# HAMLET'S HIT POINTS

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UNLOCK THE GAME-MASTERING POWER
OF THREE CLASSIC TALES

# A NOTE ABOUT THIS PDF'S FORMATTING

This PDF edition of *Hamlet's Hit Points* is formatted—and thus, paginated—differently from the book's print edition. Specifically, in the three story analyses here, beat maps that graphically depict several beats in succession have been eliminated in favor of single icon-and-arrow combinations per beat. We've done this because on many PDF readers viewing an entire two-page spread at once is impractical, but to do so is necessary to make easy sense of the print edition's multi-beat maps. However, because you may want to have it, a separate PDF that is identical to the print version, formatted in spreads rather than single pages in order to preserve the print edition's exact appearance, has been made available in parallel with this version. In addition, a third PDF presents all of each story's beats as single, massive, one-page maps.

If you acquired this PDF from a legitimate source, all three files should have been provided as a bundle. If you did not receive all three PDFs, please contact service@gameplaywright.net or your PDF's vendor.

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# HOW TO PRETEND YOU'VE READ THIS BOOK

*Hamlet's Hit Points* creates a system for analyzing stories tuned to the needs of roleplaying gamers. As such it assumes a basic familiarity with roleplaying terms and techniques.

With its system of beat analysis, you can track a narrative's moment-to-moment shifts in emotional momentum. Beat analysis builds itself around the following very basic fact:

*Stories engage our attention by constantly modulating our emotional responses.*

As observations go, this one is glaringly obvious, once stated. Yet we in the roleplaying community have paid it surprisingly little heed over the nearly forty years of our form's existence.

The opening essay, "Surprised By Story," finds a historical explanation for our collective neglect of narrative fundamentals.

The "Beat Analysis" section lays out the building blocks of our story breakdown system. It divides stories into a series of separate moments, or beats. Beats fall into nine categories: two primary types and seven less common ones. Each beat resolves in a way that alters or reinforces the audience's responses. Most move us either toward hope or fear, with the odd beat resolving ambiguously.

The bulk of the book is given over to full-length analyses of three classic narratives. It applies the beat analysis system to learn how William Shakespeare, in *Hamlet*, and the filmmakers behind *Dr. No* and *Casablanca* modulate our responses. Notes throughout examine ways to import the techniques found in these works into our GMing and playing.

Finally, we discuss ways to use the beat system to analyze:

- Other existing narratives, with an eye toward internalizing storytelling technique, which strengthens your instincts as an improviser when GMing or playing.
- Your planned adventures and scenarios, to increase player engagement with them.
- Game sessions in retrospect, to look for things to improve next time.
- Your own non-RPG stories, to improve them during the outlining and/or revision phases.

If you walk away from reading this book thinking, "Well, that seemed obvious, now that I think of it," and your gaming subtly improves as a result, it has done its job.