he 'wig-wags Walt's earlobe with the muzzle of his shiny 9mm.' That's a KTC moment of ultra-creepiness and high-tension. Then there's another F&G beat concerning story cause and effect: Walt tells K8 to put out his cigarette, and he obeys, not having to be reminded about the flammable gases involved in meth production. K8 tosses the lit cigarette out the RV's window and it falls into the dry grass. It's a seemingly innocuous moment, but it turns out to be a crucial story beat. The moment also foreshadows Walt's plan, as it relies on the presence of flammable gases. Walt fires up a hot plate and EXECUTES HIS PLAN, the

second step in the Five Point Finale: he dumps a jar of red phosphorus onto the hot plate and there's an explosion of noxious gas (a beat that was actually foreshadowed earlier, in dialogue between Walt and Hank at the top of page 26). Walt has the advantage of surprise and he holds his breath and ducks beneath the red smoke as the dealers start choking. Walt gets to the door first, jumps out and holds the door closed with the cousins close behind. Bullets whiz past Walt's head (our quiet chemistry teacher is being shot at!) but soon they're unconscious and Walt has prevailed.

But there is a HIGH TOWER SURPRISE (#1): K8's cigarette has started a brush fire! By now it's too big to stamp out, so Walt straps a respirator on Jesse and deposits him into the RV's passenger seat (A & B stories merging), pulls on his own gas mask and floors it, the fire licking at the RV's tires.

In an F&G moment, a tree branch yanks Walt's trousers from its awning hanger as the RV passes underneath which is the last piece of the "tapestry of details" accounting for how and why the RV is in the state we found it at the top of the Teaser – and why Walt has no pants. The next cut brings us to the moment in time where the story began, showing the RV careening through the cow pastures (changed to the open desert in the show), Walt at the wheel wearing a respirator but no pants, Jesse unconscious next to him, the two dead men in back, the homemade lab a shambles and money (from K8's trash bag) fluttering about the cabin. Now we know exactly how all those elements got there, and it's hugely satisfying, and incredibly brief. Walt then crashes into a ditch, slams his head into the wheel and the screen goes black.

We jump forward in time, after Walt has recorded his confession (efficiently skipping story we have already seen), and pull out from the black inside the barrel of Walt's' gun (Emilio's shiny chrome 9mm) trained on the approaching sirens, which is an F&G transition (from black, coming out of black). This is also the second part of the High Tower Surprise (let's call it HTS #2), because Walt successfully escaped the threat of the fire but now faces an even bigger threat – police. Notice how the series of threats, "the Bad Guys" Walt encounters, has escalated in a steady progression of power: first it was the idiot jocks harassing Walt's son at the department store; next it was two murderous drug dealers; then a brush fire; now law enforcement in the form of multiple cherry-topped visible in the distance. Walt has prevailed thus far, and now we understand the ironclad story logic that brought this 'most unlikely character to find in this situation' to be in this exact spot. This is the endpoint of the author's F&G regarding playing with story time and story logic, but the biggest story problem of all literally looms just above the grassy foreground.

Now Walt faces his 'black moment' where he has to DIG DEEP DOWN (point 4 out of 5) and make a leap of faith to prevail. For Walt it's the realization that no matter how far he has slid down that moral slope, he's not prepared to shoot a policeman. Not yet, anyway. So his fateful decision, his leap of faith, is to end it all right here by shooting himself. He has faith this is the best choice in a sea of bad choices. He then EXECUTES HIS NEW PLAN (point 5) – the most desperate act possible for a hero – by putting the gun in his mouth and pulling the trigger. But the safety is on (REVERSAL!)! By the time he sorts

out the problem the police cars are upon him, and guess what – they’re not police cars! They’re fire trucks! A REVERSAL that is a powerful TRANSFORMATION. And since the firemen don’t know anything about Walt, they zoom past on their way to the brush fire visible in the distance. Walt is ironically saved by his faith in suicide, botched though it may have been. Threat over, Jesse wakes up wondering what happened. Walt, ever the teacher, the intellect, the nerd, explains matter-of-factly: “Red phosphorus, when heat is applied, oxidizes and yields carbonyl chloride. Phosgene gas.” This is as much an explanation for the audience as for Jesse, and it puts the final pin of plausibility into explaining the outcome of the climax, not to mention calling back the dialogue from page 26. Then the script, with F&G commentary, explains how Walt wanders back to the RV, followed by Jesse, “who have only barely survived their first week together...”

