Two ways to think of structuring a season.

I read about this idea in a post from the English writer Warren Ellis. He is originally a writer of comics, but has since written novels and short stories. In more recent years he has been hired to adapt some of his work into movies and tv shows. He presents the Levitz Paradigm. Here it is described by another comic writer Gene Ha:

Basically, the procedure is this: The writer has two, three, or even four plots going at once. The main plot—call it Plot A—occupies most of the pages and the characters' energies. The secondary plot—Plot B—functions as a subplot. Plot C and Plot D, if any, are given minimum space and attention—a few panels. As Plot A concludes, Plot B is "promoted"; it becomes Plot A, and Plot C becomes Plot B, and so forth. Thus, there is a constant upward plot progression; each plot develops in interest and complexity as the year's issues appear.

Turns out Paul built the perpetual motion machine for commercial monthly comics decades earlier.

Ellis writes:

Paul Levitz is a writer who was also the de facto boss of DC Comics for donkey's years. Paul and I didn't see eye to eye on a few things (although he was a big supporter of TRANSMETROPOLITAN), but I always liked him personally, and sent him a note when he left DC welcoming him back to the writing community (and trying not to make that sound like "I curse you to live in interesting times"). But I had no idea this existed.

I found a quote about this method from writer and editor Denny O'Neil:
Another reason to employ the Levitz Paradigm requires us to step gingerly from the practical to the philosophical. It seems to me that this storytelling method is the best imitation of life possible in a work of fiction. Life, you may have noticed, does not happen in parcels, but as a continuum.
And while you can argue with the truth and application of that, it's certainly a very interesting position worth thinking about.

Here's another way to approach structure. This comes from Dan Harmon who created the half hour show Community.

Ten episodes into the first season, COMMUNITY does something so well-timed and structurally unassailably perfect -- tying a dozen characters and four different plotlines into, of all things, *a musical number* -- that it basically completed the enterprise of classical half-hour comedy television and the doors should have been locked after it.

Dan Harmon is unusually interested in structure, and has written brilliantly about it. (He's also unusually interested in cruelty, as RICK & MORTY attests.) Look at this:
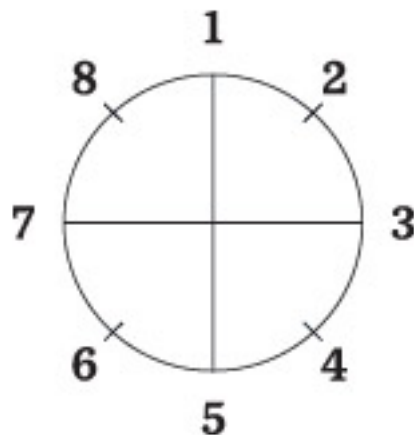
1. A character is in a zone of comfort
2. But they want something
3. They enter an unfamiliar situation
4. Adapt to it
5. Get what they wanted
6. Pay a heavy price for it
7. Then return to their familiar situation
8. Having changed

Harmon refers to this as a story circle. It's a distilled version of the Hero's Journey. This is the process he puts every character through in every story. Harmon's gift here is to cook down a whole bunch of thinking into a clever summation and a really useful hand tool.

I mean, it's not a secret - Aaron Sorkin, for example, has spoken about "what a character wants" as the guiding light of his tv writing. You can look at HANNIBAL, too, and see that Hannibal Lector is always the most interesting character in the room because his want is so clearly defined and cleverly wrought -- he wants to be understood and accepted by an equal, and Will Graham becomes negative space next to him because Graham's want is the absence of a want. But Harmon's really useful explication of all this theory, and applying it in the writer's room, leads to very interesting structural writing, and these fantastic vaulted cathedrals of storytelling.

The story circle system, complete with its return to the familiar situation -- "home" base is hugely important in episodic television, and takes on iconic resonances -- is the perfected mechanism of the classical half-hour tv comedy format.