

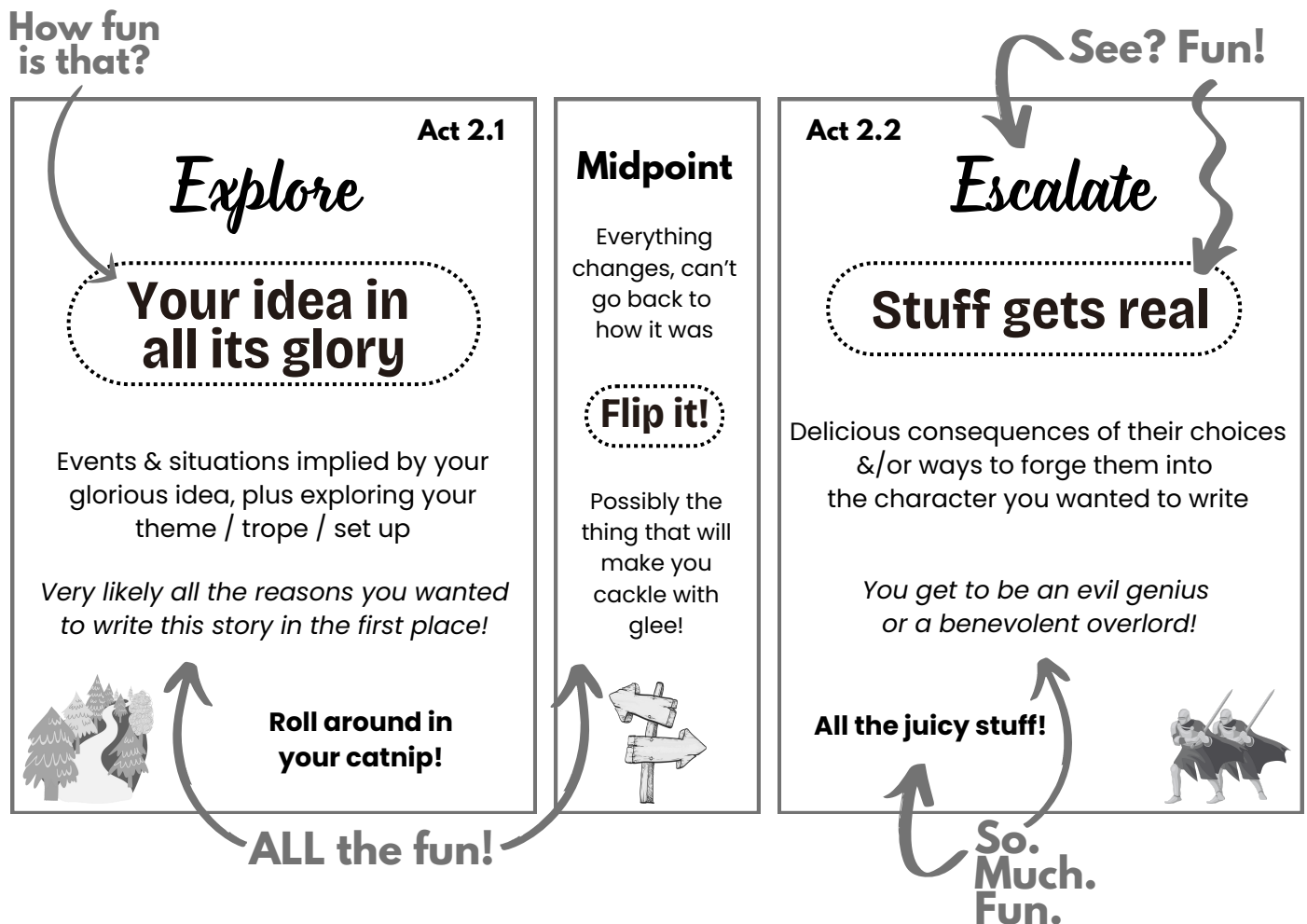
Troubleshooting
Problem 1: **It's the boring part**

Problem: Can't get motivated because it's the boring stuff.

Temptation:

- Give up and start a new project
- Skip to the end & come back close to deadline.

But... this is the FUN section to write!