Final Image (Pgs 56 – 57)

Back home, Walt pulls his literally “laundered” cash out of the clothes dryer and counts it. then places it in a shoebox, drawing a parallel between himself and the criminals in the two drug busts we’ve seen previously in this story, as we’re also reminded of Hank’s line from page 28 where he noted “These assholes like their shoeboxes – better n’ Bank of America.” Walt also places the tape of his confession into the box (planting a dramatic question “what if somebody finds this?”) and then stows it in the rafters in the garage.

When Walt finally comes to bed, Skyler asks where he’s been and what’s been going on with him lately, saying the worst thing he can do is shut her out. He answers like the old taciturn Walt: “Nothing. I’m fine.” He’s clearly not going to let her in on any of his secrets (did he ever?). She still doesn’t even know he has cancer. Thus more dramatic questions are put into motion: when is she going to find out, and how much, and what will she do? Like any good pilot, questions are posed right here at the end to entice viewers into finding out the answers in the next episode.

Walt and Skyler stare at each other in the dark. In some of the finest writing in the script, here on the last page, the author says “A strange feeling comes over him. It’s relief to be alive, mixed with dread that life won’t last. It’s fear of being caught. It’s the thrill – for once – of taking risks. It’s excitement, in many different forms. And since he can’t talk about it, there’s only one way to let it out.”

Walt kisses Skyler. And when she reaches for him she’s surprised, and delighted, to find him erect. TRANSFORMATION! One that’s literal and physical. Despite Walt’s moral slide into criminality, we won’t begrudge him solutions to the essential things that need fixing, like his ability to make love to his wife. Any cat deserves that. Walt moves into her and we cut to black off the sounds of “heavy breathing and the squeak-squeak-squeaking of bed springs.” It’s safe to assume Walt will sleep soundly tonight, for the first time in a long while – yet another primal problem solved – though we can also guess that this restfulness is not likely to last...

SUMMARY

The pilot script for “Breaking Bad” by Vince Gilligan is truly outstanding writing. It has a powerful premise executed at the highest level. Much of its impact is due to its masterful structure, the specific beats of which just happen to correspond exactly with Blake Snyder’s Beat Sheet (the “BS2”). Nearly every single scene is a demonstration of the BS2 in action. Whether Mr. Gilligan actually employed the BS2 structure template when outlining the story, or used other tools with different names to achieve his effects, the result in my opinion is a perfect script.

This is an origin story that depicts the birth of a drug dealing criminal mastermind. It takes its time detailing the context of the hero and his ‘normal world,’ and so the page count of the first 8 (out of 15) BS2 story beats resemble a feature script of 110 pages, not the average 57 page one-hour TV script. In other words, it takes its time setting everything up. But the script doesn’t skip any steps to fit inside the allotted hour, it just concentrates the remaining steps in fewer pages. This gives the script’s second half incredible story energy.

Something else that gives the script great power is the authorial “Fun & Games” in evidence across multiple dimensions. Vince Gilligan is a storyteller fully “at play” in crafting this script, not just in his structure and story world design, but also his characterization, dialogue, scene progression, logic, the interplay of all the above, and the ample doses of cleverness and insight of various hues.

As the show enters its final season, it’s easy to see why it has steadily gained viewers over five years. Not only is the writing enthralling, but the show taps into the zeitgeist by depicting an average, middle-class man (a dude) who, despite powerful gifts (IQ, education, and a passion for chemistry), *still* finds himself near the bottom of the economic food chain. A lot of people can relate. When the middle class struggles to make a living and even the affluent are feeling the pinch, a lot of us wish we could find a better, easier, way. Some of us might even be tempted to “break bad.” This show offers a cautionary tale of uncommon relevance.

As a fan of the show I thank Vince Gilligan for sharing his special powers of storytelling with all of us, and I thank Blake Snyder for providing a powerful language to examine why “Breaking Bad” is so damn good. I look forward to the tragic tale of Walter White resolving at the end of this last season with memorable inevitability. May we all be powerfully *transformed!*