Try this:

- Act 2.1: List all the **fun things implied by your glorious idea** (probably the reasons you wanted to write this story). Write them!
- Act 2.2: List all the juicy **consequences** your character will have to face & things that will **make them grow** into your vision. Write them!

Troubleshooting
Problem 2:

The conflict ran out of steam

Problem:

The middle lacks tension.

Temptation:

- Just keep repeating the threat.
- Drag a fixable conflict oooooout.
- Jump the shark by throwing more things at the characters.

Try this:

- **Pinch Points:** the villain/conflict stops lurking in the background and does something to get them closer to their goal. Screenplays: 2 pinch points, halfway through each of the middle sections.
- **Reinforcing:** provide more evidence of the conflict. If you've reinforced well, the character believes the conflict/villain is more of an obstacle than ever.
- **Deepening:** existing conflicts. Not just reinforcing, something new happening that makes the conflict stronger than it was before. Make it worse!

Troubleshooting
Problem 3:

The pace is sluggish

Problem:

You want narrative drive, but the wheels are spinning.

Temptation:

The Siren of the Manuscript Middle:

- "Quick! Fill it! Fill it with anything!"
- "There's soooo much room. Of course you can include ***."

Try this:

- **Check each scene** for its **purpose**. Every scene needs to be there for a reason (preferably 2 or more!) otherwise they're padding, and you lose narrative drive. If a scene can be cut without affecting your story, then cut it.
- **Combine two scenes** from the sluggish section to get one solid, layered scene (especially sittin' & thinkin' scenes).
- Experiment with **snag lines**: little hooks that raise questions, promise a payoff, tease & build anticipation.

Troubleshooting
Problem 4:

The only twist is how predictable it is

Problem:

You can't come up with a twist when you need one.

Temptation:

- Settle for the next obvious scene.
- Throw in a random twist even though it makes them act out of character.

Try this:

Trick your brain into leaving its nice, paved pathway.

- **Brainstorm 15:** come up with completely over the top ideas, then pull it back.
- **Brainstorm with a friend:** fun & laughter encourages your brain to reach further, plus, your friend's suggestions can send your brain in more new directions.
- **Start with a prompt:** (prompt is off the path, then adapt to suit). Think of your favourite plot twists, adapt the underlying idea to fit your plot, see if you like it or if it sparks other ideas.

Troubleshooting
Problem 5:

My character is a bit... one-note

Problem:

Their reactions are predictable, or success/fail never varies.

Temptation:

- Just make them act 'out of character.'
- Compensate with extra quirks.

Try this:

- **Let them fail:** a try-fail-retry cycle. It's good for them.
- **Let them grow:** the middle is the greenhouse of character development! The growth at the end of the story will stand on the shoulders of whatever growth happens in the middle.
- **Unexpected reactions:** use **flash points**. Consider all the aspects of your character: backstory, challenges, goals, other people's reactions. Look for points of friction between the aspects = flash points. That can produce unexpected reactions that are still authentic/ in character.

Troubleshooting
Problem 6:

What's this subplot even doing?

Problem:

The subplot is missing, random or ineffective.

Temptation:

- Come up with 75 subplots.
- Write what's interesting, even if not connected to the main plot.

Try this:

- Create subplots by **teasing out** layers of core idea to **explore & reveal**, e.g., reinforce main plot's theme, reveal character, or demonstrate the stakes.
- **Add value** through subplots that **propel plot**, e.g., a subplot pushes the protagonist into character growth that they'll need for the main plot.
- Use subplots to **balance the rising tension** of the main plot: if you resolve some of the tension in one plotline, ramp up the tension in another.

Troubleshooting
Problem 7:

The blank page... it mocks me

Problem:

You've hit the middle, and now performance anxiety is here. The blank page is still blank.

Temptation:

- Blame it on the story. Start a new one.
- Assume you'll finally be found out as a fraud. It was all a fluke.

Try this:

Hopefully this won't happen anymore (because no more tumbleweeds!). But if all else fails:

- **Ditch restraint:** Look for ways you can lower the threshold / reduce pressure so performance anxiety doesn't think it needs to turn up.
- **Chase motivation:** tell someone or engage via art.
- **Roll around in your catnip!** Use it to fuel your writing.
- **Brainstorm** on your own or with a friend. (Handout)